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## “Of Belonging or Not”: Counter-Canons of Britishness in the Novels of Hanif Kureishi and Andrea Levy

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*This article analyses two novels, Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004), to elaborate on how they form postcolonial literary visions of metropolitan Britain, in resistance to colonialist depictions of the setting which have been disseminated across the world. The two works share related themes and motifs in their representations of the experiences of first- and second-generation migrants from Britain’s (former) colonies. Kureishi’s novel, set in the 1970s, relates the teenage life of Karim, the son of an Indian migrant, Haroon, as he navigates his sense of being a “funny kind of Englishman” (3). Levy’s novel, on the other hand, relates the experiences of a Jamaican couple, Hortense and Gilbert, as they arrive in Britain in 1948 within a fictionalised representation of the Empire Windrush. Comparable images within their works, including allusions to George Lamming’s writing from the 1950s and Stuart Hall’s depiction of the West End as it has existed in colonial imaginings, demonstrate how the two novelists participate in – and, therefore, help construct – a counter-canon of writing about post-war and postcolonial Britishness.*

**Writing has been my life: I decided as a teenager that story-telling was what I wanted to do, and I was determined that it would be how I earned my living, however paltry that might be ... London has been an exciting place to live ... there have been revolutions in finance, music and culture, in the way race and homosexuality are seen, and particularly in terms of the place of women ... To write about human beings is to think about gender, race and class. Everyone is standing somewhere.**

– Hanif Kureishi, *What Happened?*

In 2019, Andrea Levy’s novel, *Small Island* (originally published in 2004), was staged for the first time at the National Theatre, bringing the text’s narrative on life in post-war London to the attention of a public and communal audience. Later the same year, the acclaimed author and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi released his memoir, *What Happened?*, in which he reflects on neoliberal politics, cultural and racial identity, and his previous writing, including his landmark novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Although beyond the immediate scope of this article, 2019 was also the year Bernardine Evaristo jointly won the Booker Prize, alongside Margaret Atwood, for her depiction of twelve characters living in contemporary London in *Girl, Woman, Other*, becoming the first Black woman to do so. All three writers have had lengthy and successful careers producing novels which have been considered milestones of postcolonial British literature in which they transport the complex lives of first- and second-generation migrant characters in

the capital away from the margins and into the narrative centre. As such, they powerfully resist the ethnocentric, gendered, and heteronormative limitations inherent within hitherto novelistic representations of the metropolis.

This article will analyse how the theme of belongingness is employed in comparable ways in the novels of Levy and Kureishi. This will be divided into two sections: the first evaluates the two authors' engagement with ideas of literary canonicity and the second investigates how their respective characters grapple with the development of new cultural and linguistic identities as British citizens. This study will help gesture to how the very act of writing cultivates a cultural site of belonging which postcolonial British writers can actively construct and contribute to.

The two case studies for this analysis have gained additional poignancy following the international Black Lives Matter protests in responses to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, as well as the divisive rhetoric of Brexit (2016–2020), which contained virulent criticism of immigration at its core, and the 2018 Windrush scandal, in which the Conservative government was culpable of attempting to unjustifiably deport British citizens of Caribbean backgrounds. In fact, Levy's father arrived in the United Kingdom, from Jamaica, in the *Empire Windrush*; her novel, which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, depicts the lives of two Jamaican migrant characters, Hortense and Gilbert, as they move from the same Caribbean island in 1948 to the capital of the British Empire. Set years later, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* also draws on the importance of colonial history on modern London in a first-person narrative following the experiences of its queer protagonist, Karim, whose father, Haroon, migrated to London from India. The relationship between the history of British imperialism across the world and the formation of metropolitan identities in the contemporary era is fundamental to both novelists.

It is necessary to consider this past when attempting to understand the London of today. Following the end of World War II and the gradual decolonisation of the British Empire, migration from its colonies to the imperial metropole increased significantly, changing both the city's demographics and the literature representing it. Consequently, both Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, within their depictions of migration and the city, construct resistant visions of the already-famous setting. This is achieved through counter-discursive images of the cultural fluidity through which migrant characters perform their social, spatial, and linguistic identities in the capital. This article will analyse this key theme by drawing on Bertolt Brecht's theory of the "estrangement effect" to show how Kureishi and Levy similarly re-imagine London by altering colonialist expectations of the urban space. Doing so, they consciously construct a counter-canon through dialogic allusion to British migrant authors, including the figureheads of George Lamming, Stuart Hall, and Salman Rushdie. Each grapples, in comparable ways, with the degree to which their fictional characters feel a sense of *belonging* in modern Britain and, in turn, how their works *belong* to existing canonical ideas of British literature. These works reckon with the very ideas of Britishness and Englishness which pervade contemporary debates on politics and culture.

## I. Reassessing the Canon

By representing the experiences of first- and second-generation migrants in Britain, the two novels demarginalise historical narratives which were otherwise effaced or excluded by hegemonic discourses of the nation. Each, therefore, creates a postcolonial counter-narrative which, in the words of Stuart Hall, “stages the experience of exile, immigration and deterritorialization” (qtd. in Wisker 181). In *Small Island*, for instance, Gilbert’s assessment that there “were many Jamaicans in the Royal Air Force”, succeeded by Hortense’s recollection of “an advertisement in the *Daily Gleaner* ... under the ex-servicemen’s section headed, ‘Help Those Who Helped’, [containing] the notice about a ship that was leaving for England. The *Empire Windrush*, sailing on 28 May” (92, 99), traces the significant history of Caribbean migration to London. This includes the relationship between migration in 1948 and the war years earlier to which hundreds of Jamaicans contributed as conscripts of the empire. Hortense’s allusion to “an advertisement” directly evokes textual histories which have been forgotten in the United Kingdom and need to be rearticulated.

Subsequently, both novels estrange colonialist visions of London by centring Jamaican and Indian migrants’ distinctive perspectives of the urban space, placing these characters’ idealised expectations of iconographic London in juxtaposition with the disappointing reality of the alienating and fragmented post-Blitz city. According to Jonathan Schneer, “London was the empire’s capital, and the imperial metropolis of the world” (4). This globally-promulgated reputation is articulated powerfully in Hall’s representation of colonial and Commonwealth migration to the city, suggesting that “[i]f you come from the sticks, the colonial sticks, where you really want to live is right on Eros Statue in Piccadilly Circus ... the centre of the hub of the world. You might as well. You have been hearing about that ever since you were one month old” (“The Local and the Global”, 24). Indeed, this imagery is directly echoed in *Small Island* in which Gilbert reports Hortense’s response to Central London: “Look, this is Piccadilly Circus. I have seen it in books. The statue is called Eros.’... everything her glad eye rested upon she pointed out to me” (462). Not only does Hortense express her enthusiasm for the iconic West End space, appropriated as a metonym of the whole city’s supposed grandeur, but her emphasis on “hav[ing] seen it in books” demonstrates how biased expectations of London were disseminated through colonialist modes of pedagogy and literature. This relates to Gilbert’s endorsement of migrating to the metropole, asking, “you ever seen a picture of the Houses of Parliament in London? It is a sight ... like a fairytale castle” (93). Here he amalgamates photographic portrayals of London’s monuments with fantastic elements in his recollection of an *imagined*, textually-constructed city as a hybrid of the real and the idyllic, thereby creating a new, counter-canonical image of the capital from his migrant perspective.

This psychogeographic process of synthesising reality, memory, and imagination within a representation of an urban space exemplifies J. Hillis Miller’s theory that such a location “is a place that is everywhere and nowhere ... The topography and toponymy ... hide an unplaceable place ... a country of the mind or ... literature” (7, 19). This reveals the paradoxical nature of discursive portrayals of London which are simultaneously “everywhere” – the unavoidable image of the imperial metropolis referred to as the “Mother Land” in colonies on every continent – yet “nowhere” due to the limited reality of this city constructed by psychic imaginings which steadily build up into a consecrated canon. These mythologised expectations of London correlate with George Lamming’s writing, including his theory concerning “the West Indian’s relation to the *idea* of England ... in spite of reading Dickens ... this man had never really felt,

as a possibility and a fact, the existence of the English worker. This sudden bewilderment had sprung from his *idea* of England ... This *myth* begins ... from the earliest stages of his education” (25–27). Lamming exposes the ways in which British imperialism, often through the literary canons established in children’s education, imposed images of racial inequality across the globe which intersected with notions of class to enforce the *idea* of English superiority. This important observation is revisited and parodied in both novels.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, for instance, Karim reveals how Haroon “was amazed and heartened by the sight of the British ... He’d never seen the English in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen ... and no one had told him the English didn’t wash regularly ... And when Dad tried to discuss Byron in local pubs no one warned him that not every Englishman could read” (24). This displays the disjuncture between the reality of London’s post-war impoverishment and Haroon’s idealised expectations of England’s economic status and culture, while also emphasising how representations of the city are circumscribed by what “one” chooses to reveal and conceal. There are parallels here with the aforementioned photographs a young Gilbert viewed in Jamaica in *Small Island*. In his childhood in colonised India, Haroon, not unlike Gilbert, was exposed to imperialist depictions of London propagated by the British education system which presented the fallacy that all Londoners are rich, affluent, and culturally preeminent in order to justify claims of its supposed superiority to that of the spaces its government colonised. To return to the opening of Kureishi’s 2019 memoir, he demonstrates that the acts of *storytelling* and, by contrast, *withholding* reveal how London is a place produced by various, and sometimes competing, literary narratives. Some of these reproduce idealistic, antiquated, and Eurocentric motifs and, thus, prevent authentic depictions of the city from emerging. The allusion to the Romantic poet reveals the juxtaposition between outdated views of the capital (from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry) and its postcolonial present. Even the pub setting illustrates the tension between the external, public world of London actually lived in by working-class residents, and the private act of reading about an imagined version of the city from afar. The “local” quotidian experience is in opposition with colonialist visions disseminated globally – visions which were created by economically privileged British writers in order to sell an image of the metropolis to its subjugated colonies.

The same motif reappears in *Small Island*:

... the Mother Country – this thought-I-knew-you place – was bewildering these Jamaican boys... They looked shocked when billowing black smoke puffed its way round ... And why everything look so dowdy? ... And over there, can you believe what the eye is telling? A white man sweeping the road ... and there on the pavement before me I spy a brooch ... [But t]hat jewel was no more than a cluster of flies caught by the light ... after the host of flies flew they left me with just the small piece of brown dog’s shit they had all gathered on. (212)

The narrative’s act of literary estrangement evokes preconceived notions of London which, despite being a “thought-I-knew-you place”, miscorrelates with the “dowdy” reality of the contemporary city, through which both the characters’ *and* the reader’s idealised expectations of the resilient wartime metropolis are challenged and destabilised. In particular, the notion of London as “bewildering” intertextually echoes Lamming’s description of migrants’ “bewilderment” at seeing “white” people perform manual labour, with the Dickensian imagery of “black smoke” and poverty confronting the reality of the city which Lamming

identifies as being wilfully ignored. Gilbert's discovery of the "flies" symbolises how the promise of London as an economic idyll – expressed through the commercial and cultural connotations of jewellery – is undermined with bathos through the scatological image of London as a base, deceiving trap for migrants.

This theme of migrant disillusionment towards London recurs in both novels to illustrate the dangerous falsity and hollowness of colonial propaganda about the capital – and the nation(s) it represents. Indeed, in the final chapter of *Small Island* commencing with Hortense summarising that "I never dreamed England would be like this ... a white Englishwoman [Queenie] ... kneeling before me yearning for me to take her black child" (523). Despite explicitly alluding to her eventual adoption of Michael, her assessment also implicitly refers to Hortense's spurious assumptions about London expressed throughout the text. For instance, after being rejected as a teacher, she reveals that Piccadilly Circus formed part of her "dream ... of coming to London", in response to which Gilbert warns that "not many people have a dream come true"; this results in her "start[ing] to cry", lamenting that "I thought I would come here and teach" (464). Hortense's "dream" of London, which envisioned the city as place of possibility and economic self-development, remains emphatically unrealised due to the institutional racism she experiences. Although the image of Piccadilly Circus she imagined is fulfilled, it – like Gilbert's "brooch" – is an illusion which lacks any social or economic substance for Hortense's future. Similarly, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim's account of his grandparents' expectations that "[l]ike Gandhi... [Haroon] would return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and ... ballroom dancer", appropriates dramatic irony through Haroon's failure to either "return to India" or become a "lawyer", instead "working as a clerk ... for £3 a week" because, according to Haroon, "whites will never promote us" (24, 26–27). This vividly expresses the socio-economic marginalisation he experiences as a result of institutional racist discrimination. Moreover, the proximity of these descriptions to Karim's statement that Haroon "wanted me to be a doctor" (23), as well as his later repetition of the allusion to the Indian anti-colonial figure in suggesting that "Gandhi himself once had a room in West Kensington" (126), creates idiomatic parallels between Haroon's migration and Karim's own movement from the suburbs to the inner city, representing both as failing to realise their parents' aspirations for their migrating children, or even the migrants' own expectations of Central London as a locus of possibility. Furthermore, Karim's admission that Haroon "had no idea when he set off that he'd never see his mother's face again. This was the great undisclosed grief of his life" (24), further reveals the disparity between the latter's "idea" of migration and the reality of his experiences in London, while also symbolising his mournful separation from his figurative "mother" – or, motherland – India. It is worth noting, albeit briefly, that this bears significant echoes of Salman Rushdie's depiction of the partition of "Mother India" in his Booker Prize-winning novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981). The concept of migration as a cause of enduring "grief" correlates with Edward Said's theory that "[e]xile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place ... true exile is a condition of terminal loss" (173); he later alludes to Wallace Stevens in describing it as "a mind of winter" (186). Indeed, this motif, associating migration with a "loss" symbolised by "winter", is echoed in *Small Island*, in which Hortense, following the resignation of her objective to become a teacher, states that "I have found that this is a very cold country" (466), implicitly and metaphorically signifying the alienation she experiences as a migrant in a depersonalised and emotionless urban environment.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim suggests that the increasing religious conservatism of his father's childhood friend, Anwar, "was the immigrant condition living itself out through" him (64). He goes on to explain that Anwar and Haroon, despite having formerly been "happy to live like Englishmen", gradually "appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here ... [yet] neither of them expressed any desire to actually see their origins again" (64). According to Karim, "the immigrant condition" necessarily includes an aspiration to return – physically or psychologically – to one's ostensible "origins", revealing how Anwar performs this desire through a resistance to assimilation, or behaving "like Englishmen". However, he equally evokes Anwar's ambivalent relationship with India, favouring an "internal", psychological conception of the country over a spatial return. This affirms Rushdie's theory – which idiomatically echoes Said's – that "exiles or emigrants ... are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back ... But ... we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost ... we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10). Compare Rushdie's discourse here with Miller's aforementioned description of all places as belonging to "a country of the mind" (19).

Similarly, in *Small Island*, after recalling the racist abuse he experiences while working as a driver for the Post Office, Gilbert describes how "at that moment I longed to be once more in Jamaica. I yearned for home as a drunk man for whisky", before revealing that "[a]ll I am dreaming of as I climbed the stairs [home] was ... walking in the heat of the sun nyamming a mango. Or sipping sorrel with Elwood on the veranda. But I am woken rude as I opened the door" (318). In his resistance to the hardship he experiences in London, Gilbert formulates an idealised image of Jamaica, usurping his former "dream" of the imperial metropolis with a new "dream" of returning to this "imagined homeland". He expresses the desperation of his escapist vision through an analogy with alcohol addiction, while emphasising both the transience and insubstantiality of his "dream" as one which – like the "dream" of London before it – is suddenly undercut by the reality of his immediate setting: "the veranda" of his memory is boldly replaced by "the door" of his impoverished home into which he is compelled to return instead. Importantly, it is the exact same setting – "the veranda" not far from the sea in colonised "Bombay" – in which Karim positions his father and Anwar in his imagining (or, perhaps, retelling) of their childhoods which oscillated between joyful scenes of swimming or cricket and the rising threat of "Hindu-Muslim fighting" (23). The verandas of Jamaica and India are sites between inside and outside, representing the ways in which the two locations were – and still are – on the cusp between colonialism and decolonisation, and symbolising the movement between places typified by the act of migration. Note, too, the etymology of the word *veranda*, which moved from Portuguese to Hindi and, finally, to English, illustrating the processes of linguistic and cultural hybridity made possible in a globalised world. In contrast to the open-air verandas Gilbert and Haroon once knew, London is a space where residents are hidden behind hard architectural borders – an alienation rendered more severe for migrants who face suspicion and segregation from racist neighbours. Both novels, therefore, similarly express migrant characters' idealised expectations of London through juxtaposition with the city's unfamiliar and unwelcoming reality, forcing them to usurp their *ideas* of the metropolis with new dreams of "imagined homelands".

## II. Reassessing Cultural Identities

Within their portrayals of the relationship between migration and the city, both novels explore how cultural identities are developed and performed in cosmopolitan, postcolonial London in ways which push against reductive and stereotypical expectations of Britishness. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim commences the first-person narrative by expressing that,

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories ... Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not ... (3)

Karim's repetition of the ethnonym "Englishman" demonstrates a meditation on his individual national and cultural identity – foreshadowing this thematic engagement across the novel – while simultaneously negotiating contemporary concepts of Englishness. The dramatic irony of Karim being "born and bred" in London, yet being considered – according to reductive, conservative notions of nationality – as only "almost" English reveals the racism inherent in his sense of social difference and exclusion. He is treated as, and subsequently made to feel, less "English" due to his multiethnic background which is denigrated as "funny" and dehumanised through the bestial connotations of "breed". This status relates to Paul Gilroy's suggestion that "England's [non-white] settlers are forever locked in the bastard culture of their enslaved ancestors, unable to break out into the 'mainstream' alternative" (25), which Karim expresses in his description of having "emerged from two old histories", including his father's Indian "histor[y]", with reference to which he is constantly being judged, rather than on his individuality. Later in the novel, for instance, Karim depicts the institutional racism he experiences when a white character, Shadwell, describes "Punjabi or Urdu" as Karim's "own language", before insisting that "your father speaks, doesn't he?" (140). This episode reveals how Shadwell disavows Karim's Englishness by misrecognising him as a non-English-speaker, judging him according to racists stereotypes based on Karim's migrant "father", rather than viewing Karim as an individual. However, his account of his identity as an "odd mixture of ... here and there", which is simultaneously "new" and "old", demonstrates how he undermines fixed binaries of time and space to reveal how, in globalised London, his identity – as a metonym of those of other Londoners – is fluid, liminal, and hybrid, resisting homogenising or monolithic expectations of selfhood. This postmodern conception of identity correlates with Hall's assessment that "cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed but poised, *in transition*, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time... in a globalized world" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 310). Indeed, Karim later claims that "although I hated inequality, it didn't mean I wanted to be treated like everyone else. I recognised that what I liked in Dad and [Karim's friend] Charlie was their insistence on standing apart" (149). This crucially demonstrates how identity within multicultural London involves a complex interplay between community – or "equality" – and uniqueness; or in other words, the desire to be socially included in mainstream British society while also symbolically "standing apart" enough to express one's individuality. This two-fold process is particularly important in a work composed by an author who lived during Margaret Thatcher's rule when Conservative policy aggressively questioned citizens' national identity according to how they performed hegemonic displays of British identity – especially people from so-called 'minority' communities or backgrounds. It is no surprise, then, that Karim spends much of his

teenage years invested in becoming an actor. He wants to perform his Englishness or Britishness, but he also strives to (visibly) maintain his queerness, his investment in 1970s counter-culture, and his ties to his father's cultural identity which all challenge – separately and combined – Thatcherite visions of British nationalism defined by acts of racist and homophobic exclusion. The same idiom is repeated in the introduction to Kureishi's memoir and his insistence that “[e]veryone is standing somewhere” according to ideas of “gender, race and class” (1). The process of making sense of how one *stands* in a given society is a fundamental question any postcolonial writer must face.

Similarly, in *Small Islands*, moments like Hortense's description that “[w]e eat rice and peas on Sunday ... but in my English kitchen roast meat .... and even fish and chips bubble on the stove” (101), demonstrates how, within the interior domestic sphere of Hortense's and Gilbert's “English kitchen”, the cultures of Jamaica and England – emblematised by national dishes of both “small islands” – exist mutually within a symbolic representation of London as a site of cultural syncretism. However, the two characters' speech – and, thus, how they *perform* their linguistic identities – sets them apart from others in external settings. Hortense, for instance, suggests that “[a]nyone hearing Gilbert ... speak would know ... that this man was not English ... he talked ... in a rough Jamaican way. Whereas I ... had determined to speak in an English manner ... I resolved to listen to the ... BBC” (449). In expressing her desire to assimilate into a performance of expected London behaviour – with the register of BBC Radio signifying Standardised English and Received Pronunciation – Hortense delineates “Jamaican” and “English” vernaculars into binaries, wilfully undermining Gilbert's Britishness. Similarly, when two American GIs enquire into Gilbert's identity, they display confusion in asking, “You British? ... you don't look British”, causing the latter to exclaim “[h]ad no one outside the Caribbean ever heard of Jamaica?” (154–155). Not only is Gilbert misrecognised as non-British – despite being a British subject – according to racist assumptions of how a British person “look[s]”, but his indignation that Jamaica has been ostensibly forgotten in English and American discourses demonstrates how members of Britain's colonies, including their contributions to World War II, have been effaced and marginalised in contemporary conceptions of Britishness. As Benedict Anderson suggests, in his analysis of how the tropes of “memory and forgetting” constitute the “imagined” construct of the nation, “[a]ll profound changes in consciousness ... bring with them characteristic amnesias” (208), demonstrating how the “amnesias” surrounding British citizenship engender racist, monolithic axioms of nationality. Interestingly, the two parallel examples from the text showcase how ideas of Britishness have been disseminated externally and imposed on the outside world – including Jamaica and the United States, both with colonial histories tied to Britain. This paradigm of associating nationality with language (or vernacular) has been internalised by colonised individuals, like Hortense.

However, the linguistic polyphony of *Small Island* resists this colonialist vision of the city by placing Gilbert's Jamaican English – including the terms “cha” and “caan” (22–24) – alongside Hortense's formal diction and Queenie's Cockney register in its characterisation of the cultural diversity of multilingual, polyglot London. Equally, in one scene in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim recalls Haroon exclaiming, “Oh God” – a cry which he goes on to describe as “the wailing of Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist” (16). This sentence alone demonstrates how London suburbs are creative spaces of both linguistic and religious syncretism, in which a range of languages and religious practices can be concurrently performed by a single individual. This ability to create new modes of cultural

experience – and to freely perform them as one wishes – is presented as an antidote to the ethnocentricity which racist characters in both texts seek to promote by foreclosing the wondrous possibilities of diversity. Levy and Kureishi showcase the beauty of modern London as a place home to multiple languages, accents, and religions, while always reminding readers of the discriminatory practices which threaten to undermine this.

### **III. Conclusions**

Overall, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Small Island*, within their representations of the relationship between London and migration, employ the narrative strategy of estrangement to explore the disjuncture between colonial migrants' expectations of the imperial metropole and the reality of the impoverished post-war city. They use similar discourse to present the London of colonialist literature, pedagogy, and psychology as a psychogeographic amalgam of the real and the imagined. Both novels negotiate concepts of identity in cosmopolitan and multilingual London through dialogue with existing British literature, offering a post-Lamming counter-canon which draws on the shared literary motifs of Black British and British Asian writers who have written about this colonial and postcolonial metropolis for the past century.

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## Author Biography

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Dr Daniele Nunziata is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Oxford where he teaches at St Anne's College. He researches postcolonial and world literature with a focus on writing from the Middle East. His first monograph is forthcoming and is based on his DPhil research conducted at the same university analysing portrayals of Cyprus in travel writing before and after its independence from the British Empire. His research has been previously published in *PMLA*, the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, and the *Studies in World Literature* book series (Columbia University Press). He has organised and co-organised several conferences about translation studies and refugee writing at his institution, including *Translational Spaces: Language, Literatures, Disciplines* in 2020 with the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation group. He is a regular contributor to the postcolonial literary project, *Writers Make Worlds*, which discusses and celebrates modern British literature; he has also written for *Oxford and Empire*, *TORCH*, *Routed Magazine*, and the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, among other sources.