UNDERSTANDING RACIAL DIVISIONS IN SPATIAL TERMS: SELVON, KUREISHI AND ADEBAYO ON BEING BLACK IN LONDON
IRKSAL AYRIMLARI MEKANSAL AÇIDAN ANLAMAK: SELVON, KUREISHI VE ADEBAYO'DAN LONDRA'DA SİYAH OLMAK

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Abstract

In this essay, I explore the critical ways in which multicultural landscape of London is portrayed with a view to understanding divisions of race, culture, and social class in the following selected works of fiction: Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996). These novels, which are respectively set in the fifties, seventies, and nineties, primarily address long-established prejudices against black people by recognising the hardships of the immigrant experience in London and attempt to counter racial essentialisms. I show that as changes occur in social and political conditions over time, concerns of immigrant groups change as well, along with the kinds of communality they aspire to be a part of and the response to problems they give. In my analysis, while in *Lonely Londoners*, London acts as the immediate post-imperial destination for immigrants, who experience prejudice from the locals and have to compete with each other, but still remain friends and a community, in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Some Kind of Black*, the idea of being part of a community (even a "black" one) becomes more intricate from the perspective of the descendants of immigrants, who attempt to reformulate binary constructs of race. I conclude that the above-mentioned authors who have written about the experiences of immigrants and later generations in a dialogue with the city have contributed to the creation of a more legible social map of London, which can help achieve a raise in popular interest and awareness regarding racial issues.

Key Words: London, City, Identity, Cultural Diversity, Immigrants, Racism

Öz

Bu makalede, Londra'da çok kültürlülüğün eleştirel betimlemeleri, kentsel ırk, kültür ve toplumsal sınıf ayrımlarının çözümlenmesine katkıda bulunmak kaygısıyla, aşağıdaki kitaplar aracılığıyla incelenmektedir: Sam Selvon'ın *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)'ı, Hanif Kureishi'nin *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)'sı ve Diran Adebayo'nun *Some Kind of Black* (1996)'i. Sırayla elli, yetmiş ve doksanlı yıllarda kurgulanmış olan bu üç roman, her şeyden önce Londra'daki göçmenlerin deneyimlediği güçlüklerin bilincinde olarak, siyah insanlara karşı uzun süredir var olan önyargıları ele almakta ve ırkçı yönelimlerin karşısında durmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu yazıda, toplumsal ve siyasi koşullarda zaman içerisinde yaşanan değişikliklerin yanı sıra, göçmen grupların kaygıları ile göçmenlerin ne tür bir topluluğun parçası olmak istedikleri ve sorunlar karşısında ne gibi tepkiler verdikleri konularında da değişiklikler olabildiği gösterilmektedir. Bu analiz kapsamında, *Lonely Londoners*'da Londra, yerel halkın önyargılarını tecrübe edip birbiriyle rekabet etmek zorunda kalan, ancak yine de arkadaş ve içinde bulundukları topluluğun birer üyesi olarak kalabilen göçmenler için bir imparatorluk sonrası cazibe merkezi işlevini yerine getirmekteyken, *The Buddha of Suburbia* ve *Some Kind of Black*'te ise, ("siyahi" bile olsa) bir topluluğun bir parçası olma fikri, ırksal ikilikleri yeniden formüle etmeye çabalayan göçmen çocuklarının bakış açılarından bakıldığında daha da karmaşık bir hal almaktadır. Göçmenlerin ve sonraki nesillerin deneyimlerini kentle bir diyalog içerisinde kaleme alan söz konusu bu yazarlar, Londra'nın, ırksal meseleler bakımından toplumsal ilgi ve farkındalığın artmasına katkıda bulunabilecek daha okunaklı bir toplumsal haritasının oluşturulmasına katkıda bulunmuşlardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Londra, Kent, Kimlik, Kültürel Çeşitlilik, Göçmenler, Irkçılık

INTRODUCTION

As the centre of the former empire, London is in a unique position to host stimulating debates on race, culture, identity, and social class. Cultural representations of London which focus on its distinctive cultural fabric view the city mainly from two perspectives: while, on one hand, a significant number of works draw a negative image of the city as an intolerant space teeming with inequalities, on the other, there are still many which offer a celebratory experience, with people from diverse religious and ethnical backgrounds living side by side. In other words, while for some, London "encapsulate[s] the vicious and depraved aspects of city life" as Nicholas Freeman notes (2007, p. 4), for others, it is the cradle of cultural and social progress (Cuevas, 2008, p. 41-43). In this essay, I explore the critical ways in which multicultural landscape of London is portrayed in the following selected works of fiction to redeem the voices of the displaced and the disparaged, rather than to reinforce an oblivious readership of a multicultural, globalised community whose edifice is likely to ignore and muster the continuing divisions of race, culture and social class: Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996). These novels provide unique insights as to the range of notions on how black identity should be defined and can be imagined with the help of the city.

EARLIER SENTIMENTS ON IMMIGRATION TO LONDON

London's transformation by immigration has been a long-standing cause for concern and bitterness among the general public as some of the earlier adverse sentiments towards the expanding and changing metropolis were already looming in the course of urbanisation movements of the early Victorian period. During that period, an "anti-metropolitan bias" was adopted by "a Nonconformist religious culture which often viewed the metropolis with suspicion as the modern Babylon" while the "pastoral" culture of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which, in their rootedness in tradition, viewed the city as a threat ranking alongside the decline of feudalism and by degrees became reactionary in the matter of commercialisation in the metropolis (Schwarzbach, 1979, p. 222). This outlook, which is called the "pastoralist tradition", saw the city as the source of "social chaos and anarchy" with morally corrupt individuals on the basis that traditional social hierarchies of the feudal order no longer existed in the city (Cuevas, 2008, p. 36). Joseph McLaughlin (2000, p. 17) observes how, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, London decidedly retained a special influence on

writers, resulting in their frequent deployment of the "urban jungle" metaphor to explain the increasingly disorderly and hostile nature of the metropolitan space.

The urban character, "the experience and understanding", of London, has so far been so skilfully harnessed that it cannot, in John McLeod's words, "free itself from imaginative and discursive modes" (2004, p. 15). As Freeman notes (2007, p. 4), London, after all, "was the literal centre of the world through the founding of the Greenwich Meridian in 1884, and the symbolic centre of it through being the heart of empire". As immigration figures increased after the end of the Second World War, a considerable portion of which owing to decolonisation, in the third quarter of the twentieth century, London witnessed large numbers of incoming immigrants, all of whom hoped to find jobs and better livelihood. There was a certain myth about London that drove these movements, especially from the viewpoint of the colonial "periphery" even though London would prove at times less than welcoming. Homi K. Bhabha explains this phenomenon in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) from the standpoint of the "postcolonial space", describing the "postcolonial, migrant presence" that comes with the gaps in the perception of culture, which cannot overcome "the narrative of cultural difference":

> … the liminality of the Western nation is the shadow of its own finitude: the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space …. The postcolonial space is now "supplementary" to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn't aggrandize the *presence* of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double (p. 168).

London for decades had assumed the role of the imperial centre and been instrumental in the creation of a sense of racial and cultural superiority to communities and agencies outside its broader national boundaries. This obscure reality of the empire having been imprinted in the immigrant experience, London streets were seen as "paved with gold" by immigrants, who shared the "dream of London as a place of prosperity, happiness and welcome" (McLeod, p. 34). The grandeur of London was imagined because of the imperial myth of "mother country", whose capital city was seen "as the metropolitan parent-state of the colonies" (McLeod, p. 28) and inspired writers to write about contrasting convictions regarding what would effectively be called the former centre of the empire.

NEWCOMERS

Numerous insightful postcolonial writers, at this time, far from reinforcing a positive image of a multicultural, globalised city, rather focused on the hardships the atmosphere of

inhospitality induced on newcomers in the 1950s who were in desperate need for decent accommodation and employment:

> Several postcolonial writers bear witness to the racism, violence and torment they and others experienced during the decade, and offer a bleak, sombre view of the city that demythologizes the colonial myth of London as the heart of a welcoming site of opportunity and fulfilment for those arriving from the colonies (McLeod, 2004, p. 27).

Sam Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956/2006) "has been read as a definitive expression of the migrant experience" (Richards, 2010, p. 22) that readily deconstructs the mythic character of London. The novel narrates the immigration story in the 1950s' London of a group of men from the West Indies, representative of the Windrush generation, who moved to "the mother country" England in the expectations that they would have decent lives, but found themselves having to cope with the issues of "economic hardship, racism and loneliness" (McLeod, 2004, p. 27). The difficulties encountered by the newcomers seemingly involve finding decent jobs and a place to stay while essentially "their efforts [are] often thwarted by racism and prejudice on the part of landlords and employers" (McLeod, p. 26). Such inhospitality registers in the discriminatory attitudes and gazes of people, which London further epitomises with its gloomy weather (Selvon, p. 76). Moreover, racial intolerance also generates economic inequality. When Tolroy goes to a factory to get a job for somebody else, he does so without difficulty, for, as he says, "the work is a hard work and mostly is spades they have working in the factory, paying lower wages than they would have to pay white fellars" (Selvon, p. 52). Black people arriving in London from existing and former colonies at the time were mostly working class. For the narrator, this is a distinctive feature of being a black immigrant: "Wherever in London that it have Working Class, there you will find a lot of spades" (Selvon, p. 59). Yet, there seems to be no solution at hand: the topic of long-established prejudices against black people as well as the declining demand for workers, Moses says, "is a question that bigger brains than mine trying to find out from way back" (Selvon, p. 20).

In the era of post-imperial anxiety in post-war London, certain misgivings of its residents are elevated, which are "situated in both *Resistance* and *Policing*" as the city shifts from "a postwar culture of *consensus* and consent, to one of social and economic *crisis* and authoritarian coercion" (Procter, 2004, p. 76). Precisely for this reason, Moses and his friends are overcome by the fear of "authority and prejudicial agency", which restrict them from residing and even moving at discretion in the city (McLeod, 2004, p. 34-35). The West Indian newcomers to London, in David Richards's words, "are placeless, subjected to abuse and stereotypical labelling, disconnected from histories, roles, ethnicities" (2010, p. 22). They are weighed down

by the alienating effect of the metropolis and their powerlessness, which turns their postcolonial experience into a struggle for survival. Even the most recent newcomers to the city constitute a threat for the immigrants who settle in London only slightly earlier and they all find themselves in competition with one another: they compete with each other to get a decent job, accommodation, and, as Selvon humorously narrates, not to pay for the night's heating. Despite such challenges, the misery and racial discrimination actually do keep them together.

The Lonely Londoners is a powerful story of immigrant life because it allows the reader to understand some of the struggles of the Windrush generation even though Selvon ends his book with what John McLeod calls a "utopian vision" (McLeod, 2004, p. 30). Loneliness dissolves at the end of the novel through the power of creativity and hope, which has a central role in the novel as a strategy for both "survival and transformation" (McLeod, p. 57). The grim winter day at the start of the novel turns into an enjoyable and hopeful summer night in the end. Londoners are brought together in a dancehall through calypso music and dance, which inspire hope and trust in newcomers' ability to change London to be more "optimistic and inclusive" (McLeod, p. 30). The depictions of happy encounters are inspirational for the "hopeful projections of London where the city's divisive architecture of power was effectively contested" (McLeod, p. 26). Even though it may seem that such a hopeful tone at the end of the novel carries the risk of undermining the story of hardship and racism presented in the novel, *The Lonely Londoners* in fact gives the message that hope and despair can intersect and interchange.

SUBURBS AND THE CITY

The works of fiction concerning the descendants of first-generation immigrants engage with differing, yet not widely dissimilar, concerns from those of the 1950s. The writers of this type of fiction typically deal with what John McLeod calls "the homogenizing modality of race" (McLeod, 2004, p. 21-22) in that these works generally focus on the deconstruction of generalisations and essentialisms regarding "black" immigrants. Hanif Kureishi's works are instrumental in displaying some of the "radical implications for established conceptions of national, cultural and personal identity alike, not just for 'host' societies, but for these diasporic formations, too" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 11-12). While generally focusing on the immigrant communities from the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies, Kureishi's London narrative facilitates and renders comprehensive analysis of immigrant experience and the ongoing identity politics of the descendants of immigrants. Kureishi's early characters and themes are usually

based on his own upbringing and experiences in London as the son of an immigrant Pakistani father and an English mother. In these works, he addresses the subject of racism against immigrant populations and searches for new forms and meanings of Englishness. He is considered to have reshaped the boundaries of English postcolonial literature with the themes he explored in a period when the representation of the British-Asian population in the mass media, literature, or the arts was not adequate to revamp social and cultural values in Britain.

Of all his works, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) is the most popular in part because it "was one of the first to focus on the life and struggles of mixed-race second-generation immigrants" (Wohlsein, 2008, p. 1), and also because of the subsequent BBC production made based on it. The book addresses the issues of racism, diaspora, nostalgia, hybridity, cultural belonging, and identity crisis in the immigrant experience. Set in the 1970s, the novel tells the story of Karim's struggle to find his place in the world as a teenager who is half English and half Pakistani. The book is divided into two parts, which engage with the issues of identity, including race and sexuality following Karim's life as a young man first in the suburbs and then in the city. If the suburbs of the 1970s are representative of conventional Englishness, boredom, and philistinism, the city is certainly diverse, exciting, promising, and a hub of cultural richness and heterogeneity.

Having been exposed to racially motivated bullying himself, Kureishi (1986, p. 29) defines the acceptance of immigrants in England as 'an arduous journey'. The fact that the dominant white population of British suburbs of the 1970s failed to acknowledge and embrace immigrants from former British colonies present an important challenge and a defining factor in the formation of both Kureishi's own identity, as he grew up in Bromley, and that of Karim as the protagonist of his bildungsroman. As part of the "black" community, Karim is in search of recognition and acceptance in the largely white British population of the suburbs. The novel starts with Karim observing, "[p]erhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 3). After all, as Procter (2003, p. 153) suggests,

> [h]is unstable, hybrid identity is not simply a product of ethnicity (of being Indian and English), but of *locality* … If Karim is "easily bored" in the suburbs, then paradoxically the "restlessness" this boredom generates is at least partly responsible for the dynamic, inventive and unsettling identity politics of the novel.

Karim is representative of the bewilderment created by a state of in-betweenness, in part due to his skin colour in a predominantly white society that puts constraints on him in a historically and

politically biased context. He has to fight his way out of the shackles that his background places him in in order to create a life for himself that is based on his choice only. Suburbia, in that respect, is a significant place for Kureishi to begin to depict the "arduous journey" that has forced immigrant groups to fight back.

The interplay between the suburban and urban may create an ambivalent sense of national identity and belonging whereas localities have the power to consolidate identities in their own image. Procter (2003, p. 4) describes "the suburbs not as a diasporic border of itinerant crossings but as a stubbornly isolated locale, distinct from the multicultural spaces of the city". For Procter, "Suburbia … is as significant as a provincial English dwelling place as it is a syncretic 'third space'" (Procter, 2003, p. 126). Third space, as suggested by Homi Bhabha (1994), relates to unfixed, changing definitions used in place of essentialist notions of identity which result in binary constructs. Hybridity emerges in a way that allows transitivity between cultures. It is the third space that allows this transitivity between the periphery and the centre; although, hybrid cultural forms are not enough to prevent hierarchies and forms of hierarchical subjugation in society. As Andrew Hammond suggests, "[o]ne cannot assume … that the elements undergoing hybridisation are wholly virtuous or that they combat such absolutist ideologies as sexism, homophobia or class division" (2007, p. 224). In such terms, similar lifestyles and people in the suburbs, when compared to the rest of the city, create a certain sense of isolation from the whole (MacCabe, 2004, p. 37). It should be noted that Karim's place in the suburbs is the one that occupies the position of being "a minority within a minority" (Bromley, 2000, p. 150). For this reason, suburbia creates its own identity and cultural politics as it is still a syncretic space that is neither inside nor outside London. Third space, embodied in the suburbs, with its odd mixture of racial prejudice and class consciousness permits transitions to take place.

Karim's father's immigration journey is not complete in the London suburbs. Stuart Hall observes that "[m]igration is a one-way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to" (1987, p. 44). The new destination of immigrants is where they reconstruct their identities. New identity politics arise in a new place (Hall, p. 44). Though back in India, Haroon, Karim's father, has an affluent family, "a cool river of balmy distraction, of beaches and cricket, of mocking the British" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 26), in Britain, he is a civil servant who knows he will not be promoted as long as there are white people to promote (Kureishi, p. 27). His and Karim's in-betweenness doesn't only arise from the suburbs, but also from their economically disadvantaged position. This being the case, just as he was able to reconstruct his identity when he left India, Haroon reconstructs his identity again when he leaves the suburbs in the past. In the same way, Karim's

move to London with his family "means an end to the painful sense of exposure which Karim suffers in the mainly white suburbs and a new safety in numbers" (Thomas, 2011):

> In bed before I went to sleep I fantasized about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me. …. There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn't feel exposed (Kureishi, p. 121).

Even though Karim can't find the identity and the sense of belonging that he wants while in the suburbs, the city presents him with a new opportunity for a sense of freedom and anonymity.

In the city, thanks to Eva, Karim's father's girlfriend, Karim finds himself surrounded by an intellectually and socially active network of people. Thanks to this circle, Karim manages to find a job as an actor; however, his skin colour becomes the defining factor for his getting the role of Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*, "a known figure from an authorised discourse: 'white truth'" (Bromley, 2000, p. 156). The fact that Karim accepts this role places him once again in the colonial discourse: he can't escape being stigmatised by his ancestral fate in London. Karim's Mowgli impersonation might be previously defined and scripted; however, the second role Karim chooses to play, his impersonation of Anwar, still remains within the margins of his "ethnic other" (Bromley, p. 154). For this, Karim is criticised by Tracey, an actress in the theatre company, on the grounds that it will be "representative". For her, the stereotypical representation of ethnic minorities living in the UK, including arranged marriages or the act of "madly waving his stick at the white boys" is what white people expect to see; the verification of the authorised "white truth" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 180). Tracey has clearly internalised racial prejudice, and therefore, for her, any racist representation of any racial group must be considered destructive. According to her, Karim represents "black people" as "unorganised aggressors" (Kureishi, p. 180). Her criticism suggests a need for urgency in "presenting a 'positive' black image in a period when the institutional opportunities for doing so are limited" (Procter, 2003, p. 136). The pressures on immigrant communities within the British society in the 60s came from the likes of Enoch Powel, whose famous 'Rivers of Blood' speech (20 April 1968) worked towards the aim of hedging migration from ex-colonies, but also targeted the immigrant populations living in the United Kingdom at the time. This period is marked in Britain as a time when "racists gained confidence" (Kureishi, 1986, p. 11).

Throughout the novel, Kureishi employs the themes of underrepresentation and oppression as a fulcrum against the political climate that was exhibited in the 60s and 70s predominantly. Against the hostile climate of the time, the subaltern people in the novel are linked by their differences and will to unite against oppression. Moore-Gilbert writes that, in practice, "Hall's

conception of 'hybridity' primarily enables social alliances in which *marginalised* formations"
are "linked through their *differences*, through the dislocations between them, rather than through
their similarity, correspondence or identity" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 197). Hall's view is that
cultural politics do involve acting towards common ends despite differences in identities
(Moore-Gilbert, p. 197). Kureishi's portrayal of the solidarity between blacks and South Asians
for a common goal is a reference and reaction to the racist political climate that was exhibited in
the 60s and 70s predominantly. The collective struggle here is against the positioning of some
people in the country as the Other. Karim is not happy about the binary approach to race as it can
get exploited to also define his national identity: "we were supposed to be English, but to the
English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 53).

Karim is not able to take any particular kind of political stance: he "shuttles between
identities, positions and politics without ever firmly committing or attaching himself to any"
(Procter, 2003, p. 154). As James Procter suggests, the fact that he is called "black" perplexes
Karim, but there is more to take into consideration when we think about "black" identity:

> Karim's back answers insist on a recognition of difference that gets concealed in Tracey's
> use of "black" as a blanket term. At the same time we might ask whether Karim's
> emphasis on alterity, which productively destabilises essentialist notions of black
> subjectivity, is also at the expense of a political position. Tracey's sense of a communal
> politics is rejected by Karim, who places an accent on the individual (one old Indian man)
> (Procter, p. 136).

Despite Tracey's fixed "black-and-white" stance, Karim is "moving on" (Procter, 2003, p. 153).
Tracey condemns the stereotypes and clichés surrounding Indians. However, Karim enjoys
recognition through the roles he can play (Bromley, 2000, p. 155). This way, he can neutralise
his own marginality. That's why when he gets a chance to be on TV and popular, he takes it. His
marginality will always be there, but he is normalising it through -any kind of- representation.
He is in a way "embedded in Western individualism and its patterns of consumption" that are
identified with the Thatcher government (Hammond, 2007, p. 226). Ultimately, Karim rejects
Tracey's views through his actions, ambivalently benefiting from Western representations of his
cultural heritage, consuming his options, being in the middle, picking and choosing whatever
feels good as an individual rather than defending an orthodox view against racism. At the end of
the novel, while Karim celebrates his new job, Thatcher government signals a new era for British
history, leaving question marks about Karim's choices.

LONDON MEANS THE WORLD

Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996/1997) is another novel that tackles the issues of racism and identity stereotyping. It follows a year in the life of a young man, Dele, in the nineties, who drifts along life challenged by politics, violence, and his wavering sense of belonging in Britain, but gradually reaches maturity thanks to life-changing events, self-discovery, and love. Dele, the protagonist of the novel, is a student of Nigerian descent at the University of Oxford. Being the son of an immigrant couple, he is caught between the legacy of his family's immigration to Britain and a fresh start that finds expression in the elite Oxford and London. Dele's upbringing in London defines his urban self, the part of him that belongs to the street world while Oxford stands for his chance to accomplish a "privileged" and respectable life and social status (Ahrens, 2019, p. 94). All these episodes in his life are presented in the novel as complementary parts of Dele's identity that inform each other (Câmpu, 2010, p. 58).

Dele's air of nonchalance fosters a constant state of flux and movement between Oxford and London. While he takes advantage of his new environment with his middle-class peers in Oxford, evidently not feeling completely at home there, Dele also spends a lot of his time in London, in his father's words, "when you [he] should be at college studying" (Adebayo, 1997, p. 5). At Oxford, an exclusive "heterotopic space" (Ahrens, 2019, p. 94-5), in Foucault's words, a space which is a "simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (Foucault, 1984), is offered to preserve the "existing boundaries and structures" of the university by way of excluding outsiders (Ahrens, p. 94-5). The rift between Oxford and London for Dele arises from a synthetic sense of belonging the university might provide for him with the prospects of him belonging to "dominant" social groups that his mother so dearly wants him to secure. Despite his family's wish to be accepted in society vicariously through Dele, Oxford clearly not proving a suitable site for him, Dele often visits London, spending time with his friends.

Irrespective of his privileged Oxford background or Dele's family's reservations regarding his London companions, Dele still gets exposed to racism when he is with his friends in London. After Concrete, Dele's friend from Brixton, confronts the police for towing his car, the row turns into a racial conflict (Adebayo, 1997, p. 73-78). In the book, class and social status play a crucial role, but race is seen as a determining factor for the perception of black individuals' place in social class system. The plot of the novel is inspired by the case of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in a racist attack by five white men while waiting for a bus in 1993. In light of this, the author shows that no matter which social class Dele belongs to and what educational background

he has, he too gets exposed to racism by the police. Adebayo, in this spirit, by exploring the underbelly of this multicultural city with its racist people with authority, debates the hardships of overcoming limitations posed by racial background.

Unlike Karim from *The Buddha of Suburbia* who challenges the blanket term 'black' that includes Indians or Pakistanis, *Some Kind of Black* challenges the divisions among black people along the lines of national origins. It is noted in the novel that while Dele's "streetwise friends" pressure him into "acting Jamaican", his parents remind him of life in Nigeria. The narrator points towards the fact that such defaming practices against other nations can be kindled in families (Adebayo, 1997, p. 47):

> Baba Dele had pressurised him heavily from hanging out with Caribbeans as a youth, …
> [W]here he was living most everybody – Africans or Small Islanders – spent at least part of
> the time as a kid acting Jamaican.

Mark Stein (2004, p. 18) points out that even the home countries of immigrants are "unstable signifier[s], as even in London we need to differentiate between 'Nigerians resident off Jubilee Line' and 'Nigerians coming like Yardmen in Hackney'". Brixton gives Dele the impression that he is "crossing a border" when he travels within London (Stein, p. 19). Despite the pressure he is under to act like he is part of a given group, as Stein (p. 19) argues, Dele "bridges his parental Nigerian background with West Indian diasporic cultural forms, and thereby illustrates that this fusion is not as incongruous as it might seem". Dele believes that it is his "branches" that matter more than his "roots", because, "it's the branches that bear fruit and tilt for the sky" (Adebayo, 1997, p. 9); therefore, he does not side with "cultural nationalists" and is wary of their sentimentality about Africa, which, for him, is a mere nostalgic entity; a composite of "hoary myths of the integrity of strong African cultures" (Stein, p. 19). By not wearing "a patterned agbada", Dele dissociates himself from them (Stein, p. 19). His indifference towards his studies, which is what might enable him to retain his middle-class status, and his lack of interest or involvement in the protests against racism is in effect also related to his unwillingness to identify himself with a group. Adebayo's London helps him confront notions of singular black identity. As Stein puts it, "[t]he multiplicity of divisions" in Adebayo's novel "disallows any clear identification with *one* locality, *one* identity, or *one* positionality" (Stein, p. 19). By exploring differences, Adebayo equips himself and the reader with the tools that challenge racial essentialism.

CONCLUSION

Social divisions that continue to mark and determine the frame in which urban cultures and communities, particularly those within immigrant communities, can be defined compel authors to consider the unique ways in which underprivileged voices can be represented. The works of fiction I have analysed in this paper, by promoting their London setting as part of their plot, enter into a conversation with the city that in the end benefits the social groups they are representing. Based on this precept, I have primarily analysed *The Lonely Londoners* as an early example of migrant literature, in which Sam Selvon gives voice to immigrants from the West Indies who settle in London. In the novel, he was able to create a shift in the literary space from "grand historical narratives of former European metropolitan centres" to marginalised narratives with "diasporic sensibilities" that has reshaped literary canons (Ponzanesi and Merolla, 2005, p. 1). With the stress it puts on individualism, *The Buddha of Suburbia* presents differences in approach to the experience of hybrid spaces and identities in London, and in tackling the issue of representation, it promotes the idea that change can transpire by taking opportunities to exist and not necessarily always fighting with the past from colour-coded fortresses. Diran Adebayo, in his *Some Kind of Black*, by drawing attention to institutional racism in London and mapping London in national terms, shows the depth of problems within and outside black communities. What these works have in common is that they all position their arguments in conversation with London. The authors write on the experience of immigrants and later generations, their hopes, disappointments, and social and political problems and criticisms in a dialogue with the city. Changing concerns among immigrant groups and the stressed difference in the type of social unity and solidarity the characters feel they need to establish over the decades demonstrate that as well as problems, authors' solutions to problems also vary and transform.

EXPANDED SUMMARY

In this essay, I explore the critical ways in which multicultural landscape of London is portrayed in three selected works of fiction to redeem the voices of the displaced and the disparaged, rather than to reinforce an oblivious readership of a multicultural, globalised community whose edifice is likely to ignore and muster the continuing divisions of race, culture and social class. These novels are Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996). These novels address long-established prejudices against black people by recognising the hardships of the

immigrant experience in London and attempt to counter racial essentialisms. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the focus is on the immigrant stories of a group of people who are weighed down by the alienating effect of the metropolis and their powerlessness against it, which turns their postcolonial experience into a struggle for survival. Despite such challenges, the misery and racial discrimination actually keep them together.

The primary focus of both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Some Kind of Black* is the descendants of first-generation immigrants. These books extensively engage with what McLeod calls "the homogenizing modality of race" (McLeod, 2004, p. 21-22), which can be considered as a cause for concern if it leads to racist essentialism. The focus in these works is on deconstructing generalisations and essentialisms regarding "black" immigrants. Kureishi's portrayal of solidarity between blacks and South Asians for a common goal is a reference and reaction to the increasingly racist and exclusionist political climate that was conceived in the 60s and 70s predominantly. In the novel, the collective struggle takes place in response to the binary division of the nation as the English and the Others. Despite the united front in the novel, Karim, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, in order to be able to avoid binary definitions of identity also demands for "a recognition of difference that gets concealed" in the "use of 'black' as a blanket term" (Procter, 2003, p. 136). While *The Buddha of Suburbia*'s subaltern people are linked by differences and can act in unison, in *Some Kind of Black*, such differences within the black community can turn into a matter of conflict. Tackling with racism and stereotyping, the latter indicates an awareness of "cultural nationalists" who can impose a conflict within black communities along national lines (Stein, p. 19).

In these three novels which are set in the fifties, seventies and nineties respectively, I have looked for the ways of reading what it means to be "black" in London. These works primarily address the ambivalent condition of immigrant communities, namely their in-betweenness. The works of fiction I have briefly analysed in this paper demonstrate the possibility of dealing with and addressing the issues of racism, discrimination, and intolerance in more ways than one. As changes occur in social and political conditions, concerns of immigrant groups change as well as the kinds of communality they aspire to be a part of and the response to the problems they will give. Fiction reflects social and historical changes as well as concerns while challenging the solutions that are offered for them. The authors who have written about the experiences of immigrants and later generations in a dialogue with the city have contributed to the creation of a more legible social map of London. By means of this common technique of reading conflict with the help of the city, novels can achieve a raise in popular interest and awareness.

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