

## Lives on the Margins: Multiculturalism and Austerity in Zeldin's *The Inequalities*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines Alexander Zeldin's *The Inequalities* Trilogy to consider how the plays with multicultural characterizations circulate notions related to the UK Austerity Programme, and to suggest they can be regarded as having austerity narratives with multicultural characterization. The plays under consideration are *Beyond Caring* (2015), *Love* (2017) and *Faith, Hope and Charity* (2019). The first play of the trilogy, *Beyond Caring* is the story of invisible labourers, zero-hours contract workers. *Love* is about temporary housing and the people who are benefiting from Universal Credit Programme of the UK. *Faith, Hope and Charity* depicts the story of a community centre providing hot food and shelter to the people who are in extreme poverty. Alexander Zeldin's trilogy analyses austerity policies and examines the impact of the UK Conservative governments on multiculturalism. By combining the insights gained from the analysis of these two important concepts, the study presents a fundamental critique of the impact of austerity policies on multiculturalism through the trilogy. This article explores how Zeldin's trilogy critiques the UK's multiculturalism policies, which aim for equality through peace and prosperity but instead lead to shared poverty under austerity measures.

**Keywords:** Alexander Zeldin, Contemporary British Drama, Multiculturalism, Homelessness, The UK Austerity Programme.

## Sınırdı Yaşamlar: Alexander Zeldin'in *The Inequalities* adlı üçlemesinde Çokkültürlülük ve Kemer Sıkma Politikaları

### ÖZET

Bu makale, çok kültürlü karakterizasyonlara sahip oyunların Birleşik Krallık'taki Kemer Sıkma Programı ile ilgili kavramları nasıl yaydığını ele almak ve bu anlatıların kemer sıkma hikayeleri olarak kabul edilebileceklerini öne sürmek için Alexander Zeldin'in *Eşitsizlikler Üçlemesi*'ni inceleyecektir. Üçlemeyi oluşturan oyunlar *Beyond Caring* (2015), *Love* (2017) ve *Faith, Hope and Charity* (2019) adlı eserlerdir. Üçlemenin ilk oyunu olan *Beyond Caring*, görünmez işçiler olarak da bilinen 'zero-hours contract' adlı geçici sözleşmeli işçilerin hikayesidir. *Love*, geçici

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sığınma yerlerinde kalmak zorunda olan ve Birleşik Krallık'ın Evrensel Kredi Programı'ndan faydalanan insanlarla ilgilidir. *Faith, Hope and Charity*, derin yoksulluk içinde olan insanlara sıcak yemek ve barınak sağlayan bir toplum merkezinin işleyişini tasvir eder. Alexander Zeldin'in üçlemesi kemer sıkma politikalarını analiz eder ve Birleşik Krallık Muhafazakar Parti hükümetlerinin kemer sıkma uygulamalarının çok kültürlülük üzerindeki etkisini inceler. Çalışma, bu iki önemli kavramın analizinden elde edilen içgörülerini birleştirerek, üçleme aracılığıyla kemer sıkma politikalarının çok kültürlülük üzerindeki etkisine dair temel bir eleştiri sunmaktadır. Bu makale, Zeldin'in üçlemesinin, çok kültürlülük politikaları aracılığıyla barış ve ekonomik refahta eşitlenmeyi umut eden Birleşik Krallık halkının, kemer sıkma politikalarının etkisi altında yoksullukta nasıl eşitlendiğine dair eleştirisini nasıl kullandığını analiz etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alexander Zeldin, Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Çok kültürlülük, Evsizlik, Birleşik Krallık Kemer Sıkma Programı.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism aims to end the assimilation pressure of the dominant culture and to ensure that different members of the society live in harmony on the basis of legal equality. Multiculturalism values cultural diversity and advocates social equality at economic and social levels. The UK stands out as a multicultural country in this respect. Historical events such as the Roman invasion, Viking attacks, and the UK's colonial period have significantly shaped UK's diversity. Şentürk (2020) builds on this idea by examining how colonial influences contributed to British heritage, particularly through Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. He notes, "The encounter of [...] different cultures paved the way for the ways in which a new British identity would be negotiated" (p. 126). Former colonies and lands still maintain close relations with the UK, and migration flows further increase this cultural richness. In recent years, British governments have taken important steps in all areas by encouraging multiculturalism. Following the announcement of the UK Austerity Programme in 2010, there have been significant changes and cuts to social services for citizens. According to a report by the New Horizon Youth Centre (2021), homelessness has increased significantly. This shows that despite the reforms, individuals in the UK are increasingly vulnerable and disadvantaged. The same report highlights that homelessness is particularly prevalent among immigrants and black communities, suggesting that the UK's multiculturalism policies have been severely affected by austerity. Alexander Zeldin is a British playwright and director. Zeldin's "work has been performed in 16 countries and presented by the leading international arts festivals" (National Theatre, 2024). Alexander Zeldin's the Inequalities Trilogy is based on real testimonials of multicultural precarious people, such as Adnan, who is a Syrian injured man and Tharwa, who is from Sudan and now living locally. Alexander Zeldin's trilogy offers an essential critique of Austerity, by combining the politics of Austerity and the multiculturalism practises of the UK governments. This paper analyses the ways in which Zeldin's trilogy deploys his criticism on how People of the UK, who are aimed to be equal in peace and economic welfare with the policies of multiculturalism, are equalized in poverty due to austerity.

### **1.1. Multiculturalism in the UK**

The multicultural structure of the United Kingdom is one of the important features that makes it unique. Bringing together various national identities with different dialects, traditions, music and languages, this country is a strong example of multiculturalism. Former lands and colonies still have strong relations with the UK and people continue to migrate. According to Vertovec (1996) multiculturalism has been promoted by UK governments in almost all administrative areas. Since the 1970s, the concept has become important in parliamentary debates, political party programs, public statements, and local government planning and budget policies.

The period when multiculturalism was most clearly implemented as a state policy in the United Kingdom coincided with the Labour Party government led by Tony Blair between 1997 and 2010. The 1990s were a period when cultural diversity and multicultural practices were intensely debated both in the European Union and in the United Kingdom. These discussions, especially on the concept of belonging, gained an important place in the political agenda of the United Kingdom with the coming to power of New Labour in 1997 and gave a different direction to the policies of previous Conservative governments. As Blair (1997) himself declares, During the election campaign, Tony Blair's party had effectively put emphasis onto Britain's inherent racial diversity, telling the British people that "every colour is a good colour" (Parekh Report, 2000, p. 40), and celebrating 'the Cool Britannia'.

Following Labour's election victory in 1997, the Runnymede Trust established 'the Commission on the Future of a Multi-Ethnic Britain' to assess the political and cultural implications of Britain's increasing diversity. Chaired by political philosopher Professor Bhikhu Parekh, the commission set up five task forces focusing on areas such as the family, democratic institutions, culture, employment, justice and security. The commission's overarching aim was to embrace racial diversity and provide effective solutions to racial discrimination in order to make Britain a vibrant multicultural society. With the arrival of New Labour, the commission's recommendations brought the issues of belonging and multiculturalism to the forefront of public debate.

Thanks to state multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, ethnic groups could have got an official ground to collaborate and enter into a dialogue with one another without having to sacrifice their particular identities. Labour's policies aimed at cheering British society as a cultural mosaic not in a melting pot. Adopting multiculturalism as a state policy in the new millennium, the United Kingdom has implemented many practices in fields such as education, health, culture and economy. Patrick West (2005) states that a more radical but widespread interpretation of cultural pluralism emphasizes that no culture is superior to another, suggesting that society should not only accept differences but also actively encourage this diversity. West gives some examples from the UK multicultural Practises: "Local and central government giving financial aid to ethnic minority groups and funding artistic projects; state schools celebrating foreign festivals and teaching the languages of

ethnic minority groups; street signs in multiple languages; local libraries stocking disproportionate numbers of titles that represent the ‘ethnic diversity’ of its boroughs; and census returns being printed in thirteen different.” (p. 153)

The MPI is a “scholarly research project that monitors the evolution of multiculturalism policies in 21 Western democracies. The project is designed to provide information about multiculturalism policies in a standardized format [. . .]. The [MPI] and supporting documentation are freely available for researchers” (MPI, 2016). To assess the evolution of multicultural policies over time, the MPI (Multicultural Policy Index) provides a standard composite index of eight indicators: “Affirmation, School Curriculum, Media, Exemptions, Dual Citizenship, Funding Ethnic Groups, Bilingual Education, Affirmative Action” (MPI, 2016). The MPI demonstrates the UK’s immigration and multiculturalism policies by analysing the scores on these indicators for the years from 2000 to 2015.

Multicultural Policy Index (MPI) indicates that the UK receives an overall score of 6 out of 8, in spite of several problems in the areas, such as Bilingual Education or validation. This result indicates that the country has a relatively good stance in terms of multiculturalism. However, when looking at the policies of the Conservative Party after 2010 and the MPI data, there has been a decline in state-supported multiculturalism practices. This period of the Conservative government led by David Cameron has also been referred to as the “Age of Austerity” (the Guardian, 2009).

## **1.2. The Age of Austerity in the UK**

The 2008 global economic crisis, due to the combination of factors such as the growth of the housing bubble, fragile credit conditions, deregulation or lack of regulation in the markets, and risky debt burden, deeply shook world markets and went down in history as the greatest crisis of neoliberalism. This crisis, which “is already recognized as one of the great risk management failures in recent history” (Earle, 2009, p. 785), had a great impact not only on financial markets but also on the world with social effects such as economic inequality, increase in unemployment rates, and the spread of austerity policies on a global scale. The crisis led to the collapse of the banking system, necessitating billions of dollars in rescue packages and increasing state intervention in the markets. As a result, deepening economic insecurity and social inequalities, especially among low-income groups, further strengthened criticisms about the sustainability of neoliberal policies.

The inadequacy of financial reforms in the post-crisis period brought to the agenda concerns that a similar crisis could occur again. This process revealed the vulnerabilities and systemic risks in the global economy and revealed that the basic dynamics of the neoliberal order needed to be re-evaluated. In this context, the austerity policies implemented in the United Kingdom following the 2008 economic crisis have stood out as a concrete example of neoliberalism’s response to crises. Cuts in public spending and the withdrawal of social services have deepened economic inequalities, making the negative impacts, particularly on low-income and marginalized communities, even more pronounced.

Mark Blyth states that “austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts and deficits.” (2013, p. 2). In light of Blyth's definition, the austerity policies implemented in the United Kingdom in the post-2010 period have manifested themselves with extensive cuts in public spending. The reductions in budgets allocated to health, education and social assistance in particular have deepened the social effects of these policies. As Heather Stewart and Richard Partington (2018) reports, “About 7.3 million children across the UK, 2.4 million disabled people and 800,000 people looking for work are affected” during austerity. While the government aims to reduce budget deficits in order to increase economic stability and competitiveness, these cuts have affected large segments of the population and increased income inequality. It can be said that instead of encouraging long-term economic growth, austerity policies have brought about many criticisms by reducing consumption and increasing social unrest.

The conservative government, which stopped many social aids within the scope of Austerity practices, perceived state multiculturalism practices as a burden to the budget and cut it off. Since 2010, with the arrival of David Cameron's coalition in office, multiculturalism was officially declared a failure and then a mistake. Hence, the ‘failure of state multiculturalism’ and the implementation of ‘civic integration policies’ are consistent with a formal retreat of multicultural policy in the UK. It has been observed that, between 2000 and 2015, a retreat or at least a substantial revision on the matter of immigrant multicultural policy in Great Britain. Multiculturalism practices have fallen victim to the Austerity program in the UK. The sharp turn from multiculturalism has disappointed people of different cultures in Britain. In addition, the economic crisis and the practices of austerity such as Universal Credit mostly affected multicultural individuals whose social and economic levels were already low. It is possible to see these negativities in all areas of social life. It is not a coincidence that Zeldin, who presents criticism of austerity and inequalities in his plays, included people from different cultures in his character selection. The study will consider the trilogy by Alexander Zeldin in more detail.

## **2. Beyond Caring: Zero-Hours Contracts, Precarity and Multiculturalism in Austerity**

The first play to be analysed is *Beyond Caring*. Written by Alexander Zeldin and developed with the ensemble of the premiere production, this play “explores the precarious existence of cleaners at a meat factory” (Trueman, 2014). The story follows the lives of four cleaners who come to work the night shift on zero-hour contracts. Employed by a temp agency, these individuals take a break every four hours to clean, drink tea or coffee, read magazines and chat. When the weather gets light, they go home or to their next job. The same pattern continues repeatedly until a connection is established between the strangers and the isolated individuals form relations quickly in the play; this narrative combines dark humour with raw honesty to shed light on the lives of an unseen working class community. Moreover,

the characters' challenges with work environments showcase the cultural mix that defines British society.

In *Beyond Caring*, all characters represent different life moments from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Ian, for example, 27-year-old full-time employee, experiences the serious problems of contemporary working class. Susan has to deal with homelessness and long night shifts as a 48-year-old agency worker. Grace and Phil both have to dedicate their entire week to their work. Becky is a 36-year-old agency worker who tries to meet ends in a job market marked by growing economic precarity. The play brings various life moments to the stage on labour practices and systemic disparities in the workplace setting. The characters, with their social positions, uncovers the fact that race and financial instability can devastate people's entire lives. Their togetherness produces a total narrative investigating the differences between multiculturalism and resilience amidst a world experiencing transformations. *Beyond Caring* takes the viewer beyond the experience, encouraging them to examine an important and often overlooked aspect of modern Britain. The play's main theme is the struggles of characters facing precarious working conditions and their socio-political impact.

Grace: Yeah I was exempt from work but I went to an assessment

Ian: Do you mind me asking what's wrong with/you

Grace: Rheumatoid arthritis

Ian: But you've/

Grace: I've been cleared for work

Ian: That's fine

Grace: That's fine (Zeldin, 2022 pp. 22-23)

Grace illustrates the struggles that marginalized communities in the UK face under the pressure of austerity measures in this scenario as she shares her personal story as a woman of colour who was deemed 'fit for work' despite battling rheumatoid arthritis. This specific incident sheds light on how economic productivity takes precedence over people's welfare in policies and sheds light on the disparities, among race gender, and disability. Grace's character brings a layer of complexity to the play by shedding light on the challenges faced by marginalized groups due to their race and the societal injustices endured by communities that are often marginalized or seen as 'outsiders'. Through Grace's narrative, the audience can see how multiculturalism intertwines with disparities in Britain as she navigates through issues such as inadequate healthcare services and social security benefits along with lack of workers' rights. Grace's identity does not only reflect her struggle but also serves as a reflection of the broader challenges faced by marginalized groups. The storyline of the play revolves around the precariat group and investigates these themes while offering insight, into the struggles faced by individuals stuck in unstable job situations. Grace's story is set within a wider context, alongside the narratives of other characters such as

Becky and Susan. Özata's (2021) analysis of Angela in Simon Stephens' *Bluebird* as a woman trying to survive despite the corrupt values of society is also valid for Zeldin's three female characters. Becky, a young single mother, faces economic uncertainty, while Susan, a homeless woman forced to sleep in a factory, represents the fragility of modern life. Collectively, these characters reveal the layered and profound effects of systemic injustices on multicultural and vulnerable populations in contemporary Britain.

Grace lives with rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease. This disease causes the immune system to attack the cells lining the joints instead of fighting infections. This results in swelling in the joints and Grace often has difficulty standing (NHS, 2024). In the morning while cleaning the machines in the first scene of the third act, Grace cannot make enough progress in the work she is responsible for due to her illness and it gets worse. She calls out to Susan: "Susan Please. I can't get up. My muscles are frozen" (Zeldin, 2022, p. 58). Susan reminds Grace that there are only five minutes left until her break and warns her to pay attention to the rules. The regulations of the place where they work are extremely strict and the workers work under precarious conditions. This scene strikingly reveals the injustice of the 'fit for work' report given to her by the government and the physical limitations Grace experiences due to her illness. Grace's situation reveals how the working order ignores the health of individuals and prioritizes economic productivity.

Grace works within the framework of the Zero Hours Contract model, which has become widespread as part of the Conservative government's austerity policies. In this model, "the employer does not even need to 'dismiss' its workers in order to deprive them of their employment" (Adams et al, 2016, p. 21). This form of contract thus acts as a cover for precarious work and masks real unemployment rates. The lives of those working in the cleaning sector, particularly women and migrants, are often precarious, dispensable and negligible, as Athanasiou (2011) has noted. Louise Owen (2019) argues that we need to see *Beyond Caring* not only as a critique of interpersonal relations or power dynamics, but as an analysis of wider economic systems. Owen stresses that in order to understand the play's themes, it is necessary to "situate the setting of the play within a wider historical and material context" (p. 73). Grace's case in particular is notable in this context, both in terms of her identity and her working conditions. Grace, who is disabled, black and female, is deemed "fit for work" in an environment where male characters in the game have full-time jobs and female characters are employed on Zero Hours Contracts. Owen implies that this arrangement is a concrete example of a system that is unfair to individuals like Grace.

### **3. Love: Homelessness, Universal Credit, and Multiculturalism in Austerity**

*Love* tells the stories of individuals living in temporary accommodation and benefiting from the much-criticised Universal Credit Scheme, which was created as a result of the UK's austerity policies. Universal Credit includes "benefits have been replaced by a single monthly payment" (Starck, 2020, p. 190). The scheme is intended to make benefits easier to claim and encourage individuals to return to work more quickly. However, it has been heavily criticised for deepening inequalities in practice, introducing strict rules, causing

long delays and creating a punitive system of partial or full payment cuts. The effects of austerity have left deep scars on every part of British society. In the play, three families from different backgrounds are forced to live together in temporary accommodation as Christmas approaches.

One family consists of a middle-aged man and his elderly mother, another a young couple with a baby on the way, and another a woman who has recently migrated from Sudan. These complete strangers are forced to live together in shared spaces, with an intensely multicultural environment and almost no privacy. This work, developed by Alexander Zeldin and his cast, presents the audience with a story of family love that addresses the deep human bonds of our age. Throughout the play, cultural representations of old age and dementia, an Afro-British individual's experiences of unemployment and exclusion, a newly immigrated woman's loneliness, and a Syrian fleeing war are included. By bringing these disparate characters together in a small house, Zeldin reveals both the difficulties of multicultural life and the devastating effects of austerity policies. At the beginning of the play, Colin, an unemployed and single man living in a temporary accommodation centre with his mother, meets Emma, and this meeting shapes the central conflicts of the story:

Emma: Yeh no obviously I don't want – the baby- to be born here /

Colin: No, like obviously yeh but you know they just cheat you.

Emma: Yeah, we were evicted, they put the rent up like overnight and we couldn't afford it

Colin: You're fucking joking, landlords, vermin, like I'm her carer and you know the council just /don't support you like (Zeldin, 2020, p. 80)

Emma is a black woman and lives in temporary accommodation with her white British Husband Dean and their two children. Emma is also pregnant, but homelessness poses an additional obstacle that complicates the family's overall harmony. On the other hand, Dean receives a call informing him that he has been referred for a sanction "due to non-attendance at a job-coaching session" (Zeldin, 2022, p. 96). He explains that his missing the appointment coincided with the day the eviction decision was made, and that he had reported the situation to the social worker at the time. Dean pleads, expressing his difficult situation; his wife is having a baby and they urgently need money for food and rent. He questions the legality of the decision and asks to see a manager. However, although disappointed, he hastily decides to attend a follow-up appointment. Two other important multicultural characters in the play, Tharva from Sudan and Adnan from Syria, meet in the dining hall. By bringing together people from different backgrounds in temporary shelter, these characters explore the diversity of multiculturalism and the intersections of poverty, forced migration, and the struggle for survival:

Tharwa: In Sudan we say Syria is beautiful, we say Syria is beautiful /

Adnan: Yes ...

Tharwa: It will get better Inshallah (God willing)

Adnan: Inshallah

Tharwa: Inshallah

*Pause.*

In Sudan we just love Syrian soap operas!

Adnan: Oh really?

Tharwa: We really love Mohammed and ...

Adnan: Not 'Mohammed and Noor'?!

Tharwa: Yes 'Mohammed and Noor', exactly! Honestly I love it! I watched it all the time with my family. Honestly we loved it.

Adnan: But 'Mohammed and Noor' is actually Turkish

Tharwa: Oh really?!

*She laughs and covers her smile with her scarf. (Zeldin, 2022, pp. 100-101)*

Set in austerity and temporary Council accommodation in the UK, this scene between Adnan and Tharwa reveals the resilience and humanity of individuals struggling with the challenges of poverty and displacement. The cultural expressions rooted in their Arab and Sudanese identities, 'Inshallah' and 'Alhamdulillah', emphasise the shared sense of solidarity between these two strangers, while pointing to the importance of cultural exchange and mutual understanding in multicultural Britain. In political terms, the scene demonstrates both the potential and limitations of multiculturalism in the UK.

The diversity of the residents in the accommodation reflects Britain's multicultural identity, while the lack of structural support they face demonstrates the disproportionate impact of austerity on marginalised communities. As Adnan and Tharwa share memories of Turkish soap operas on 'Syria' and relate their personal struggles, it demonstrates how cultural hybridity can build a sense of belonging. Still, this link also underscores the nature of such connections in a community plagued by persistent systemic disparities leading individuals to rely on fragile support networks.

#### **4. Faith, Hope and Charity: Staging Precarity and Homelessness**

Michael Billington (2019) characterizes Alexander Zeldin's *The Inequalities* as a reflection of the grim truths of the era of financial constraints and describes it as unique in its own right. Billington recalls that Zeldin's *Beyond Caring* and *Love* addressed the most vulnerable groups in society, such as addicts and homeless families. Billington suggests that Zeldin's latest work, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, also aims to bring solace and resilience to individuals struggling with social contradictions and life challenges. According to

Billington, this play, which opens Zeldin's latest trilogy of works that emphasize social inequalities, offers an exploration of realism in times of uncertainty.

*Faith, Hope and Charity* intertwine in the tale of Hazel's act of preparing meals for those in need at a run-down community centre on the outskirts of town. She accompanies the choir led by volunteer Mason. Beth is a mother in search of assistance for her daughter. Bernard quietly observes from the periphery as he is always the earliest to arrive and the final one to depart. Tharwa surfaces as a woman in her forties who immigrated and now resides in the area. She embodies the journey of immigrants as they navigate the process of blending into a culture and society. Tharwa's existence mirrors the widespread impact of migration and highlights the significant role women play in building bridges between different cultures. Her 9-year-old daughter, Tala, personifies the concept of having a mixed identity and advocates for the values that the next generation holds dear. By combining her mother's cultural background with the history of their new community, these characters together emphasize the importance of unity and shared cultural connections that transcend social divisions.

At the start of the play's opening scenes, Hazel encounters Mason and their shared challenges prompt a sense of unity to surface. Hazel serves as a volunteer at the community centre and Mason is her companion in this endeavour. This initial meeting illustrates the resilience of those marginalized as they lean on one another for support. The connection between Hazel and Mason highlights their solidarity against adversities, both personal and societal. In Hazel's world dwells Mason, a man grappling with social status and financial challenges. The relationship between these two characters, especially in light of Carl and Anthony's stories, offers a deeper exploration of how a sense of belonging is shaped in multicultural societies. While Carl and Anthony represent the challenges of the intersections where racial and cultural diversity meet economic insecurity, Hazel and Mason's story reveals the human dimension of these structural inequalities.

Mason: comes in with a bucket.

Mason: Yeh I reckon that ... /

Hazel: Yeh well Pete said that's gonna be really expensive.. and they're not paying for it right now I mean the council

Mason: Oh right ...I mean we could just get like a Kickstarter or a GoFundIt page. (Zeldin, 2022, p. 141)

This quote provides a multi-layered account of the socio-economic tensions and social dynamics that communities face in the context of multiculturalism and austerity. Hazel's reluctance to fund a necessary project reflects the pressures that austerity puts on public services. This has wider social implications, such as the privatisation of services and the reliance on individuals and communities to find solutions on their own, as a result of the state withdrawing its support for social needs and restricting resources.

One potential solution to this issue is Mason's recommendation to explore crowdfunding websites, like Kickstarter or GoFundIt. However, it also shows how public services are left to the responsibility of individuals, as governments systematically fail to support communities adequately. Alternative solutions such as crowdfunding imply the privatisation of social responsibility, while the fact that such strategies are not equally accessible to all communities can lead to deepening inequalities.

In this context, while alternative funding has positive aspects, such as promoting individual resilience and community solidarity, it also symbolises the abdication of state responsibility for providing social services. As a result, the dialogue delves into how austerity policies are reshaping social responsibilities and the critique of the inequalities that emerge in this process. This is a question that is relevant to multicultural societies: how to restructure social responsibilities and public services while combating socio-economic inequalities raises critical questions about how to overcome systemic inequalities.

Marc: But so like I was at college ... and that and Jason had just left ...

Mason: Yeh /

Marc: And Mum was really upset ... so she'd taken a pill and was in bed and we had the delay in the fucking universal credit, we just had no money.

We was eating here /

Mason: Right.

Marc: I should have told the judge that ... she was walking that morning down the main road from our house, towards Jason's and the cars ... She's only four ... she wanted to make like peace (Zeldin, 2022, 181)

Marc's family's account of his experiences provides a powerful example of the deep socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable groups. References to delayed Universal Credit payments highlight how the state welfare system under-supports marginalised communities, and how bureaucratic inefficiencies make them even more vulnerable. This shows that governments are failing to provide quick and effective solutions to families struggling with displacement and unemployment. Marc's mother's ordeal and his sister's perilous journey to make peace deeply reveal the emotional and psychological toll that often falls on families struggling with poverty and systemic neglect. Mason's simple responses of "Yeh" and "Right" reflect the shared experiences and collective struggles of people living in precarious situations.

In a setting like this, one discusses the struggles experienced by minority communities like immigrants and individuals from different ethnic backgrounds in great detail. Economic instability, social disintegration, and insufficient institutional assistance are frequent issues for numerous individuals residing at the fringes of society. This situation implies that

diversity may be vulnerable when communities endeavour to tackle these difficulties independently without the backing of suitable organizations and helpful regulations. In the end, this play conveys a lesson on the importance of implementing wide-ranging systemic adjustments to tackle multiculturalism and social disparities highlighting that fostering greater equality among communities is key to realizing such changes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Neoliberal policies that have dominated the world socio-political universe for the last fifty years have also had serious effects on people's daily lives. Zeldin's trilogy focuses on these daily life effects, portraying the struggles of the modern-day precariat, who are most affected by economic hardship and social inequalities on a theatre stage. Each play, with its own characteristics, tells the story of people who do not receive enough support due to instability, social injustice and austerity measures. The trilogy focuses on themes of injustice, poverty and precariousness, encouraging the audience to establish emotional and social connections with the characters' existences. Zeldin's characters reveal the inequalities in Britain's current administrative and economic situation, offering the audience a thought-provoking perspective on this complex system. *Beyond Caring* portrays the difficulties faced by workers on 'zero-hours contracts' that emerged in the neoliberal era with a powerful realism, and draws attention to the harsh working conditions that workers have to endure and the fact that workers' rights have become almost invisible. Perhaps the most important character in the play is Grace. Despite suffering from arthritis, Grace continues to be deemed 'fit for work' by the government. This reveals that workers' welfare and job security often fall short of humanitarian demands. Grace's narrative reflects the difficulties of being a disabled female immigrant. Zeldin interweaves anecdotes with social background to encourage the audience to question the existing social structure.

In his play *Love*, Zeldin brings to life the experiences of people forced to seek refuge in temporary housing facilities due to economic hardship. This study has shown that the play examines the difficulties faced by families and single individuals and the bureaucratic ways they deal with these difficulties, while also bravely revealing the uncertainties brought about by social support programs such as Universal Credit. The scene between Adnan, a Syrian, and Tharwa, a Sudanese woman, in which they share their memories, shows how cultural diversity can create strong connections between people in difficult times. The play also contains examples of how inadequate UK benefits, under the impact of austerity measures, fall short of meeting the needs of people in such need.

The final play in the trilogy, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, follows the lives of volunteers working at a community centre to support the homeless and the people in need who benefit from it. While Hazel's food distribution shows a positive aspect of community solidarity, it also shows the damaging impact of austerity on social welfare services. Mason's crowdfunding initiative exemplifies the innovative approaches that communities are taking, but also reveals the diminishing support and attention that governments are giving to citizens in need. Marc's frustration with the delay in Universal Credit shows how

systemic shortcomings have a direct impact on the daily lives of individuals. Zeldin's plays not only depict the everyday challenges people face, but also examine how these challenges are affected by the social and political environment.

In the trilogy, Zeldin constructs a broad narrative that reflects contemporary British society, criticising the inequalities in Britain and the barriers that different communities across Britain face. Zeldin's plays not only challenge social inequality, they also highlight the strength and humanity of those who resist it. Zeldin's plays not only reveal the adversities experienced by individuals but also critically examine their structural roots within neoliberal policies and austerity measures. The exploitative working conditions of workers in *Beyond Caring*, the deepening housing crisis in *Love*, and the inadequacy of the welfare system in *Faith, Hope and Charity* reveal the different dimensions of inequality in Britain today. By embedding the characters' individual stories within a social and political context, the trilogy encourages the audience to empathize and question existing systems. Zeldin's powerful narrative demonstrates the potential of theatre as a medium for representing social injustices and as a catalyst for discourse and transformative engagement

### **Statement of Research and Publication Ethics**

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### **Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article**

The entire article was written by the author.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The author has no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

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