

**POSTCOLONIALITY AND THE GLOBAL CITY:
POSTCOLONIAL LONDON AND SINGAPORE
LITERATURE AFTER 1989**

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and is the result of original research.

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ABSTRACT

The most significant recent development within postcolonial studies has been its encounter with globalisation theory. Two major positions have emerged from this. Firstly, it is asserted that globalisation has superseded postcoloniality; conflicts between the West and non-West have been replaced by transnational class conflicts and deterritorialised capitalist regimes. More circumspect theorists, however, argue that centre-periphery models of postcoloniality endure alongside deterritorialised power structures, involving North-South cultural and economic power relations still dominated by the West.

This thesis considers how comparing literary representations of postcolonial London and Singapore in the post-1989 era significantly shifts or changes these positions. It offers alternative perspectives on the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship, given that both London and Singapore are advanced global cities. I address the global city as an analytical category distinct from transnational class conflict, deterritorialised capitalism or North/South relations. This comparison identifies certain intertwined effects of globalisation and postcoloniality that are explored in the postcolonial writing of First-World global cities, and suggests distinctive postcolonial modalities in Western and non-Western global cities against an ostensibly homogeneous context of global capital.

Chapter One argues that postcolonial writers in these global cities variably negotiate accommodations between cultural and socio-economic agency, based on different kinds of engagement with globalisation. The gulf between the global spatial horizons of postcolonial writers in a Western and Asian global city is examined in Chapter Two, which asserts the uneven purchase of postcoloniality upon global capitalist place. Chapter Three argues that the contested concept of the nation

continues to inflect postcolonial literary representations of both Western and Asian global cities in its diverse mediations between the local and global. Finally, Chapter Four compares how cosmopolitan strategies are mobilised by postcolonial writers in Western and non-Western global cities to address local agendas, with very different moral outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

London and Singapore: The Global and the Postcolonial

Recent developments in political and cultural theory have called into question the continuing relevance of the postcolonial critical paradigm. Many commentators on postcolonialism call for a shift of focus from postcoloniality to globality, arguing that the formerly divided postcolonial world is now a single cultural and political arena dominated by a new form of global imperialism; the need, it is argued, is for a reconfiguration of critique around the workings of global capitalism. Some globalisation theorists have gone as far as suggesting that globalisation has superseded postcoloniality. Postcolonial theorists, Timothy Brennan has recently suggested, are remaking themselves as globalisation theorists.¹ Postcolonialism has also been figured by some to be complicit with globalisation, insofar as the former's focus on the legacy of European colonialism draws attention away from the realities of present-day global regimes. The centre-periphery models of cultural and economic power that obtained in the world under colonialism and its aftermath, it is asserted, no longer hold. Formerly reified socio-economic distinctions between the geographical notions of First and postcolonial Third Worlds have given way, according to much current wisdom, to transnational class conflict and deterritorialised global cultural flows. Globalisation, in other words, has increasingly rendered irrelevant both postcolonial cultural politics and the cultural distinctions between different configurations of postcolonial geography; it is suggested instead that global material or economic forces are the primary determinants of global power relations. The positions delineated above have been put forward most forcefully in the work of Aijaz

¹ Timothy Brennan, "From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory", in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 120-138 (p. 138).

Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, but are echoed by many other globalisation theorists. These shifts in the global dispensation are commonly understood to have become decisive during the 1980s, particularly the end of the 1980s insofar as it was marked by the demise of the Communist world.

More circumspect views on the contemporary relationship between globalisation and postcoloniality, however, have been advanced by critics unwilling to concede that postcoloniality's conceptual purchase has been displaced by globalisation's totalising optic. In his contribution to *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), a recent volume exploring the potential future trajectories of postcolonialism, Ali Behdad warns against this premature dismissal of postcolonialism's relevance to present realities:

The quick academic shift from postcolonialism to globalization, I want to suggest, has ironically short-circuited the possibility of understanding the ways in which the geographical and cultural displacements of people and things by European colonialism informed the so-called cartography of globalization today. The tendency to invent a new vocabulary to make the contemporary global flow more transparent has ironically rendered its historical roots more opaque.²

Behdad's insistence that the postcolonial facilitates an understanding and critique of contemporary globalisation is echoed by a number of fellow contributors to the volume as well as some other major postcolonial critics, most prominently Bill Ashcroft and Robert Young. A common refrain among these critics is the observation that the postcolonial condition continues to prevail alongside a newer globalised dispensation. It is also suggested that older, Western-dominated power structures are still covertly at work behind the façade of newer, ostensibly deterritorialised global regimes, resulting in the obscuring of the territorial locations of contemporary power in the West and in particular America. Postcolonialism, they argue, continues to offer

² Ali Behdad, "On Globalization, Again!", in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, eds. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 62-79 (pp. 70-71).

a relevant set of critical tools for elucidating and contesting new globalised realities, either by showing how the local might resist the global through strategies of cultural appropriation and transformation (Ashcroft) or arguing that centre-periphery or North-South asymmetries must be confronted transnationally (Young). For both Ashcroft and Young, in contradistinction to the materialist critics of postcoloniality such as Ahmad and Dirlik, both culture and geography are central facets of the politics of globalisation. As I examine in detail below, culture is important in the work of Ashcroft and Young insofar as they assume that the material and economic aspects of global-cum-postcolonial power have significant parallel effects on culture and subjectivity. An alternative perspective has been put forward by Simon Gikandi, who urges an attention to how postcolonial theory has been the conceptual source of culturalist theories of globalisation that celebrate cosmopolitan and hybrid cultures while obscuring the more depressing material realities of the postcolonial condition under globalisation. There is much at stake, then, in the debate between those who see globalisation as displacing postcoloniality and those who argue for a more nuanced, transitional model of postcoloniality *and* globalisation; as Revathi Krishnaswamy declares, “these two theoretical fields have been most influential in asserting the primacy or the constitutive role of the cultural in history, economics, and politics.”³ The postcoloniality/globalisation debate clearly speaks to a hugely significant sphere of concerns.

This thesis examines the contributions that a comparison of contemporary postcolonial London and Singapore literature can make to these debates about the relationship between globalisation and postcoloniality. At first glance, however, comparing London and Singapore in the contemporary era in relation to

³ Revathi Krishnaswamy, “The Criticism of Culture and the Culture of Criticism: At the Intersection of Postcolonialism and Globalization Theory”, *Diacritics*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2002), pp. 106-26 (p. 106).

postcoloniality and globalisation appears counter-intuitive and somewhat incongruous. The relationship of colonial domination and dependence that obtained between the two cities during the colonial era and its immediate aftermath has given way to a remarkable degree of kinship and affinity, particularly when the two cities are viewed from the perspective of global capitalism. In their contemporary manifestations they are most likely to appear in the same discussion due to their significance as global cities that serve as key nodes within transnational networks of media and capital flows. Both are centres of advanced capital. Both appear in the present to be beneficiaries of a neoliberal order of globalisation, occupying, if to different degrees of prominence and influence, the same space at the top of the global hierarchy. In an observation published in 1987, Aijaz Ahmad names Singapore as one of the prime examples of how the putative distinction between First and Third Worlds is untenable, given Singapore's growing importance within global capitalism.⁴ These similarities between Singapore and an unarguably First-World London are, if anything, more pronounced today.⁵ The two cities in general are among the victors, rather than the victims, of neoliberal globalisation.⁶ In relation to postcolonial and global regimes of power, then, London and Singapore do not perhaps offer the most obviously interesting or fruitful comparison, appearing to share many similarities while evincing few significant qualitative divergences.

A brief scan of the scholarship on global cities highlights the way in which they are, according to the criteria of neoliberal globalisation, becoming increasingly

⁴ Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'", *Social Text*, No. 17 (1987), pp. 3-25 (p. 7).

⁵ While London is widely acknowledged as *the* global city *par excellence*, Singapore's status as a leading advanced global city has been increasingly recognised. For example, Singapore topped The Globalization Index of the world's most globalised countries, published by *Foreign Policy*, for the fourth time in seven years in 2007. See "The Globalization Index", *Foreign Policy*, No. 163 (2007), pp. 68-76.

⁶ Doreen Massey, for example, has stressed the importance of seeing London as a dominant locality within global networks of capital; see Massey's *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 190-1, and "London Inside-Out", *Soundings*, No. 32 (2006), pp. 62-71.

similar. The literature on global cities is vast, much of it attending to the controlling roles global cities play in the processes of globalisation. John Friedmann's pioneering paper on "The World City Hypothesis" (1986) focuses on the "global control functions" of such cities, identifying global "ideological penetration and control" as an "important ancillary function of world cities".⁷ A similar argument informs Saskia Sassen's study of *The Global City* (2001), which enshrines London, New York and Tokyo as the world's premier global cities and suggests that key decisions affecting the global economy are made from these centres.⁸ Such cities are also regarded as having more shared attributes with other global cities than with their immediate hinterlands.⁹ "The presence of global functions and institutions", David Clark writes, "means that world cities have more in common with each other than they have with urban centres in their own countries and with places of similar size elsewhere."¹⁰ Global cities are thus material manifestations of what Manuel Castells has theorised as the networked "space of flows" of contemporary globalisation,¹¹ as Peter J. Taylor suggests in his reading of Castells's work.¹² These urban centres occupy a specific global spatial network that is qualitatively distinguishable from other territorial entities and groupings.

The networked spatial contiguity of geographically scattered global cities is rooted in their shared characteristics of having control over, and being thoroughly immersed in, the workings of global capitalism. In other words, geographically

⁷ John Friedmann, "The World City Hypothesis", *Development and Change*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1986), pp. 69-83 (p. 73).

⁸ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹ See Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), p. 167, and Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 726-751 (p. 732).

¹⁰ David Clark, *Urban World/Global City*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 157.

¹¹ See Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

¹² Peter J. Taylor, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 27.

dispersed global cities are intimately linked by their membership in an exclusive club of advanced financial centres. As Brenda Yeoh suggests in her essay on “Global/Globalizing Cities” (1999),

the global city concept is often used not so much as an analytical tool but as a ‘status’ yardstick to measure cities in terms of their global economic linkages, to locate their place in a hierarchy of nested cities and to assess their potential to join the superleague.¹³

Both London and Singapore quite clearly occupy the upper echelons of such a hierarchy and might therefore be regarded as having much in common; according to Beaverstock et al., they belong on a shortlist of ten cities that make up what Yeoh terms a “superleague” within the global cities club.¹⁴

The similarities shared by global cities extend, it is claimed, to the cultural sphere. Paul Knox, for example, attests to this homogenising tendency in the following claim:

From a world-system perspective we can view world cities as tending to undermine the narratives and myths that have sustained the construction of nations from states and vice versa. The other side of this coin is that world cities, as proscenia for materialistic, cosmopolitan lifestyles, as crucibles of new narratives, and as carriers of new myths, can be seen as being central to the construction of new, transnational sensibilities. These sensibilities, together with the cultural flows that sustain them, are seen by some as adding up to a global culture.¹⁵

Knox draws our attention to the perceived eroding of national identities in the face of globalisation and the attendant generation of a global, “cosmopolitan” identity. The crux of his argument seems to be that globalisation involves the increasing similarity

¹³ Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Global/Globalizing Cities”, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1999), pp. 607-616 (p. 608).

¹⁴ J.V. Beaverstock, R.G. Smith and P.J. Taylor, “A Roster of World Cities”, *Cities*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (1999), pp. 445-458. Also see Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis”, and his more recent survey “Where We Stand: A Decade of World City Research”, in *World Cities in a World-system*, eds. Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 21-47.

¹⁵ Paul L. Knox, “World Cities in a World-system”, in *World Cities in a World-system*, eds. Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 3-20 (p. 13).

of global cities in cultural terms. This is echoed by Friedmann in a more recent paper, in which he characterises global cities¹⁶ as being cosmopolitan:

[...] we have to agree that the *dominant culture* of world cities is cosmopolitan, as defined by its controlling social strata whom Leslie Sklair [...] calls the transnational capitalist class. The lingua franca of this class is English, and its class style of consumption is the envy of virtually all subaltern classes. (“Where We Stand”, pp. 23-4)

The claims made here for a common global culture shared by cities like London and Singapore, then, are ultimately rooted in the interests of global capitalism.

In the context of the new regime of globalisation acknowledged by the existing strands of debate on the globalisation-postcoloniality relationship, comparisons between London as a postimperial global city and ex-colonial cities such as Calcutta or Lagos – whose positions within the new dispensation of power wrought by globalisation tend to reflect the kind of marginality or subordinate status they experienced under colonialism and its immediate aftermath – come across as more predictable and more indicative of continuing global asymmetries. “Not only”, argues Brenda Yeoh,

are the ‘colonial city’ and the ‘imperial city’ umbilically connected in terms of economic linkages as well as cultural hybridization, but their ‘post-equivalents’ cannot be disentangled one from the other and need to be analysed within a single ‘postcolonial’ framework of intertwining histories and relations.¹⁷

Yeoh’s observation is clearly resonant with comparisons of London on the one hand and cities like Calcutta or Lagos on the other, given the continued and pronounced imbalance that obtains in their economic relations of power. Such comparisons understandably embody a stark inequality both in terms of ex-coloniser/ex-colonised relations and in terms of their positioning vis-à-vis the global economy and political

¹⁶ Friedmann uses the terms “global city” and “world city” interchangeably, a point he makes explicit in his paper.

¹⁷ Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Postcolonial Cities”, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2001), pp. 456-468 (p. 457).

power; one might expect them to demonstrate both the perpetuation of a postcolonial, centre-periphery model of uneven power relations and a new asymmetry wrought by neoliberal globalisation. They are, in other words, ostensibly more resonant with the critical concerns of both postcolonial and globalisation studies. Alternatively, a comparison between Singapore and Lagos for example, whose respective achievements in the postcolonial era reflect dramatically different levels of material success, would yield a different significant insight: namely, the vastly unequal degrees to which different ex-colonial cities have succeeded within global capitalism and how their respective post-independence cultures and social strategies might account for this. In contrast, a comparison of London and Singapore in the context of neoliberal globalisation appears to be little more than a comparison of the relative degrees to which both are advanced, industrialised centres of global capital.

But such an interpretation involves a recourse to largely materialist criteria for understanding the postcoloniality/globalisation issue, according to which both cities are part of a global elite. By shifting our focus onto the postcolonial literatures of London and Singapore, a dramatically different set of observations begins to emerge.¹⁸ The present comparison considers what original perspectives an examination of post-1989 literary representations of the postcolonial cultures of these two advanced global cities – historically linked through a coloniser-colonised relationship – might bring to existing debates on how globalisation has impacted upon the condition of postcoloniality. This periodisation foregrounds 1989 as a symbolic moment in history, one which has been taken up by numerous globalisation and postcolonial theorists (including many of the anti-postcolonial globalists examined

¹⁸ In what follows I will use the terms “postcolonial London” and “postcolonial Singapore” to reference the cultures, literatures and subjects of these two cities that locate their origins in formerly colonised peoples. While the potential ambiguity of the term “postcolonial” has been widely remarked, given that it is used to refer as much to the abiding legacy of European imperialism as to its victims, my specific use of it here will generally be clear from the context in which it is invoked.

below) as heralding, variously, the end of the three worlds model of global relations; the obsolescence of postcoloniality; the ushering in of the age of transnational capital's primacy in determining global power structures; and the global triumph or continued dominance of Western capitalism and modernity. Hardt and Negri, for example, associate the various events of 1989 that resulted in the collapse of the Communist world with the advent of contemporary globalisation and global regimes; in this they are typical of many theorists who identify the end of the Cold War as having ushered in a new globalised age and the obsolescence of postcoloniality as a critical category.¹⁹ John Rennie Short similarly declares that contemporary globalisation has rendered increasingly irrelevant the colonialist binary of centre and periphery. "After 1989", he writes, "we can more properly speak of a global world, albeit one in which the major cleavage of East-West has been replaced by the more enduring one of rich and poor."²⁰ 1989, therefore, is a useful and suggestive date with which to circumscribe the historical scope of a discussion of how global-city writers have responded to the contemporary relationship of globalisation and postcoloniality.

By focusing on literary explorations of the postcolonial cultures of the two cities rather than how the two cities are positioned in relation to each other in the contemporary world order, this thesis engages with the often contradictory transformations wrought by globalisation on the postcolonial condition as they have been variably explored in the writing of two different nodes of postcolonial geography. It also allows for a specifically focused examination of how variegated postcolonialities have been represented by writers across what is ostensibly a ubiquitous and dominant context of global capital. This thesis thus heeds James

¹⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xi. See, also, my discussion in the later sections of this Introduction of existing work on the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation, which covers several theorists who concur on this point.

²⁰ John Rennie Short, *Global Dimensions: Space, Place and the Contemporary World* (London: Reaktion, 2001), p. p. 53.

Donald's warning that while "there is nothing new about the idea that Singapore and London are part of the same story, whether the story is capitalism, colonialism, modernity, or globalisation", these concepts "tend to reduce the singularity of events (and cities), whenever and wherever, to being manifestations of one underlying cause".²¹ The common background of both cities within global capitalism will therefore be refracted through two distinctive literary contexts of postcoloniality. On a fundamental level, postcolonial London must be understood as a set of minority, marginal, diasporic cultures within the contemporary Western space that is London, whereas postcolonial Singapore is effectively coterminous with contemporary Singapore. The qualitative chasm that exists between the two sets of postcolonial cultures in terms of the nature of postcolonial belonging, clarity of national identity, and ownership or power over place, for example, is clearly immense. The postcolonial, it will become clear, has a specificity that cannot be subsumed by globalisation, and needs to be understood in its complex imbrication with the latter process.

How does a comparative examination of contemporary postcolonial London and Singapore literature shift or transform existing theories of the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation? Established work largely focuses on globalisation as having crystallised a transnational class conflict which downplays the significance of cultural geography and location, suggests that postcolonial power regimes continue to exist alongside globalised ones, or assumes that power relations in the material sphere of postcoloniality-cum-globalisation parallel those in the cultural sphere. This thesis diverts attention away from these positions, and considers how writers have explored both the perils and possibilities of globalisation for

²¹ James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 174-5.

postcolonial subjects in global cities. It proceeds from the premise that it is in global-city writing that postcolonials are represented as having the most intense and substantive engagement with globalisation. It is particularly interested in the divergences between postcolonial appropriations of globalisation in Western and non-Western global-city writing. In addressing these concerns the present work variously corroborates, contradicts or complicates existing theoretical models. While I do not want to suggest that London and Singapore are together fully representative of postcoloniality within the sphere of advanced globalisation, they are arguably the most globalised postcolonial cities in the West and non-West respectively. It is this particular distinction, between the postcoloniality of perhaps the foremost global Western city and that of a leading global ex-colonial city, under the overlapping conditions of postcoloniality and globalisation, that this thesis will uncover through a comparison of their literatures. A theorisation of global diversity in postcolonial global-city writing, then, will be developed.

These concerns will be pursued in this thesis through four significant issues, each of which yields original insights into the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship as well as challenging or shifting aspects of the existing theories on this relationship that are described in some detail in the later sections of this Introduction. In Chapter One I consider the question of postcolonial agency in global city literature. My analysis of postcolonial London and Singapore writing in this chapter identifies a negative correlation between the cultural and sociomaterial agency of postcolonials. But this negative correlation is reflected in opposing trends in the postcolonial writing of these two cities. Postcolonial Londoners' significant degree of empowerment and influence within the city's globalised cultural markets is cast in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) and Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) as a

function of their exoticised social marginality. Hwee Hwee Tan's *Foreign Bodies* (1997) and *Mammon Inc.* (2001), on the other hand, allocate considerable globalised socioeconomic agency to postcolonial Singaporeans, but in a way that casts this agency as a function of their cultural subordination to the West. This comparative reading enables a view of postcolonial agency in global cities as a significant yet partial empowerment by globalisation that is curtailed in certain ways by contemporary postcolonial forces, a dispensation subject to what I describe as a politics of accommodation. Postcolonial subjects in these global city texts, then, forge two distinct pathways toward shedding neocolonial subordination to the West, while still being partially bound up with the ethical difficulties of global hegemonies.

Chapter Two examines how postcolonial London and Singapore writers have explored the effects of globalisation on postcolonial place. In Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), the globality of postcolonial London takes the deep historical form of spatial transformations wrought by postcolonial migration and its resulting diasporas. Both writers recognise the conflictual nature of place in postcolonial London, but Evaristo is ultimately more sanguine over postcolonial London's future prospects as a utopian global space, while Smith perceives the postcolonial tensions of the city to be enduring. In the Singapore writing, the colonial urban legacy is cast as a valued cultural inheritance. A selection of texts valorises postcolonial urbanism as a legacy that is threatened with effacement by neoliberal global forces. Heng Siok Tian's poetry, however, takes up both the postcolonial and the global as constituent facets of place in Singapore. In particular, her work considers the postcolonial as a mode of inhabiting global space and its virtual networks. The globality of postcolonial London and Singapore place in the writing, then, is both problematic and promising for postcolonial subjects. It suggests

a way of understanding the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation in global-city literature in terms of a tension between the problematics and utopics of globalised place.

Representations of the nation in postcolonial London and Singapore writing are the focus of Chapter Three, which considers how a global-cities perspective illuminates debates on the link between postcoloniality, globalisation and the nation. The texts examined here share an opposition to the unreconstructed diasporic nativisms and reterritorialised transnational fundamentalisms they locate in contemporary postcolonial London and Singapore. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) explore these subject positions as dysfunctional globalised modes of inhabiting postcolonial London. Suchen Christine Lim's portrait of Singapore in *Fistful of Colours* (1993) similarly perceives such identities at the heart of mainstream Singapore society and subjects them to an exhaustive repudiation. In a more equivocal way, Catherine Lim's *Following the Wrong God Home* (2001) shares this view of Singapore. The London and Singapore writers diverge, however, in the strategies they endorse for engaging with the intersecting issues of nation and globalisation. Ali and Smith recognise a need for postcolonial Londoners to focus on locality and integration into the broad quotidian reality of London, rather than on the nativist allure of transnational fundamentalisms, for national identification. The Singapore writers, in contrast, adopt global, extroverted views of the nation. These views cohere in a celebratory vision of the nation in Edwin Thumboo's recent poetry. Encompassing both global capitalist modernity and cultural and ethnic globality, his poetic vision resolves the postcolonial problematics of nation and globalisation presented in Suchen Lim and Catherine Lim's novels. Global cities are thus represented by these writers as postcolonial sites in which retrograde nationalist

globalisms are confronted and rejected, but are also written as spaces which disclose the uneven recourse to the global for differently situated postcolonial national projects.

Finally, in Chapter Four, the notion of cosmopolitanism serves as a critical concept through which to understand how postcolonial global-city writers explore some possible forms of appropriation of globalisation for postcolonial agendas. London in Atima Srivastava's *Looking For Maya* (1999) and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996) is cast, not primarily as a British city, but rather as a global cosmopolis. These novels represent a postcolonial insistence on the globality of the city, whereby Western urban space becomes reconceptualised as global space. For Srivastava and Adebayo, globalisation offers a positive cultural solution to the postcolonial diasporic predicament of metropolitan exclusion and cultural identity through a vernacular cosmopolitanism both of survival and of multicultural celebration. The postcolonial Singapore texts, on the other hand, foreground the distinctiveness of cosmopolitanism in the city-state as a specific public and governmental discourse that has emerged in recent years. In Daren Shiau's *Heartland* (1999) and a selection of recent poetry, cosmopolitanism embraces a market logic that mediates Singapore's successful engagement with global capitalism, while also reflecting something of a neocolonial cultural dependency on the West. Most interestingly, the textual treatment of market cosmopolitanism is suggestive of an emergent imperial role for Singapore in relation to subaltern labour from the Asian economic peripheries. Cosmopolitanism in Singapore writing thus encompasses both neocolonial and neoimperialist relationships with global economic forces. Within the ostensibly homogeneous global city network, then, writers have borne witness to how globalisation can be appropriated by postcolonial subjects and societies both in

affirmative ways and to profitable but questionable effect, in response to variable local forms of interplay between global and postcolonial imperatives.

This thesis, then, considers how writers have explored the postcolonial experience of the most globalised cities, particularly in terms of the empowering access to globalisation that global cities offer postcolonial subjects alongside continuing postcolonial tensions and challenges. It also develops insight into divergences in this experience between postcolonial literary representations of a global Western metropolis and a global ex-colonial Asian city – that is, between the classic example of metropolitan diasporic writing and the writing of an ex-colonial city. What follows in the rest of this Introduction are overviews of the two main strands in the existing debate regarding the relationship between postcolonialism, postcoloniality and globalisation. Broadly considered, the debate divides itself into the two general positions with which I opened this Introduction: first, the strand of the debate that claims the obsolescence of the postcolonial paradigm in the face of globalisation; second, the claim that the contemporary world is now structured by simultaneously postcolonial and global power relations. The present work asserts the purchase of the global-city perspective, developed through a comparison of postcolonial London and Singapore writing, for transforming our view of these existing theories of the contemporary relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation.

Beyond the Postcolonial: Globalisation and the Eclipse of Postcoloniality

The notion of the “postcolonial” has, especially since the early 1990s, been subjected to searching critique both from within postcolonial studies itself and from the perspectives of other disciplinary fields. Central to many of these critiques is a sense

that the postcolonial critical paradigm is an anachronism, that its relevance lies in a past world situation that has been succeeded by a new global order. Several particularly scathing critics have in fact accused postcolonialism of being complicit with contemporary global hegemonies and social inequities, insofar as its focus on the shaping role of colonialism and its aftermath allegedly blinds us to present world realities.²² The vast critical discourse that mediates the relationship between postcoloniality, postcolonialism and globalisation is marked by a considerable degree of ambivalence, nuance and disagreement; but what is not in doubt is that the postcolonial paradigm is, and has been for some time, under assault from those who proclaim its obsolescence. Some recent overviews of the field appear to concede the point, and have gestured toward the issue of globalisation as representing the future trajectory of postcolonial studies.²³

The arguments adduced by globalisation discourse that signal the demise of the postcolonial paradigm are rooted in claims about the spatiogeographical transformation of the globe. They assert the decreasing importance of the historical, political and cultural legacy of colonialism due to the radical deterritorialisation of the globe. Arguably the most fundamental theme in this broad dismissal of postcoloniality has been what Fernando Coronil usefully terms *globalcentrism*.²⁴ The globalcentric perspective postulates a single world no longer divided according to colonialist binary geographies. Divisions are instead experienced as transnational, deterritorialised formations of global collectivities and power interests:

²² See the work of Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik in particular (discussed below). Also see Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), pp. 84-98, and Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'", *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), pp. 99-113.

²³ See Ania Loomba, "Conclusion: Globalisation and the Future of Postcolonial Studies", in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 213-228; Robert J.C. Young, "White Mythologies Revisited", in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: 2004), pp. 1-31; and various chapters in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*.

²⁴ Fernando Coronil, "Towards a Critique of Globalcentrism: Speculations on Capitalism's Nature", *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2000), pp. 351-374.

The image of a unified globe dispenses with the notion of an outside. It displaces the locus of cultural difference from highly Orientalized others located outside metropolitan centers to diffuse populations dispersed across the globe. Nations have become increasingly open to the flow of capital, even as they remain closed to the movement of the poor. While the elites of these nations are increasingly integrated in transnational circuits of work, study, leisure, and even residence, their impoverished majorities are increasingly excluded from the domestic economy and abandoned by their states. (Coronil, p. 368)

Globalcentrism involves, therefore, a key *spatial* divergence from older colonialist models of global cultural difference. This divergence is echoed in Ania Loomba's recent summary account of globalcentric repudiations of postcoloniality:

Globalisation seems to have transformed the world so radically, many of its advocates and critics suggest, that it has rendered obsolete a critical and analytical perspective which takes the history and legacy of European colonialism as its focal point [. . .] Globalisation, they argue, cannot be analysed using concepts like margins and centres so central to postcolonial studies. Today's economies, politics, cultures and identities are all better described in terms of transnational networks, regional and international flows and the dissolution of geographic and cultural borders, paradigms which are familiar to postcolonial critics but which are now invoked to suggest a radical break with the narratives of colonisation and anti-colonialism. (Loomba, p. 213)

The "imaginative geography" that Edward Said ascribes to European imperialist ideology is replaced, in these configurations, by global class divides and transnational networks.²⁵ For Masao Miyoshi, the metropolitan-colonial model that underpins the postcolonial paradigm has been displaced, in the post-Cold War world, by a new form of global, deterritorialized imperialism conducted by transnational corporations.²⁶ These corporations are not tied to their nation of origin, but are globally mobile in harnessing global capitalism in their exploitative pursuit of capitalistic aggrandisement.²⁷ In the cultural sphere, the globalcentric perspective posits what Arjun Appadurai calls "a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, with a new Afterword (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 [1978]), p. 54.

²⁶ See Miyoshi, p. 728.

²⁷ See pp. 736, 739.

cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries).”²⁸ For John Tomlinson, the coercive nature of cultural imperialism during the European colonial age has been replaced by a non-coercive process of global integration. Imperialism is marked, in Tomlinson’s view, by “the notion of a purposeful project: the *intended* spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe.” Globalisation, in contrast, involves the “interconnection and interdependency of all global areas which happens in a far less purposeful way [. . .] as the result of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at global integration, but which nonetheless produce it”.²⁹ What is identified or claimed here is a shift from centre-periphery divisions of global power to an *unwilled* diffusion of power globally. The representations of postcolonial and globalised place examined in Chapter Two, however, enable a more complex and conflicted understanding of the spatial politics of globalisation.

An explicitly Marxist commitment characterises the work of Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and the collaborative efforts of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, perhaps the most prominent proponents of globalcentrism to explicitly refute the postcolonial paradigm. Fundamental to their work are the centrality of global capital to global power relations and the increasing obsolescence of the so-called Three Worlds model.³⁰ For Ahmad, the privileging of colonialism as the central optic in understanding history prevents the recognition of the role of other sociohistorical

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 27-47 (p. 32).

²⁹ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pinter, 1991), p. 175.

³⁰ For a useful discussion of the Three Worlds theory, see Carl E. Pletsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950-1975”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1981), pp. 565-90.

forces in the shaping of the contemporary world.³¹ In place of an historical perspective informed mainly by colonialism, Ahmad calls – characteristically – for a view of capitalism as the primary determinant of contemporary world order. Using India as a point of reference, he argues that

there have been other countries – such as Turkey which has *not* been colonised, or Iran and Egypt, whose occupation had not led to colonisation of the kind that India suffered – where the onset of capitalist modernity and their incorporation in the world capitalist system brought about state apparatuses as well as social and cultural configurations that were, nevertheless, remarkably similar to the ones in India, which *was* fully colonised. In this context, we should speak not so much of colonialism or postcolonialism but of capitalist modernity, which takes the colonial form in particular places and at particular times. (p. 7)

The global frame of capitalism identified here by Ahmad as the hegemonic force in the present world order lies at the heart of his repudiation of the Three Worlds theory. Global capitalism, in his analysis, provides the conditions for dismantling the colonialist binary opposition between First and Third Worlds favoured by critics like Fredric Jameson, who, according to Ahmad, essentialises and homogenises “both the advanced capitalist countries on the one hand and the imperialized formations on the other.”³²

Ahmad’s contention relies on his conviction that capitalism has, especially since the late 1980s, so thoroughly permeated the globe as to render broad geographical and territorial distinctions secondary in contemporary social analysis.³³ The embracing of capitalism by non-Western and ex-colonial nations profoundly disrupts, in his view, the alleged distinction between capitalist and postcolonial

³¹ Aijaz Ahmad, “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality”, *Race and Class*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (1995), pp. 1-20 (pp. 6-7). A similar criticism of postcolonialism is made in McClintock’s essay “The Angel of Progress”.

³² Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”, in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 95-122 (p. 95).

³³ Ahmad dates capitalism’s “global triumph” to “the late 1980s”. Ahmad, “Introduction”, *In Theory*, pp. 1-42 (p. 42).

countries.³⁴ Citing in particular Pacific Rim states like South Korea and Singapore, which “constitute the fastest-growing region within global capitalism”, he denounces “the binary opposition which Jameson constructs between a capitalist First World and a presumably pre- or non-capitalist Third World” as “empirically ungrounded in any facts” (“Jameson’s Rhetoric”, p. 101). He posits instead a world unified “by the global operation of a single mode of production, namely the capitalist one, and the global resistance to this mode” (p. 103) that “is ultimately socialist in character” (p. 120). While he does acknowledge the heterogeneity in social determinations provided by the categories of gender and race,³⁵ it is clear that capitalism plays the defining role in his account of global affairs and conflicts.

Global capitalism, therefore, supplies the structural conditions for Ahmad’s globalcentric theory. Invoking it allows him to announce that “we live not in three worlds but in one” (p. 103). Advanced capitalism has so inextricably linked the world’s constituent units together that it “must now survive as a global system or not at all.”³⁶ If, as Ahmad seems convinced, the world “is a hierarchically structured whole”, unified under global capitalism rather than “divided into monolithic binaries”, then the socialist resistance to this must also have a transnational, global and universal character.³⁷ Ahmad contends that global class conflict, as a concomitant of globalcentrism, replaces colonialist divisions as the dominant sphere of dispute in present social realities around the world. Postcolonialism thus earns Ahmad’s ire in its alleged diversion of critique away from structural contestations of power and toward

³⁴ This perspective has led Ahmad, more recently, to conceive of global capitalism as an imperialism without colonies. See Aijaz Ahmad, “Imperialism of Our Time”, *Socialist Register 2004: The New Imperial Challenge*, eds. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (London: Merlin, 2004), pp. 43-62 (pp. 44-45).

³⁵ See p. 122.

³⁶ Aijaz Ahmad, “Three Worlds Theory: End of a Debate”, in *In Theory*, pp. 287-318 (p. 313).

³⁷ See p. 316.

the intangible concerns over the postcolonial condition of exile and migrancy.³⁸ To this end, intellectuals from ex-colonial societies, like Salman Rushdie and Edward Said, are referenced by Ahmad as exiles who come from nations subordinate within the global imperialist system but from the dominant middle class of those nations and are hence able to join the middle, rather than working, class of the metropolis. The upshot of this is the obscuring of “the class question” and the treatment of postcolonial migrancy “as an ontological condition, more or less.”³⁹ For Ahmad, in other words, the overlapping issues of national identity and diaspora central to postcolonial subjectivities must defer to the conflict between classes within global space.

In a similar way, he attempts to subvert the work of Homi Bhabha, not so much by declaring the obsolescence of the postcolonial critical paradigm that Bhabha represents as by hijacking it and assimilating it into his own critical purview. In his reading, Bhabha’s work theorises hybridity as a universal condition that is exemplified by the figure of the postcolonial migrant. This focus on the “ontological” dimension of hybridity earns Ahmad’s denunciation for failing to foreground class politics as the “true” predicament of postcoloniality in favour of the intangible aspects of migrancy:

History does not consist of perpetual migration, so that the universality of ‘displacement’ that Bhabha claims both as the general human condition and the desirable philosophical position is tenable neither as description of the world nor as generalised political possibility [. . .] Among the migrants themselves, only the privileged can live a life of constant mobility and surplus pleasure [. . .] Most migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plenitude but as torment; what they seek is not displacement but, precisely, a *place* from where they may begin anew, with some sense of a stable future. Postcoloniality is also, like most things, a matter of class. (“Politics of Literary Postcoloniality”, p. 16)

³⁸ This aspect of Ahmad’s work earns a mention in E. San Juan, Jr.’s *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), which itself argues a similar case.

³⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, “Introduction”, *In Theory*, pp. 12-13.

While implicitly acknowledging that migrants and non-migrants form discrete groupings, then, Ahmad is clearly less interested in the influence of geographical, cultural or national determination than in the global politics of class affiliation; the class divisions within the category of “migrant” take precedence, from this perspective, over the category of the “migrant” itself.

Arif Dirlik’s assault on postcolonialism runs along similar lines to Ahmad’s, but goes to the extent of accusing postcolonialism of being *actively* complicit with global capitalism.⁴⁰ This dimension of his work, aptly described by John McLeod as “oddly paranoid”,⁴¹ represents an extended effort to directly implicate postcolonial theorists in the workings of global capitalism. In perhaps his most influential essay (which Stuart Hall has dismissed as an “*ad hominem*” attack on postcolonial theory⁴²), Dirlik identifies three specific points at which postcolonialism and global capitalism intersect. Firstly, postcolonialism is, in his analysis, broadly synonymous with the interests of global capitalism,⁴³ and is repeatedly accused of “resonating” with the latter (an accusation that Hall rejects on grounds of its banality).⁴⁴ Secondly, postcolonialism allegedly masks the power relations of the contemporary globalised world. It has had valuable critical force in addressing past imperial hegemonies, but is unable to expose contemporary power structures:

The complicity of “postcolonial” in hegemony lies in postcolonialism’s diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political and

⁴⁰ Postcolonialism is conveniently set up here as a single, monolithic target for critique, eliding all internal divisions.

⁴¹ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 257.

⁴² Stuart Hall, “When Was ‘The Post-Colonial’? Thinking at the Limit”, in *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, eds. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 242-60 (p. 256).

⁴³ Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism”, in *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* [1997] (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 52-83 (p. 73). Like Ahmad, Dirlik repeatedly dates the emergence of the present order of global capitalism and globalisation to the 1980s.

⁴⁴ See Dirlik, “Postcolonial Aura”, pp. 53, 54, 74, 76; and Hall, “When Was the Post-Colonial?”, p. 259.

cultural domination, and its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence: a Global Capitalism which, however fragmented in appearance, serves nevertheless as the structuring principle of global relations. (p. 54)

Dirlik here merely hints at postcolonialism's implication in the alleged cover-up; but elsewhere in the essay he directly accuses postcolonialism of involvement in the hegemony of global capitalism. "To put it bluntly," he writes, "'postcoloniality' is designed to *avoid* making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a Global Capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries" (p. 74; italics in the original).⁴⁵ Following up on this rationale, Dirlik concludes that "'postcoloniality' is the condition of the intelligentsia of Global Capitalism" (p. 77). His understanding of "postcoloniality", then, in fact places the more commonly-held view of postcoloniality as colonialism's legacy firmly in the past. What he promotes, ultimately, is a concern with what more mainstream postcolonial critics might understand as the "post-postcolonial".

The globalcentrism of Dirlik's work centres on the primacy of global capitalism in his account of the collapse of the Three Worlds model under globalisation. Postcoloniality is figured, in fact, as one facet of the global deterritorialisation inherent in the dissolution of the Three Worlds into a single one:

The Second World, the world of socialism, is for all practical purposes, of the past. But the new global configuration also calls into question the distinctions between the First and Third Worlds. Parts of the earlier Third World are today on the pathways of transnational capital, and belong in the "developed" sector of the world economy. Likewise, parts of the First World marginalized in the new global economy are hardly distinguishable in way of life from what used to be viewed as Third World characteristics. It may not be fortuitous that the North-South distinction has gradually taken over from the earlier division of the globe into the three worlds – so long as we remember that the references of North and South are not merely to concrete geographic locations, but metaphorical references: North denoting the pathways of transnational capital,

⁴⁵ A similar claim is made by Miyoshi, who understands academic postcolonialism as an "alibi" in the deliberate attempt by postcolonial theorists to hide global realities. See Miyoshi, "A Borderless World?", pp. 728, 751.

and, South, the marginalized populations of the world, regardless of their location (which is where “postcoloniality” comes in!). (p. 72)

Global capital flows and the global defeat of alternatives to capitalism, it appears, have resulted in a single (but heterogeneous) world in which power relations revolve around global classes, and tripartite notions of the spatial division of the globe no longer hold. The global movements of elites along the pathways of transnational capital, it is also claimed, have exploded any possibility of characterising identity and social power based solely on one’s affiliation to the geographic First or Third Worlds, or, indeed, on the specific politics of place, nation and identity. Postcolonial, “Third World” elite intellectuals in the West are, in Dirlik’s estimation, more empowered than most of the “First World” population precisely because they are “highly paid, highly prestigious postcolonial intellectuals at Columbia, Duke, Princeton or UC-Santa Cruz” (p. 65).

Dirlik shares with Ahmad, then, a conviction that deterritorialised class affiliations have replaced colonialist geographies as the primary structuring element in the contemporary world order.⁴⁶ In a more recent essay,⁴⁷ Dirlik delivers a defence of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s arguments in *Empire* (2000) and reiterates the obsolescence of the notion of imperialism in the face of globalisation. In particular, the transnational class interests that both Ahmad and Dirlik privilege as the sites of the primary conflict of power under global capitalism continue to serve here as the central issue of globalisation.⁴⁸ The deterritorialisation implicit in this perspective can

⁴⁶ While Dirlik appears to recant his critique of postcolonialism’s focus on colonial history in a recent article, he continues to insist that this colonialist paradigm is an obstacle to understanding contemporary hegemonies. See Dirlik, “Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation”, *Interventions*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2002), pp. 428-448.

⁴⁷ Arif Dirlik, “*Empire?* Some Thoughts on Colonialism, Culture, and Class in the Making of Global Crisis and War in Perpetuity”, *Interventions*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2003), pp. 207-217.

⁴⁸ See pp. 212-3.

be read alongside the account of the decentring of global power that Dirlik identifies in Hardt and Negri's work.⁴⁹

Hardt and Negri advance a theory of globalisation that crystallises many of the claims made by Ahmad, Dirlik and other globalcentric thinkers. Hugely controversial, their book has inspired much debate, a fact reflected in the appearance of a number of scholarly volumes and a special issue of the journal *Interventions* addressing its contentions.⁵⁰ It is alleged in *Empire* that globalisation, especially since the collapse in the late 1980s of the Soviet impediment to a global capitalist market, has ushered in an era of "Empire", a unitary, global, deterritorialised form of rule over a capitalist globe that is distinct from the old European imperialisms.⁵¹ Concurring with Ahmad and Dirlik, Hardt and Negri argue that these developments signal the obsolescence of the Three Worlds theory insofar as "the spatial divisions of the three Worlds (First, Second, and Third) have been scrambled so that we continually find the First World in the Third, the Third in the First, and the Second almost nowhere at all". The result of this is "a smooth world [. . .] defined by new and complex regimes of differentiation and homogenization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (xiii). This new world order dispenses with the territorial divisions between centre and periphery, (post)colony and (post)metropolis. Hardt and Negri explicitly refute the widely-held view of the United States as the new global imperial centre.⁵² In contradistinction to such claims, they assert that "Imperialism is over. No nation will be world leader in the way modern European nations were" (xiv). Rather, Empire is

⁴⁹ See p. 215.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Atilio A. Boron, *Empire and Imperialism: a Critical Reading of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri*, trans. Jessica Casiro (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005); *Debating Empire*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London and New York: Verso, 2003); and *Interventions*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2003).

⁵¹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xi, xii.

⁵² See xiii-xiv, p. 384.

distinctively contemporary in “that its power has no actual and localizable terrain or center” and functions instead through what they call network power (p. 384).

Where the sovereignty of the nation-state underpinned the old European imperialisms, Hardt and Negri’s notion of Empire is marked by a lack of boundaries of any kind. Empire encompasses the spatial totality of the world;⁵³ in Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman’s interpretation of Hardt and Negri, it is “a purely immanent global capitalist order that lacks an outside”.⁵⁴ Empire is also ahistorical; the concept brooks no notions of historical progression. It is conceived as “outside of history or at the end of history” (Hardt and Negri, xiv-xv), and thus accords with the teleology of Francis Fukuyama’s apology for capitalist liberal democracy.⁵⁵ It encompasses the totality of global society: for Hardt and Negri, the political space of Empire is coextensive with the political space of the resistance that emerges against it.⁵⁶

The era of Empire, Hardt and Negri assert, has made postcolonial theory obsolete. In the contemporary global dispensation, colonialist divisions no longer hold. Rather, globalisation and Empire function by celebrating the hybridity and postmodern subjectivity championed by postcolonial theory. Empire, they venture, is in fact antithetical to the binary power and cultural structures that prevailed under colonialism and its aftermath, and is therefore the global logic that postcolonial theorists themselves work toward.⁵⁷ Postcolonial theorists, in other words, have “mistake[n] today’s real enemy” (p. 137). Postcolonialism appears, then, to be an outdated mode of critique, relevant to past historical contexts but merely echoing existing hegemonies. While Hardt and Negri absolve postcolonial theorists from any

⁵³ See xiv.

⁵⁴ Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman, “Introduction: The Globalization of Fiction / the Fiction of Globalization”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2001), pp. 603-626 (p. 608).

⁵⁵ P. 189. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

⁵⁶ See p. 393.

⁵⁷ See pp. 137-8.

complicity with global capitalism, they do highlight the shared foundations of postcolonialism and Empire such that postcolonial theorists “unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule” (p. 138). Homi Bhabha’s focus on deconstructing (post)colonialist binaries, therefore, is regarded as a critique of regimes of power that no longer exist,⁵⁸ while Edward Said’s view that the United States is replicating the methods of the old European imperialisms fails to recognise “the novelty of the structures and logics of power that order the contemporary world”. “Empire”, they avow, “is not a weak echo of modern imperialisms but a fundamentally new form of rule” (p. 146).

The globalcentric refutation of the postcolonial paradigm, then, posits the radical deterritorialisation and spatial transformation of the world that renders the encounter between hegemony and subject increasingly less reliant on (neo)colonialist geographical determinations. Analytical categories based on spatial models, such as North and South, First and Third Worlds, or East and West, are rejected as little more than metaphors that have no material referents of consequence in actual space. This repudiation is partly animated by a refusal to regard anything other than economic dominance as a significant expression of hegemony. Transnational class affiliations are the primary lines along which contemporary conflicts of power are said to unfold. The focus on narrowly materialist considerations means that the problems of racial and cultural discrimination, often reflecting a fundamentally geographical perspective on the world despite (and often because of) the vast and complex migrations that characterise recent world history, are regarded as deserving of only cursory attention. Even Appadurai’s heterogenising model of cultural globalisation attenuates the role played in global power relations by fixed notions of place and cultural situatedness,

⁵⁸ See pp. 143-6.

urging instead a critique of the nation-state and calling for a postnational conception of global culture.⁵⁹ Through the powerful voices of critics like Ahmad, Dirlik and Hardt and Negri, this strand of the postcoloniality/globalisation debate openly repudiates the geographical, culturalist and racialised underpinnings of postcolonial critique and sets up in its place a transnational or deterritorialised model of power relations structured primarily by global capitalism.

My examination of postcolonial London and Singapore literature in the context of the larger debate on postcoloniality and globalisation, however, will demonstrate that the globalcentric position severely curtails our understanding of how contemporary hegemony can be a complex intertwining of postcolonial and globalised power. It highlights the importance of reading the cultural together with the material in order to fully grasp such complexities. The literary analyses in the chapters that follow also reveal how postcolonial global-city writers have registered the ironies and contradictions of place, the nation, agency and subjectivity that emerge at the confluence of postcolonial culture, capital, and globalisation. In the process they expose the conceptual limitations of globalcentric critique for illuminating postcolonial literary explorations of the global-city experience, and enable more complex insights into globalisation and the postcolonial.

Postcoloniality and Globalisation

In a defence of postcolonialism against some of the more sweeping claims of globalisation theory, the editors of *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* argue that “practitioners of postcolonial studies must and do recognize that there are newer as well as older forms of sovereignty and economic power subsisting side by side in the

⁵⁹ See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

globalized world.”⁶⁰ This declaration encapsulates the general view held by critics who assert the continuing relevance of the postcolonial paradigm alongside the contemporary globalisation paradigm. Whether suggesting that the world continues to be dominated in various ways by the West through the latter’s dominance of the global economic system, or that America has replaced (or at least joined with) Europe as the power core of global hegemony, these critics maintain a focus on centre-periphery relations as a primary structuring force in contemporary global power dispensations. Lamenting the extent to which postcolonialists “have acceded to the debate over globalization”, Ali Behdad is keen to emphasise how the current global order might be understood as an outgrowth of postcoloniality, rather than as its definitive replacement.⁶¹ Some in fact see globalisation as nothing more than a neoimperialism that functions through capitalist hegemony in addition to more established imperialist structures. Neil Lazarus’s recent commentary on “Postcolonial Studies After the Invasion of Iraq” (2006) is a prime example of this position: he argues that in the move from the first Gulf War to the second, globalisation, which has purported to be an inexorable force for good in the world, has been exposed to “reveal the power of the American state, now frankly projected and bent on world domination.”⁶²

One of the most familiar developments of recent postcolonial theory has indeed been a shift toward seeing America as the new imperialist centre of power in global relations. Vilashini Cooppan, for instance, argues against the grain of Hardt and Negri’s concept of Empire in theorising American cultural hegemony as rooted in

⁶⁰ Ania Loomba et al., “Beyond What? An Introduction”, in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, pp. 1-38 (p. 15).

⁶¹ Behdad, p. 63.

⁶² Neil Lazarus, “Postcolonial Studies After the Invasion of Iraq”, *New Formations*, No. 59 (2006), pp. 10-22 (p. 11).

national concerns.⁶³ America in these analyses does not replace Europe as the imperial centre in a simple fashion; rather, America is generally regarded as practising a new form of imperialism without formal colonies. Its economic, political and cultural power is diffused through global exchange mechanisms heavily skewed to its own advantage. Edward Said alludes to this difference in his analysis of the era of “American ascendancy”. While claiming that contemporary American dominance functions through both force and ideology, much as European imperialism did, Said identifies a dramatic increase in the extent of its global cultural influence as the distinctively new element of the American age: “Where it differs in the American century is the quantum leap in the reach of cultural authority, thanks in large measure to the unprecedented growth in the apparatus for the diffusion and control of information.”⁶⁴ A territorial, centre-periphery model of global relations, therefore, similar to that which prevailed during European colonialism and its immediate aftermath, continues to be advanced.

I want now to turn to a detailed reading of the work of Bill Ashcroft and Robert Young, two major critics who have theorised postcoloniality as persisting alongside a newer regime of globalisation and who continue to view postcolonialism as providing the most pertinent critique of both postcolonial and global hegemonies. An account of Simon Gikandi’s theory of the globalisation/postcoloniality relationship, which posits postcoloniality as a modality of the global condition in both its salutary and sobering guises, follows. Taking up the question of how postcolonialism might continue to be relevant in an age of globalisation, particularly given “the increasing importance of social and cultural issues which appear to have

⁶³ Vilashini Cooppan, “The Ruins of Empire: The National and Global Politics of America’s Return to Rome”, in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, pp. 80-100.

⁶⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [1993] (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 291.

little apparent connection to the material fact of European colonialism”,⁶⁵ Ashcroft offers two answers:

[...] firstly, we cannot understand globalization without understanding the structure of global power relations which flourishes in the twenty-first century as an economic, cultural and political legacy of Western imperialism. Secondly, post-colonial theory, and particularly the example of post-colonial literatures, can provide very clear models for understanding how local communities achieve agency under the pressure of global hegemony. There are many globalisms: sociological, economic, political, cultural, depending on the discipline from which the phenomenon is approached. But all of them may be addressed in terms of the model of power relations developed over several centuries of European imperialism. (p. 208)

Central to Ashcroft’s analysis is an understanding of global power structures apparently at odds with that developed by the globalcentric critics of postcolonialism examined in the preceding section, although Ashcroft does not claim that contemporary global hegemony is identical to that which prevailed under European empire. The second answer he provides also puts a degree of theoretical distance between his position and that of the globalcentrists: where the latter insist that contemporary hegemony is global and must therefore be contested globally or through transnational alliances, Ashcroft maintains a more established postcolonial strategy of localised resistance. I will examine the nuances of these arguments in greater detail below.

A slight ambiguity marks Ashcroft’s account of contemporary global hegemony. He identifies the United States, which is said to have “assumed command of imperial rhetoric”, as “the key to the link between classical imperialism and contemporary globalization”. But American dominance functions through “a globalization process without spatial boundaries” (p. 212), a process that “is the radical *transformation* of imperialism, continually reconstituted, and interesting precisely because it stems from no obvious imperial centre”; rather, it is “rhizomic,

⁶⁵ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 207.

circulatory and diffuse” (p. 213). The power relationship between “North and South”, according to Ashcroft, “is very reminiscent of historical relations between imperial centres and dominated states, but globalization has diffused the situation immensely” (p. 209). This view shares, to a degree at least, the conviction of the anti-postcolonial globalisation critics that global power is no longer concentrated within specific national territories. In arguing that the United States “initiated those features of social life and social relations which today may be considered to characterize the global: mass production, mass communication and mass consumption” (p. 212), Ashcroft advances a theory of globalisation as the spread of Western modernity. The global system described by Ashcroft, however, continues to be dominated by America and other Northern powers, although in his analysis this dominance is less clear-cut in global politics than it is in the global economy. “There is no question”, he affirms, “that the underlying pressure of the global economy, like the imperial economy before it, is to render the post-colonial world a mere instrument in the enrichment of the North” (p. 209). Postcolonial Singapore and London writers, we shall see, testify to the ambiguous position the postcolonials of these cities occupy between what Ashcroft calls “the post-colonial world” and “the North”.

He oscillates, therefore, between seeing the United States as the new centre of power within the existing global structure set up by European empire, and insisting that globalisation is a radical transformation of imperialism because its regimes of power are dispersed and deterritorialised. Unlike the globalcentric critics, however, he refutes any suggestion that imperialism has been superseded by globalisation as the primary model of global power. Such an argument stems, he insists, “from an extremely limited view of imperialism” involving passive periphery and dominant

centre; the reality involves rhizomic exchanges between the two.⁶⁶ Implicit in this account is the continued Western dominance of the globe through more covert structural means rather than the overtly territorial expressions of power that characterised European imperialism. Coronil distills the essence of Ashcroft's critical interpretation in observing that while imperial power has shifted from an identifiable location in what we understand as Europe or the West "to a less identifiable position in the 'globe'", the West remains the centre of global power, albeit hidden behind the façade of the global market through a process of "invisible reterritorialization" (Coronil, p. 368). In important ways, the London and Singapore writers, particularly in Chapters One and Four on agency and cosmopolitanism respectively, both address and nuance this observation in their work.

Postcolonialism represents, for Ashcroft, the primary strategy for contesting global hegemony. Two features of his argument stand out: first, it focuses on the sphere of culture as that in which the greatest potential for resisting the global might be found; and second, it assumes that localised transformative strategies represent the primary ways of contesting globalisation. The first assertion is undergirded by the conviction that "[t]he engagement of local communities with global culture is marked by a far greater degree of self-determination than we find at present in global economic relationships" (p. 209). For this reason, Ashcroft claims that postcolonialism, which he sees as providing the most perspicacious disclosure of how local cultures can contest global culture, shows the way forward for resisting other kinds of global dominance; more specifically, "the model of post-colonial societies reveals that local empowerment comes by means of the creative interpolation of the dominant, and increasingly a globally dominant, discourse" (p. 209). Ashcroft's

⁶⁶ See p. 210.

implicit point, then, is that global or Western dominance over the local or postcolonial in both material and cultural spheres reflects a common unequal relationship of power, a point explicitly challenged in my arguments on postcolonial agency in Chapter One.

The second feature I highlighted above is related to this postcolonial strategy of resistance. Ashcroft argues that the postcolonial resists the global through “interpolation”, a concept grounded in local “engagement and transformation” rather than “dismissal, isolation and rejection” (p. 214). Instead of seeing local and global in a simple oppositional relationship, he develops a more complex picture of how the local appropriates the global and in turn transforms the latter through alternative deployments. An entire chapter of his book is devoted to the concept of interpolation, which he describes as

the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse without asserting a unified anti-imperial intention, or a separate oppositional purity [...] When we view the ways in which a dominant discourse may operate to keep oppositional discourses located, defined and marginal, we see the strategic importance of a form of intervention which operates within the dominant system but refuses to leave it intact. Fundamentally the process of insertion, interruption, interjection, which is suggested by the act of interpolation, is the initial (and essential) movement in the process of post-colonial transformation. (pp. 47-48)

Ashcroft identifies Said’s theory of “the voyage in” as an example of interpolation.⁶⁷ One might also point to various theories of hybridity as interpolative strategies for contesting hegemony.⁶⁸ What stands out in his theory of interpolation, however, is the focus on the local as the primary arena in which hegemony is encountered and engaged. This diverges from the transnational or global emphasis of anti-hegemonic politics advanced by the globalcentric critics of postcolonialism, who insist upon

⁶⁷ P. 48; see Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*.

⁶⁸ See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Also see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* [1994] (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

global alliances as the adequate response to global power. While this latter position does not preclude local action – indeed transnational strategies would presumably rely on coordinated responses across various localities – the emphasis is very much on the need for action on a global scale. For Ashcroft, however, the postcolonial strategy of interpolation involves a range of localised responses tailored to localised expressions of global dominance. The writers examined in this thesis bear witness to the complexity of such postcolonial interpolative strategies within global cities.

Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) is a detailed account of the historical roots of postcolonial theory, an attempt to demonstrate the Marxist traditions of the various anti-colonial movements that led to post-war decolonisation. In Young's study Marxism is seen to have been adapted in various ways to the purpose of contesting colonialism. While this might ostensibly place him within the materialist framework of critique championed by Ahmad et al., he does acknowledge the importance of culture in postcolonial analysis, albeit as a broad reflection of material power relations. Material dominance, Young implicitly avers, has a parallel effect in the cultural sphere. "Postcolonial theory", he writes, "is distinguished from orthodox European Marxism by combining its critique of objective material conditions with detailed analysis of their subjective effects."⁶⁹ Neither does he jettison the territorial binary between imperial centre and dominated periphery so central to the postcolonial paradigm, although he acknowledges that contemporary power functions in other ways as well. A distinctive feature of his recent work on postcolonialism has been his adumbration of the notion of tricontinentalism, a term he prefers to postcolonialism (although he uses the two interchangeably). Tricontinentalism as theorised by Young appears to conceive of postcolonial

⁶⁹ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 7.

resistance as a transnational force, at least in its ideological affiliations and positioning, and therefore at least somewhat analogous to the transnational class allegiances described by neo-Marxist globalcentrists. But tricontinentalism, we shall see, also installs a geographic binary within global power structures along North-South lines, a global divide still susceptible to (post)colonial analysis.

Postcolonialism, in Young's work, "does not privilege the colonial". The history of colonialism is regarded as significant

only to the extent that that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present, to the extent that much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake, and to the extent that the anti-colonial liberation movements remain the source and inspiration of its politics. (p. 4)

Postcolonialism, then, engages with the colonial past by "making connections between that past and the politics of the present" (p. 6). This claim refutes the allegations made against postcolonialism by critics like Dirlik, who accuse it of obscuring present hegemonies by focusing on the colonial past. Like Ashcroft, Young is keen to retain the category of the postcolonial as relevant to contemporary structures of world dominance. The link here between colonialist and present-day power relations is an understanding of globalisation as the expansion and spread of the West across the world. If European empire was, as Young sees it, "the globalization of western imperial power" (p. 5), that legacy of globalisation is reflected in the continuing impress of colonial history on the present, particularly in the contemporary economic dispensation of the globe:

The entire world now operates within the economic system primarily developed and controlled by the west, and it is the continued dominance of the west, in terms of political, economic, military and cultural power, that gives this history a continuing significance. Political liberation did not bring economic liberation – and without economic liberation, there can be no political liberation. (p. 5)

Again, Young slips easily into the assumption that the global material dominance of the West is accompanied by an analogous global cultural dominance, much as Ashcroft does. As was the case with the latter, the insights into agency in Chapter One have a bearing on Young's theoretical analogy between global material and cultural empowerment.

While this picture of current global power continues to acknowledge the asymmetry between the West and the "Rest" (or between the North and South), Young refuses to see this as the only significant form of conflict. The observation "that global power structures have not materially shifted since the end of the imperial era" may seem self-evident, but it downplays the extent to which the North and South have become imbricated economically, culturally and diasporically (p. 8). Migration from the three continents of the South (Asia, Latin America and Africa, hence the term "tricontinental") to the West, coupled with internal class divisions, means that there are struggles not structured by binarised geographical relations of power: "Postcolonial critics recognize that north-south divisions do not devalue the struggles of those oppressed through class or minoritarian status within the heartlands of contemporary capitalism" (p. 9). Again, Young's observation contrasts starkly with Dirlik's view; the former recognises that the material geographical referents of North and South need to be qualified in order to reflect the ethnic and cultural complications wrought upon them by migration and class politics, whereas the latter's metaphorical invocation of the twinned terms requires no such qualification due to his purely materialist perspective. Young's concern here is to avoid essentialising the geographical West and non-West, not in order to replace them with transnational class distinctions, but rather with a complex combination of class, ethnicity and geography.

Young recasts the old centre-periphery model of postcolonial relations as a North-South one based on the global distribution of (primarily economic) power. He refuses to see the contemporary world as a simple deterritorialised singularity. Postcolonialism, in his conception, contests “the continuing, often covert, operation of an imperialist system of economic, political and cultural domination” (p. 58); this system is “a complex adversary whose power is dispersed through a wide range of globalized institutions and practices” (p. 59). What he calls tricontinentalism registers both the perpetuation of imperialism and the newer forms of globalised power. It is “enunciated” from the discursive, if not always literally geographic, position of the three continents of the South (p. 4), evoking in the process a transnational affiliation of the marginalised. It references, therefore, both territorial and symbolic political space, having at once a referent in material geography and political discourse. Young, then, echoes Ashcroft in suggesting that globalisation obtains alongside postcoloniality, and that often it is globalisation that allows neocolonialist regimes to flourish in diffuse and undetected ways. He diverges from Ashcroft, however, in not foregrounding the local as the primary arena in which global hegemonies are contested. His book does analyse in detail the various ways in which anti-colonial resistance was historically practised, but the contemporary purchase of postcolonialism as a contestatory politics is discussed in fairly generalised terms.⁷⁰

Where Ashcroft and Young maintain a commitment to postcolonial critique and their conviction that it continues to serve as a relevant discourse for understanding and contesting contemporary global inequities, Gikandi sees postcoloniality and globalisation as having much in common. His major statement on the issue, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality” (2001), suggests two

⁷⁰ This is not surprising, given that his theoretical discussion of postcolonialism and contemporary globalisation is largely limited to the opening of the book; the main body of his study is given over to an historical excavation of the Marxist roots of anti-colonial movements.

significant shared traits between these concepts. Firstly, they take as their primary focus “forms of social and cultural organisation whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state”. Secondly, they aim “to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogeneous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change.”⁷¹ The postcolonial, indeed, is regarded as providing much of the conceptual vocabulary drawn upon by contemporary globalisation theory, an assessment that leads Gikandi to identify “a postcolonial theory of globalization” (p. 636). This newer understanding of globalisation, he argues, distinguishes itself from earlier theories of globalisation that were rooted in modernisation or world-system theory⁷² by “their strategic deployment of postcolonial theory”, in particular the language of “hybridity and cultural transition” that he sees as part of “the grammar book of postcolonial theory” (p. 628).⁷³ Contemporary globalisation theory, in other words, is distinctive in focusing (as Gikandi believes postcolonial theory does) on culture as the primary medium through which Western accounts of modernity could be undermined.⁷⁴

These perceived commonalities provide the basis for Gikandi to elaborate the relationship between globalisation and postcoloniality in two ways, one discursive and theoretical, the other on the level of material reality. The postcolonial has been invoked by globalisation discourse as a celebratory and salutary mode of globalisation, replete with hybrid and cosmopolitan cultures. Theorists like Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai, Gikandi suggests, read the processes of globalisation in

⁷¹ Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2001), pp. 627-658 (p. 628).

⁷² See p. 633.

⁷³ It needs mentioning here that Gikandi’s working notion of postcolonial theory is a narrowly circumscribed one, primarily referencing theorists like Homi Bhabha and Jan Nederveen Pieterse who are prominent advocates of hybridity and who favour culturalist modes of globalisation theory.

⁷⁴ See p. 633.

terms of global cultural flows;⁷⁵ the attraction of postcolonialism for these globalisation theorists lies in its valorisation of culture and media images, which are perhaps the most readily “globalisable” dimensions of contemporary experience and therefore by implication the most promising expressions of global agency.⁷⁶ Gikandi rejects this discursive optimism, insisting that “it is premature to argue that the images and narratives that denote the new global culture are connected to a global structure” and that “there is no reason to suppose that the global flow in images has a homological connection to transformations in social or cultural relationships” (p. 632). Instead, he calls attention to a “disjuncture” between these global images and a more sobering reality of globalisation, one that yields “a sense of crisis within the postcolony itself” (p. 630). This crisis manifests itself as a postcolonial yearning for Western modernity and the material fruits of globalisation, as in the example Gikandi offers of two Guinean boys found dead in the cargo hold of a plane in Brussels in 1998. Leaving behind a letter addressed to the people of Europe, the boys request in it the aid of Europe such that Africa might have a share, not in any kind of “cultural hybridity” or “ontological difference”, but in “a modern life in the European sense of the world” (p. 630). Their abortive attempt to find a way out of, in Gikandi’s words, “both poverty and alterity”, calls into question much of the discursive complacency inherent in the culturalist narrative of globalisation and demands an acknowledgement of globalisation as partly “a discourse of failure and atrophy” (p. 639).

The disjuncture between the two ways of reading globalisation suggests that, for Gikandi, postcolonial theory and globalisation theory might share a common commitment to cultural analysis and the conceptual tropes of hybridity and difference, but this is not always reflected in material global realities. Celebratory narratives of

⁷⁵ See pp. 631-2.

⁷⁶ See pp. 638-9.

globalisation build on the rhetoric of postcoloniality, but the two are related in material reality by a more sobering dispensation of continuing postcolonial underdevelopment on the margins of neoliberal globalisation. While Gikandi unhelpfully conflates the meanings of the terms “postcolonial theory” and “postcoloniality”, it is clear from his work that globalisation and the postcolonial are seen to dovetail in two dramatically divergent ways. The optimism that marks the theoretical overlap between the two concepts must be measured against the cautionary reality of the postcolonial predicament of globalisation; postcoloniality, one might argue, references very contradictory positions in relation to the global. Postcolonial globalisation, ultimately, exists in discursive and material guises, both telling different stories of postcolonial (dis)empowerment. None of this elides the fact that the non-Western encounter with globalisation has had its successes; Gikandi himself contrasts the despair with which Africa inhabits the narrative of globalisation with the great success of Japan and Korea (to which we might add, in a postcolonial context, Singapore and Hong Kong) in global capitalism, which takes the form of “hybrid modernities [...] premised on a mixture of local cultures and global interests” (p. 637). But it does mean that the postcolonial needs to be retheorised as a notion that is entwined with both the successes and pathologies of globalisation.

This is precisely the task I broach in this thesis through a comparison of postcolonial London and Singapore writing. I read postcolonial subjects in global-city literature not merely as victims of globalisation, but also at the same time as its agents. While my analyses of the literature concur with the general claim that postcoloniality and globalisation are both simultaneously at work in contemporary power relations, they also highlight the limitations of the work of Ashcroft, Young and Gikandi insofar as they characterise these two forces simply as forms of

domination working in tandem. On the evidence of the literary texts, postcoloniality and globalisation in global cities are instead often appropriated and experienced by postcolonial subjects in uneven and contradictory ways, the precise features of which depend on the specific postcolonial urban modality in question.

CHAPTER 1: GLOBALISATION AND POSTCOLONIAL AGENCY

In the contemporary era of uneven globalisation, global circuits of culture, capital and commodities coalesce most prominently within the leading global cities of the world. This much is held as a truism of globalisation, as my account of global cities theory in the Introduction amply demonstrates. Given the established status of these cities as the command centres of globalised capital and global markets for cultural commodities, one might locate the greatest potential agency over global processes and structures within these urban centres. Factors like class affiliation and economic status, of course, have a significant influence over how much of this agency is realisable for individuals. The postcolonial condition adds a further complicating dimension to the question of agency in global cities: what kinds of pressure or limits does contemporary postcoloniality exert on the great potential for globalised empowerment in these most globalised of contexts? What kinds of agency, on the other hand, might be enabled by the postcolonial condition for postcolonials bound up in globalisation? In this chapter I address these questions through a comparative examination of a number of postcolonial literary texts from London and Singapore that impinge upon such concerns.

In my reading, both the postcolonial London and Singapore writers enact a negative correlation between the cultural agency and social agency of the postcolonial subjects they portray.¹ But I perceive in these representations opposing trends. Postcolonial Londoners are represented in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) and Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) as possessing significant empowerment within London's globalised markets for cultural fashions, but in

¹ By "cultural agency" I mean influence over cultural and artistic markets, as well as over ways of thinking more generally. "Social agency" refers to economic empowerment and class positioning. There is some degree of overlap between these two concepts, but the distinction is useful for analytical purposes.

exoticised terms that enshrine their social marginality irrespective of their class origins. For the postcolonial Singaporeans of Hwee Hwee Tan's *Foreign Bodies* (1997) and *Mammon Inc.* (2001), on the other hand, a high degree of social and economic empowerment appears to be available; this, however, is to a significant extent dependent on class positioning. In these Singapore novels, socioeconomic agency is cast as a function of cultural subordination to the West. I argue that these generally opposed dispensations of agency can be explained in terms of the specific mode of postcoloniality in which they are enacted: diasporic postcoloniality in the postimperial, Western global metropolis in the case of the London texts, and the postcolonial condition of the emergent ex-colonial global city *par excellence*, in the Singapore novels.

In this chapter I focus on representations of these different postcolonial modalities and their respective politics of globalised agency within leading global cities in order to shift the debate over postcoloniality and globalisation away from its focus on the nature of contemporary hegemonies. Instead I develop a specific set of insights into postcolonial agency in the most advanced contexts and circuits of globalisation, focusing on how geographical context and positioning vis-à-vis the West shape its qualified and uneven nature. The comparative literary analysis in this chapter therefore poses a critical challenge to a number of existing positions in the theoretical debate on postcoloniality and globalisation detailed in the Introduction, particularly those that foreground issues of transnational class differences and those that assume a simple correlation between social and material global dominance on the one hand, and global cultural dominance on the other. But it also crystallises a new way of understanding the implications of postcoloniality and globalisation for postcolonial agency. I develop here a view of postcolonial agency in global cities as a

significant empowerment through globalisation that is partly curtailed by contemporary postcolonial forces. This partial postcolonial empowerment, I argue, emerges from a politics of accommodation that obtains between cultural and social agency. The precise pattern this accommodation follows, however, is context-specific: I bring together literary readings of postcolonial London and Singapore in order to illuminate how differently situated postcolonials in global cities are compelled to make different kinds of compromises in their quest for agency. This chapter therefore reveals two significant forms of postcolonial progress toward redressing historical inequities through advanced global mechanisms, while warning against the ethical double bind of postcolonial complicity with global hegemonies that accrue to both.

Postcolonial London: The Postcolonial Exotic and the Diasporic Experience

In a recent study of postcolonial London literature, John McLeod invokes “postcolonial London” as a term that “names a frequently utopian subaltern aesthetic which emerges from the representations made about the city, yet remains absolutely bound up with the sobering social conditions and relations which are expressed in London’s divisive architecture of power.”² Something analogous to this, I want to argue in this section, can be asserted of postcolonial London’s imbrication in certain fictional representations with a simultaneously postcolonial and globalised regime of power: it is marked by a significant degree of cultural agency alongside a level of material or social disenfranchisement and adversity that remains difficult to ignore. It needs to be made clear here that by “material” I refer not merely to economic factors but also to other dimensions of social experience: representations of sophisticated middle-class postcolonial Londoners are not uncommon in the literature, but their

² John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 15.

economic status does not preclude the experience of quotidian racism, patronage and discrimination. Indeed, it is often the covert operation of neocolonial discrimination within ostensibly utopian narratives of multiculturalism that is the most interesting aspect of contemporary postcolonial London writing. Through the exoticising mechanism of metropolitan cultural consumerism, postcolonial London cultures have often been celebrated for their “difference” and wield a considerable degree of power in global cultural markets.³ This can, of course, reflect the covert privileging of metropolitan cultural agendas dissembled as the privileging of postcolonial difference. But it is precisely the complex intersection of postcoloniality and globalisation, I suggest, that produces a discrepancy between levels of cultural and social empowerment for postcolonial Londoners in the novels examined in this section.

That the history of postcolonial diasporas in London (and Britain in general) has been marked by racism, exclusion and physical oppression is both well-known and well-documented. A more recent development, however, has been the emergence of postcolonial and minority cultures onto the metropolitan stage as fashionable commodities, the consumption of which bespeaks a certain cultural sophistication. Through the globalised mechanism of the market, these marginalised cultures have come to be regarded as in some ways representative of the globalisation of culture. Simon Gikandi, for example, suggests that postcolonial literary texts, in their engagement with hybridity and heterogeneity, are “the most powerful signs of the new process of globalization”.⁴ In the new cultural economy difference has become profitable through commodification. This can be attributed, in the British context, to the workings of what Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has labelled consumer, “boutique” or

³ See below for a theoretical account of the postcolonial exotic that is at work in this kind of cultural consumption.

⁴ Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2001), pp. 627-658 (p. 632).

style multiculturalism.⁵ But while these processes have been widely registered, the old racisms and prejudices faced by postcolonial subjects in the postimperial metropolis, far from having abated, have often been obscured by discourses of multicultural celebration. The coexistence of the market valorisation of postcolonial difference and the social exclusions experienced by postcolonials in London prompts Paul Gilroy to sound “a note of caution”:

London’s post-colonial history shows that an intense appreciation for the exotic fruits of colonial culture has not necessarily promoted a parallel love or even respect for the people who produce it [...] Indeed, the allure of exotic culture may even have been enhanced by the deepening of social and cultural segregation. This change effectively separates London’s carnival of trans-cultural consumption and play from the troubled lives and colonial histories of its exotic and supposedly primitive producers.⁶

Gilroy’s suggestion of a facile feel to the city’s multiculturalism has been echoed by other commentators. Something of the cellular and ethnically divided nature of postcolonial London, for example, has been recognised by David Dabydeen, who argues that multiculturalism goes no further than the superficial sampling of the cultural commodities of the Other.⁷ Alibhai-Brown is explicitly condemnatory of this discrepancy between the valuation of postcolonial cultural commodities and that of postcolonial subjects in British society, observing that

white Britons, especially in metropolitan areas, started developing conflicting attitudes to the changes in society. They opened up their stomachs and their sensory organs, but not, on the whole, their hearts or heads. Subtle moments, light racisms flutter in and out of your face so often you barely notice. The evidence of prevailing discrimination, racial violence and abuse piles up daily.⁸

London’s status as a global city magnifies these issues and renders the city perhaps the most apposite context in which to examine the relationship between the

⁵ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *After Multiculturalism* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), ch. 4.

⁶ Paul Gilroy, “A London sumting dis ...”, *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1999), pp. 57-69 (p. 65).

⁷ Quoted in McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, pp. 158-9.

⁸ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are?: Imagining the New Britain* [2000] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 9.

cultural agency of postcolonials enabled by the postcolonial exotic on the one hand, and the social disempowerment that often accrues to the condition of postcoloniality on the other. The perspective of neoliberal globalisation unsurprisingly resonates with the postmodern consumerist ethos that renders postcolonial cultures fashionable. Parminder Bhachu's work on Asian fashion entrepreneurs in London, for example, examines Asian fashion as a global commodity that bespeaks the cultural authority of Asian women in postimperial metropolitan circles. She emphasises the cultural cachet of Asian fashion and other Asian cultural products through their conspicuous consumption by British royals and other celebrities.⁹ London, as perhaps the most prominent stage for this public consumption, bears witness to "the agency of Asian women in transnational settings" (p. 40) that emerges from the economic and cultural empowerment they experience through the global market success of these commodities. Bhachu's emphasis on Asian London's empowerment, however, fails to acknowledge the continuing experience of social marginalisation for the city's postcolonials, choosing instead to foreground Asian London's success in global cultural markets as evidence of a general heightened agency. My analyses of selected postcolonial London texts in this section testify by contrast to a relationship of contradiction and irony between cultural agency and sociomaterial disempowerment, and divulges a more complex picture of postcolonial London than that developed by the kind of neoliberal globalisation perspective adopted by Bhachu.

I will interrogate this relationship through a close examination of two postcolonial London novels, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) and Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999). Focusing on these texts in terms of the unevenness of postcolonial agency, I argue that a complex power regime involving

⁹ Parminder Bhachu, "It's Hip To Be Asian: The Local and Global Networks of Asian Fashion Entrepreneurs in London", in *Transnational Spaces*, eds. Peter Jackson, Philip Crang and Claire Dwyer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 40-59 (pp. 42, 44).

the intersecting forces of globalisation and postcoloniality structures the politics of agency for the postcolonial subjects of these fictions, such that postcolonial cultural agency is represented as a function of the social adversity and disempowerment experienced by these subjects. But before turning to these texts, I want first to provide an account of some of the major theoretical statements on how difference and the “exotic” have become commodified and fashionable through the operation of the market, particularly the notion of the postcolonial exotic that ties this global market mechanism to Western consumerist and ideological agendas. These theoretical formulations provide the salient conceptual terms with which to consider how the relative cultural influence that accrues to postcolonial London might be bound up with its material or social adversity as these are constructed in the two novels.

That neoliberal globalisation functions in significant part through the exploitation of the postmodernisation of culture has long been recognised. More specifically, the postmodern recognition of cultural difference and diversity has become co-opted by the politics of cosmopolitan elitism and cultural fashions. The “exotic”, in other words, is commodifiable and therefore sustained by the profit logic of capitalism. Kevin Robins argues that the postmodern veneration of difference has been hijacked by global capital’s profit motive: “The local and ‘exotic’ are torn out of place and time to be repackaged for the world bazaar. So-called world culture may reflect a new valuation of difference and particularity, but it is also very much about making a profit from it.”¹⁰ Cultural differences, in fact, have been seen as mere pawns of global capitalism. Citing the example of Benetton advertising, Robins sees global corporate forces as promoting “global consumer citizenship” and “the ideal of a new,

¹⁰ Kevin Robins, “Tradition and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context”, in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, eds. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 21-44 (p. 31).

‘universal’ identity that transcends old, particularistic attachments. But transcendence is through incorporation, rather than through dissolution.”¹¹

The cosmopolitan sophistication of “the exotic” also serves to fuel its profitability. “To be at the leading edge of modern capitalism”, Stuart Hall declares, “is to eat fifteen different cuisines in any one week, not to eat one [...] Because if you are just jetting in from Tokyo, via Harare, you come in loaded, not with ‘how everything is the same’ but how wonderful it is, that everything is different.”¹² Similarly, Jonathan Rutherford observes that “capital has fallen in love with difference: advertising thrives on selling us things that will enhance our uniqueness and individuality.” The consumer’s complicity in this cultural transaction yields a certain symmetry in its mechanism of exchange: “Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer.”¹³ This world of difference is what Hall has termed the “global postmodern”.¹⁴

But Hall suggests that the postmodern celebration of difference exists in tension with a conservative, reactionary, and unitary metropolitan culture that eschews heterogeneity.¹⁵ The former is problematised as well by what Doreen Massey has theorised as the power-geometry of globalisation.¹⁶ Hall’s qualification that the “exotic” cuisine is being eaten in Manhattan rather than Calcutta stands as a blunt assessment of such power geometries; he perceives a metropolitan bias in the

¹¹ Kevin Robins, “What in the World’s Going On?”, in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, ed. Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 11-66 (p. 39).

¹² Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity”, in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 19-39 (p. 31).

¹³ Jonathan Rutherford, “A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference”, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 9-27 (p. 11).

¹⁴ See Hall, “The Local and the Global”.

¹⁵ “The Local and the Global”, p. 32.

¹⁶ See Doreen Massey, “Imagining Globalization: Power-Geometries of Time-Space”, in *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization*, eds. Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman, and Máirtín Mac an Ghail (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 27-44, and Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

global exchange and consumption of cultural difference.¹⁷ Perhaps the most detailed theorisation of this kind of commodification and valuation of non-Western cultures for a Western market can be found in Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), in which he develops his concept of the postcolonial exotic. Beginning from a distinction between postcolonialism and postcoloniality, Huggan theorises the notion of the exotic as a way in which the West fixes the value of postcolonial cultures in relation to itself. Postcolonialism is

an ensemble of loosely connected oppositional practices, underpinned both by a highly eclectic methodology of 'cultural embattlement' [...] and by an aesthetic of largely textualised, partly localised resistance. Postcolonialism, understood this way, becomes an anti-colonial intellectualism that reads and valorises the signs of social struggle in the faultlines of literary and cultural texts.¹⁸

For Huggan, then, the term refers to what is more commonly understood as postcolonial theory and its oppositional or emancipatory politics. Such a politics, however, is potentially subject to "a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange", a mechanism he terms postcoloniality. This mechanism constructs value "through global market operations involving the exchange of cultural commodities and, particularly, culturally 'othered' goods" (p. 6).

The distinction Huggan sets up is, to my mind, fairly idiosyncratic and unintuitive; nonetheless, it is useful insofar as it allows for a schematic recognition of how, "in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products" (p. 6). Cultural commodification, under the logic of postcoloniality, points to the fact that "cultural difference also has an aesthetic value,

¹⁷ "The Local and the Global", p. 33.

¹⁸ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.

a value often measured explicitly or implicitly in terms of the *exotic*” (p. 13). The postcolonial exotic, then, is located at the tense intersection between the opposed “regimes of value” of postcolonialism and postcoloniality (p. 28). It designates “the domesticating process through which commodities are taken from the margins and reabsorbed into mainstream culture”, making the margins available in commodified form but at the same time keeping the margins “exotic” and thereby ensuring the integrity of the centre (pp. 22-3). Metropolitan culture is enshrined as normative by the exoticisation of difference; as Huggan writes, “difference is appreciated, but only in the terms of the beholder” (p. 27).

Huggan’s case study of the politics of the Booker Prize usefully highlights how contemporary multiculturalism and postcolonial literary prominence continue to be shaped by metropolitan agendas. He begins by tracing the Booker’s roots to a colonial plantation company operating in the West Indies.¹⁹ But whereas the colonial plantation economy was openly exploitative and rapacious, the Prize established with the fruits of colonial agriculture in the 1960s has been, particularly since Salman Rushdie’s win in 1981 for *Midnight’s Children*, an index of “the emergence of a postcolonial literary era” (p. 110). Postcolonial writing has become one of the most fashionable commodities in literary publishing, and has established itself as almost normative within the Anglophone metropolitan market. But Huggan’s contention is that the Booker’s ostensible inclusiveness is belied by Britain’s continuing role as the legitimising centre of global English-language literatures. “The Booker might be seen”, he avers, “[...] as remaining bound to an Anglocentric discourse of benevolent paternalism”. He also observes that “the *seat* of judgement remain[s] British” (p. 111). Citing the imperial nostalgia of a number of Booker winners, Huggan argues

¹⁹ See pp. 106-7.

that the cosmopolitan nature of the Prize continues to bolster Britain's authorising and legitimising role in global Anglophone culture.²⁰ This kind of normalising optic is presented in subtly different forms in the texts examined below, particularly as a mechanism that mediates between the social struggles of London's postcolonial subjects and the cultural leverage that they possess.

Kureishi's London in *The Black Album* functions, as many representations of postcolonial London do, as the space of a re-sited colonial encounter. Power relations are still noticeably unequal, but the space of contestation is now the metropolis itself. The centre, under threat of redefinition by migration from the ex-colonies, responds in part through racist xenophobia, while the more parochial postcolonials respond to London's normative white Westernness as an affront to their culture. Given its challenge to the traditional cultural geographies of both Western Orientalism and Eastern Occidentalism, the rehearsal of the colonial encounter in the metropolis in Kureishi's novel is particularly intense. The classic postcolonial dilemma of the postimperial centre – a racialised tension between the ex-imperial culture and its ostensibly interloping, migrant Other – is very much present. Complicating this binarised understanding of London's postcoloniality, however, is the novel's most explicit theme: that of the conflict between liberalism and fundamentalism. Significantly, the novel is set in 1989, an historical moment that references real-world events such as the collapse of the Communist world, the palpable sense of the dominance of global capitalism and the Salman Rushdie Affair. Seen in this historical context, the standoff between liberalism and fundamentalism in the novel unsettles the clarity inherent in racialised models of postcolonial conflict in the West, primarily because the political ground on which it is played out divides the putative loyalties of

²⁰ See pp. 112-7.

both white and postcolonial London. But a most telling element in all this is the potential co-optation of postcolonial cultural difference, even in its fundamentalist guise, for different political and cultural causes. The novel obliquely gestures toward a link between the overt racism and material deprivation experienced by postcolonial Asians on the one hand, and the degree of cultural influence that they wield, on the other. Their cultural agency, in other words, extends as far as British liberal multiculturalism can interpellate them into a socially subordinate, if fashionable, position, or as far as mainstream politics can turn their difference and material deprivation into political capital.

Liberalism, and its capacity to accommodate postcolonial cultural difference, is embodied most starkly in the novel by the college lecturer Deedee Osgood. Her commitment to a postmodern perspective on culture elicits mixed feelings in her student and lover Shahid, the novel's Asian protagonist. Her eclecticism initially holds the promise of intellectual growth. Postmodernism and liberalism are linked to the idea of hybridity, a concept exemplified in the novel by the pop-cultural figure of Prince, who is described as "half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too [...] He can play soul and funk and rock and rap".²¹ But for most of the narrative, Shahid prevaricates between embracing the cultural freedom of postmodern liberalism and his yearning for a group identity. London's postmodern culture, as Kureishi presents it through Deedee's class curriculum, is to some degree of suspect value, unsurprisingly, given Shahid's quest throughout the novel to discover a group-based identity to which he might commit himself. Hedonism and intellectual liberalism, embodied in the text by Deedee, are disconcerting precisely in

²¹ Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album* [1995] (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 25.

their refusal to affirm any form of cultural partisanship. Shahid's doubts about the value of Deedee's postmodernism is signalled early in the text:

Yet he was discomfited by the freedom of instruction Deedee offered. She and other post-modern types encouraged their students to study anything that took their interest, from Madonna's hair to a history of the leather jacket. Was it really learning or only diversion dressed up in the latest words? (p. 26)

His ambivalence toward Deedee's brand of global popular culture lies in the fact that, its liberal promise notwithstanding, it threatens his own lofty valuation of Western high culture. He rejects the limitations of studying figures like Madonna and George Clinton, arguing for his right to lay claim to Western high culture: "Any art could become 'his', if its value was demonstrated. He wouldn't be denied the best" (p. 135). Implicit here is his nagging sense of being shaped into an exotic commodity for Deedee's neoliberal-style consumption. Her promotion of what Bart Moore-Gilbert has described as "a globalised 'cultural studies'" means that "it is undoubtedly legitimate for Shahid to wonder whether Deedee's pedagogic strategy does not represent a subtle new form of exclusion, rather than empowerment, of the minorities on whose behalf she seems so interested."²² Kureishi provides a telling sexual metaphor for Deedee's "consumption" of Shahid, which at once registers his influential status as an exotic commodity, having "been objectified by Deedee's desire",²³ and reflects the asymmetrical relationship of power within which that cultural economy operates:

Suddenly she sat up and licked her lips. He shrank back.

'You're looking at me as if I were a piece of cake. What are you thinking?'

'I deserve you. I'm going to like eating you. Here. Here, I said.'

On his knees he went to her. (p. 117)

²² Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 121-2.

²³ Bradley Buchanan, *Hanif Kureishi* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 62.

This passage significantly resonates with Tahira's accusation that Asians "have always been sexual objects for the whites" (p. 228). Deedee's liberal "cultural studies" curriculum and her implied "consumption" of Shahid as an exotic Other also dovetail neatly with Kureishi's portrayal of Deedee as an archetypal neoliberal consumer. She is tainted, in fact, by a degree of complicity with the kind of neoliberalism Shahid associates with his "arch-Thatcherite" (p. 87) brother Chili. Frederick M. Holmes, in his analysis of *The Black Album*, suggests that Fredric Jameson's influential theory of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism is particularly germane to Deedee's liberal cultural politics, and that in spite of Shahid's own critical stance toward "the moral vacuity of his brother Chili's brand-name consumerism [...] the supposedly more progressive, alternative way of life he adopts with Deedee nevertheless involves a good deal of rather aimless shopping."²⁴

The taint of consumerism insinuated in the novel takes on a more explicitly pernicious guise in her overt interest in ethnic minorities. Her predilection for cultivating a multiethnic following of student devotees accords with the neoliberal ideology of global consumerism:

On the narrow stairs, she was fenced in by the Three Degrees Zero, an Afro-Caribbean woman, an Indian, and an Irish girl with pink hair. Deedee had a handful of such groupies, who would swoon if Deedee unexpectedly turned a corner. But these three were her most devoted, dressing as she did and studying her as if she were Madonna. (p. 167)

As if to emphasise Deedee's penchant for difference and the exotic, Kureishi gives the evidently white Irish girl pink hair and therefore some degree of parity with the

²⁴ Frederick M. Holmes, "The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West: Kureishi's *The Black Album* as an Intertext of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*", *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2001), pp. 296-313 (pp. 308-9). David Harvey has similarly suggested a link between postmodernism and the profit logic of global capitalism's consumerist ethos. See Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

overtly racialised difference of the other two groupies.²⁵ Their idolisation installs Deedee as an arbiter of cultural fashions, but their pop-cultural aping likely stems from her own pedagogic example. Even more pointedly, she teaches a class of black women fashion students in a “hut”, with one of the students “embarrassedly” poised on a chair and Deedee “laughing and pointing at the woman’s shoes” (p. 221). The scene, as Moore-Gilbert suggests, parodies the colonialist gaze upon subject cultures.²⁶ Her “collection” of postcolonial student followers, significantly, includes those she “saves” from ostensibly oppressive backgrounds. Chad cites the case of an Asian girl harboured by Deedee from her family and allegedly made to denounce Islam’s treatment of women. His account, which apportioning the blame wholly to those he labels “the post-modernists” (p. 229) and reeks of considerable bias, nonetheless hints accurately at Deedee’s involvement being a kind of neocolonialist benefaction; as Moore-Gilbert suggests, “there is an unmistakable whiff of the female colonial missionary about Deedee” (Moore-Gilbert, p. 141). The postcolonial Other is, for Deedee, one more alluringly exotic cultural commodity to be consumed in a personal history marked by a penchant for jumping onto fashionable liberal bandwagons involving minorities and oppressed groups.²⁷ Her fetishising of difference, it seems, is dependent on the extent to which the material oppression and deprivation experienced by minorities can be constructed within her liberal framework as both exotic and in need of salvation.

This framework reveals its limits in the face of fundamentalist expressions of difference. Deedee’s obvious fascination with Shahid, and the sense throughout the novel that she wages a battle on behalf of liberalism for Shahid’s divided loyalties,

²⁵ The Irish identity itself, of course, does bear an historical postcolonial relationship with an English or British identity.

²⁶ See Moore-Gilbert, p. 141.

²⁷ See *The Black Album*, p. 116.

contrast jarringly with her critical stance on the burning of a copy of *The Satanic Verses* organised by Riaz's group. Their religious fundamentalism is quite clearly *too* different, *too* exotic, for her postmodern liberal sentiments. This excess prompts her, ironically, to summon the police to stop what is, as Riaz quite reasonably states, an expression of democracy.²⁸ Tahira observes – accurately – that Deedee's postmodern rhetoric in favour of equality and against censorship extends to Muslim Asians only if they disavow their difference from her brand of liberal thought.²⁹ An analogy can be drawn here with Homi Bhabha's distinction between cultural difference and cultural diversity. For Bhabha, cultural difference is marked by "an *incommensurability*": "The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework."³⁰ British multiculturalism, in his analysis, effects "a *containment* of cultural difference" through "a *creation* of cultural diversity" that continues to inscribe mainstream British culture at the centre: "A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid'" (p. 208). What Deedee does, in effect, is to assert a postmodern liberalism that sets itself up as a contradictorily un-postmodern arbiter of British social values. It is precisely political beliefs like Deedee's that Bhabha appears to target when he argues "that this kind of liberal relativist perspective is inadequate in itself and doesn't generally recognise the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgements" (p. 209). Her neoimperialist position demonstrates how an apparently apolitical culture, dissembled as a global postmodernism, remains

²⁸ See p. 224. A similar and even more powerful critique of liberal democracy's inherent contradiction is made by Ali in Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic", who is assaulted by his father for rejecting Western notions of freedom; see Kureishi, "My Son the Fanatic", in *Love in a Blue Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 119-131.

²⁹ See pp. 229-30.

³⁰ Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space", in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-221 (p. 209).

structured by (post)colonial cultural politics and reinforces the liberal West as the unquestioned centre of global culture.

In contrast to the limits of Deedee's multiculturalist perspective, both her estranged husband, the socialist intellectual Dr Brownlow, and the Labour politician George Rugman Rudder adopt a more pragmatic attitude to the fundamentalist activities of Riaz's group. Brownlow avows a solidarity with the group, although he repeatedly attempts to interpellate them as part of the working class struggle against neoliberal oppression and in the process relegates their ethnic and religious concerns to the periphery of his politics. During the group's vigil against racist attacks on a Bengali family on a run-down housing estate, Brownlow turns up to demonstrate his support. His interpretation of the relationship between the attacks and the subjective struggle over the estate betrays his ideological leanings, however; he mistakenly believes that the group are "fighting in the same trench" as he is (p. 93). In a patronising outburst, he lays the blame for racism squarely at the door of material deprivation:

'Not surprising they're violent,' Brownlow said. 'This place. Living in ugliness. I've been wading around, you know, an hour or two in Hades, lost in the foul damp. I have seen giant dogs, sheer mournful walls, silos of misery. Sties. Breeding grounds of stink, these estates, for children. Ha! And race antipathy infecting everyone, passed on like Aids.' (p. 94)

Brownlow's recognition of racism comes almost as an afterthought; he ascribes it to all the residents of the estate and sees it as part of the fallout from disenfranchisement. Riaz openly refutes this crudely materialist analysis, arguing that those living on the estate are privileged in comparison to "our brothers in the Third World" (p. 95). The suggestion by Brownlow that the underlying problem is a narrowly material one fails to recognise the unyieldingly culturalist and ethnic optic through which Riaz interprets the attacks. Extreme material deprivation in the Third World has not, in his

eyes, led to the kind of racism and moral corruption perpetrated by the white elements on the estate.³¹ Riaz's engagement with material issues is bound up with ethnic loyalties; his concern for fellow Asian Londoners struggling with the daily realities of poverty and racism, after all, seems genuine enough given his dedication to social work for the Asian community.

Rudder, on the other hand, fully acknowledges the cultural difference embodied by Asian fundamentalists, and is at pains to openly embrace that difference for political gain. His support for the public exhibition of an allegedly holy aubergine is an instance of his political strategy of cultivating the goodwill of London's minorities:

'Naturally I have been generous enough to use my influence, as you surely appreciate, against very racist opposition, to open a private house in this way.' He lowered his voice further. 'It is because our party supports ethnic minorities, you have my fullest assurance of that. The Seventh Day Adventists have expressed deep satisfaction, and, it is said, mention my ailments in their prayers. Rastafarians shake my hand as I walk my dog. This is widely appreciated all over east London.' (p. 178)

Mainstream politics, the novel thus suggests, has to reckon with multicultural London and the significant political capital it wields. Even the book-burning's evocation of the Nazis, which partly curtails Rudder's support for Riaz's cause, does not inhibit both Rudder and the Conservative leader from calling for the book's withdrawal; as Brownlow observes, the political influence of London's Asians demands such cultural concessions.³²

The obvious political clout wielded by London's sizeable postcolonial communities in the novel needs to be seen here, however, as being conscripted into the service of a normative white political agenda. Rudder's exchange with a member of his entourage at the aubergine exhibition is instructive in this respect:

³¹ See p. 95.

³² See p. 242.

‘This your first miracle, Georgie?’ said one of the boys, as they went in.

‘It is until the Labour Party gets re-elected.’ In the hall he said in a stage whisper, ‘Of course, revelations are faith’s aberration, an amusement at the most. Let’s hope they curry this blue fruit. Brinjal, I believe it’s called. I could murder an Indian, couldn’t you, lads?’ (pp. 179-80)

A suggestive irony is bound up in this passage. On a literal level, Rudder’s desire to “murder an Indian” references the extent to which Indian food has become an integral part of the British diet. This reflects the superficial kind of multiculturalism that has become common currency in British politics; Rudder’s demonstrativeness about his knowledge of the Asian term for aubergine captures something of this triviality. But the ostensibly colloquial utterance, “I could murder an Indian”, is also a sly reference by Kureishi to the naked racism and violence that mark the history of postcolonial London. Given the background to the narrative supplied by the death sentence passed on Salman Rushdie, the line is also, as Moore-Gilbert has it, “a (comically) grotesque solecism in the context of the text’s engagement with the Rushdie Affair” (Moore-Gilbert, p. 140). The deliberate irony inherent in Rudder’s words captures the essence of the observations by Alibhai-Brown, Gilroy and Dabydeen that while London has embraced the “exotic fruits” of its postcolonial cultures, it has largely failed to accord the same appreciation to its postcolonial subjects. While the postcolonial dimension of the city is influential enough for mainstream politics not to be able to reckon without it, the affection for postcolonial cultures here appears to be built on the social subalternity of Asians, a positioning that ultimately affirms the continuing dominance of white London. It is through the social deprivations of Asian Londoners, after all, that politicians like Rudder are able to flaunt their dispensation of multiculturalist beneficence; significantly, the obsequiousness displayed by Riaz’s group toward

Rudder in acknowledgement of his help reads like a parody of colonial gratefulness for the bestowal of imperial gifts.³³

That a religious group, which ratifies its fundamentalist ethos through actions such as firebombing a bookshop, is willing to make concessions to the hegemony of white-dominated mainstream London bespeaks the strategic manoeuvres necessitated by the postcolonial London condition. But Kureishi also hints at the beguiling nature of the postcolonial exotic for postcolonials themselves. Riaz, the ideologue and leader of the group, has literary pretensions that his primary “enforcer”, Chad, describes as “dangerous” and “too radical” (p. 69); the former is intrigued, therefore, when Shahid explains the demand for non-white voices by the media:

‘I am interested, because I would have thought that outsiders like us would have had trouble gaining acceptance. The whites are very insular, surely they won’t admit people like us into their world?’

‘Oh, no, there’s nothing more fashionable than outsiders.’

Riaz seemed puzzled. ‘Why is that?’

Shahid shrugged. ‘Novelty. Even someone like you, brother, could have a wide appeal if the media knew of you. Think how many people you could address.’ (p. 175)

The power of the postcolonial exotic to interpellate postcolonials *as* exotic is evident when Riaz is described as being “flattered” by an invitation to appear on television following the book-burning (pp. 242-3). Brownlow interprets Riaz’s enthusiasm as a capitulation to the “seduction” (p. 243) of the mass media. The latter itself accommodates fundamentalist expressions of difference, even fetishises it, as Brownlow recognises: “For those TV people Riaz is a fascinating freak. They’ve never met anyone like that before. He could end up with his own chat show” (p. 243). Seen in the light of his genuine concern for fellow Asians struggling with poverty and racist violence, however, Riaz’s hold on the attention of the Western media is arguably bound up not merely with his fundamentalism, but also with his ethnic

³³ See p. 177-9.

minority status. His “weekly surgeries” dealing with quotidian issues of deprivation and racism thus obliquely link the fashionability of Asians, or the “freak” factor, to their specifically ethnicised subaltern status, which affirms not merely difference from the normative culture, but a difference that, in its subalternity, fails to disturb the self-understanding of that normative culture as a privileged one.

Unlike *The Black Album*, Meera Syal’s *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is very much a portrait of middle-class Asian postcoloniality in London. With a few exceptions, the narrative lacks the gritty atmosphere of urban squalor and criminality that characterises much of Kureishi’s text. The main Asian characters in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* do not fit the stereotype of postcolonial diasporic subjects constructed by much postcolonial British writing: they are resolutely middle-class, have common concerns about careers and relationships, and do not primarily inhabit anything that could be described as an ethnic ghetto. They are as much at home in London’s West End as they are in the Asian community. Postcolonial grievances are at first conspicuous by their absence, as are overt racist tensions; these gradually, however, reveal themselves in a highly mediated form through the mechanism of the postcolonial exotic. Many of these characters share a deep, natural identification with Asian culture alongside their varying degrees of integration into mainstream British society; in this respect they differ from the isolationists that make up most of Riaz’s group in *The Black Album*. The three Asian women at the centre of the narrative are drawn into the realm of cultural globalisation through the logic of the commodification and fashionability of difference. Tania, a sophisticated cosmopolitan who is deeply ambivalent about Asian culture, finds herself implicated in its profitable exploitation through her work as a television documentary film maker. Her friends Chila and Sunita, as well as their husbands, are part of the cast in her

documentary on the British Asian community; the film's brutal and exploitative honesty threatens to unravel the relationships it examines. Tania's complicity in the commodification of the "exotic" is presented in the novel as part of a larger, often global, alterity industry that propagates a contemporary brand of Orientalism. I will argue here that the explicit authority Syal ascribes to postcolonial cultures within London's globalised cultural economy needs to be understood in terms of the position of material subordination these postcolonial cultures are positioned within, or interpellated into, by an ultimately hegemonic white metropolitan centre. The material, as I have earlier stated, will be understood to encompass everyday experiences of racism, discrimination and patronage, as well as the economic inequities that often mark the postcolonial London condition.

Numerous instances of ethnic exoticisation appear in Syal's novel. She presents it as a global phenomenon: the French fashion house Chanel, for instance, is said to be "designing catwalk Indian suits".³⁴ Tania's agent spells out her exotic appeal, with her intelligence and brash charm confounding clichés about Indians; this exoticness is acknowledged to be particularly marketable in America.³⁵ The exotic appears to also be particularly prized in the fashionable centres of the postimperial metropolis. Chila's husband Deepak invests in developing "a trendy shopping mall" (p. 240), arguing that there are "enough tourists from the richer areas with money who want to buy individual and authentic pieces, especially ethnic stuff. You can buy bindis down the Kings Road now" (p. 241). In the heart of fashionable London, the exotic in fact confers a kind of metropolitan authenticity, as Tania informs her friends:

'I didn't know we were going out. I mean, if I'd known, I could have put my Lycra on or whatever.'

³⁴ Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* [1999] (London: Black Swan, 2000), p. 21.

³⁵ See p. 255.

‘Nah, they’ll love that look where we’re going. Nothing like a bit of the genuine ethnic for their street cred,’ said Tania, starting the engine.
‘Where are we going?’ Sunita and Chila said together.
‘Soho. Innit?’ (p. 52)

That exoticised difference has become a valued currency in contemporary London is obvious. Tania’s white partner, Martin, enthusiastically embraces multiculturalism to an extent that earns him the tag “Ghetto groupie” (p. 109) from her. His “middle class, white and male” status means, according to Tania, that he has “to try any passing bandwagon, because what else have you got?” (p. 109) The normative whiteness of British culture appears here, therefore, to have little worth or interest value by the standards of a postmodern, globalised London.

Syal conveys, then, a sense that the middle-class London inhabited by her characters is in thrall to the neoliberal fashion for exoticised difference and ethnicity. That there is a kind of power in being the genuine ethnic subject is undeniable. But the novel soon begins to disclose the ways in which this power is mediated through, and therefore contained by, the cultural authority of the centre. The chic Soho club in which the friends spend their evening stages this containment in a number of ways. Chila’s Punjabi suit elicits a reaction from the club’s receptionist that celebrates difference even as it enshrines the authority of the West over its value:

The other receptionist leaned forward and whispered, ‘Loove your outfit, by the way. This stuff is really in at the mo. Is it DKNY?’
Chila looked down for a moment. ‘No, Bimla’s Bargains, Forest Gate, I think . . .’ (p. 55)

Syal’s juxtapositioning of the genuine ethnic subject and the inauthentic exoticisation of ethnicity uncovers an unspoken asymmetry of cultural power. While the exotic is privileged as the height of fashion, its underlying value here appears to be implicitly bolstered by its ephemeral, fashion-driven endorsement by the Western capitalist and cultural establishment. The exotic, then, is a desired quality primarily when

commodified and mediated through “the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange” described by Huggan. Capitalism’s intricate logic reinscribes colonialist power relations in London’s late twentieth-century cultural milieu, but in a subtle and dissembling manner; the politics of fashion and commodification serve to partially obscure and filter from open view the perpetuation of Western structural dominance over its ethnic others. Ethnic difference, while putatively celebrated within the culture of late capitalism, is manipulated in ways that serve the agendas of a normatively constructed West.

Tania’s encounter with her white boss Jonathan at the Soho club reinforces this observation. She is shown to be very much a member of the professional world of media, adept at the socialising necessitated by that membership.³⁶ But Syal’s description of examples of institutional racism in corporate London and the blatant exploitation of ethnic difference as a malleable commodity to be harnessed to the requirements of profit mar Tania’s experience in the industry. Even in contemporary London, she remains scarred by the Orientalist manipulations that prevailed during “those moments where she had sat tight-lipped and buttocks clenched as Rupert or Donald or Angus nibbled on ciabatta and explained to her what it meant to be Asian and British, at least for the purposes of television” (p. 63). There is an unmistakable sense here that the white-dominated London media have regarded Asian culture as something to be arbitrarily defined and redefined according to the needs of the market. This shifting neo-Orientalist gaze means that while her media career puts her squarely in the upwardly mobile capitalist class and makes her a full-fledged inhabitant of a sophisticated metropolitan sphere, the way she is made to submit to arbitrary constructions of Asianness required by the agendas of her white bosses

³⁶ See pp. 62-3.

means that race significantly inflects the way in which Tania's class affiliations are experienced.

The problematic imbrication of race and class for postcolonial and black British people has a fairly long history. In an influential study published in 1978, Stuart Hall and his co-authors describe how, for the black British working class,

Race is the modality in which class is lived. It is also the medium in which class relations are experienced. This does not immediately heal any breaches or bridge any chasms. But it has consequences for the *whole class*, whose relation to their conditions of existence is now systematically transformed by race.³⁷

Hall and his collaborators are of course primarily interested in the overlap of race issues with the *working* class, and the exoticisation of postcolonial ethnicity in Syal's 1990s London certainly does not appear to have the sort of serious ramifications for the entire middle class implied by the "consequences" mentioned in Hall's study. Nonetheless, the transformative effect that race has on class experience in the novel is palpable. The parallel between the postcolonial, racialised grievances of the late 1970s examined in *Policing the Crisis* and the more sophisticated and subtle but structurally similar ethnic manipulations of the late 1990s, therefore, warns against premature pronouncements of the obsolescence of postcolonial critique; rather, a recalibration of that critique that accounts for highly mediated and disguised forms of ethnic discrimination appears to be a task of some urgency.

While Tania finds it impossible to dissociate herself from her ethnic origins, her own complicity in the commodification of ethnic difference blunts any sympathy she might otherwise have garnered. In the later part of the novel, she announces her wish to stop being pigeonholed into focusing on her own ethnic group in her work: "No more grubbing in the ghetto, I'm mainstream now" (p. 258). Earlier, she also

³⁷ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p. 394.

alludes to the postcolonial exotic being underpinned by third-world stereotypes in her sardonic response to her boss's instruction to produce an "ethnic" documentary:

'Let me just get this straight, Jonathan. You want me to do a doc on arranged marriage? That heads the crappy cliché list along with corner shops, long-suffering Indian waiters and smiling beggars whose gangrenous stumps hide a wisdom we will never understand.' (p. 65)

But the subtext of this is the fact that her ethnic particularity has underwritten her success in achieving credibility and "mainstream" status, as her agent Mark recognises.³⁸ Her exposé of the British Asian community casts a cruelly honest eye upon the lives and relationships of her friends, but also sensationalises the lives of British Asians and turns them into commodified, slickly packaged entertainment.³⁹ Even the Buzz Bar, the Asian-owned venue for Tania's film launch, is a contrived ethnic space, designed to conform to the current fashionability of the exotic Asian other; as one Asian guest at the launch remarks, "'he's spent all this money making it look like my deaf uncle's village!'" (p. 156) Leila recognises the absurdity of the global extension of this logic, arguing that the desire for, and emulation of, the exotic would eventually see East and West exchange places; in the long run, the process of universal exoticisation appears to be comically circular.⁴⁰ But crucially, it is the putative material backwardness of Asia, as embodied by the "village"-like interior of the venue, that is implicitly constructed as both exotic and authentic. The film's reception is also instructive: while it is a source of embarrassment for those appearing in it, and is interpreted by some of its Asian audience as being disloyal to the Asian community,⁴¹ its well-heeled white audience, including Tania's boss, bestow rapturous applause upon it.⁴² The propensity of the metropolitan centre for celebrating

³⁸ See p. 259.

³⁹ See pp. 174-9.

⁴⁰ See p. 157.

⁴¹ See p. 266.

⁴² See pp. 179-80.

exoticised cultural differences, Syal appears to suggest, is focused on cultural commodities that are discursively tied to adverse social conditions and vulnerabilities and which thus (re)inscribe white London as the normative standard of material development.

Tania's visit to an Asian woman in the East End, close to where she herself had grown up, to cover her domestic tragedy for television can be understood in the same light. Suki, who runs the woman's support committee and who regards Tania's film as disloyal, rebuffs her interest as exploitation:

'You have got a bloody nerve, haven't you? This must be a good story to get you out of Soho, sniffing round like some culture vulture when it suits you! This is someone's life, you know, and you're not stealing it so you can make your name on Jasbinder's back!'

Tania lurched backwards, her heels slipping under her. 'I . . . no, listen . . . I really do –'

'Save it, eh? You've made it clear who you work for. Anyone who shits on their friends isn't going to care about a stranger. You don't live here any more. And this stuff is not for tourists. Go home.' (p. 267)

The terms in which Suki characterises Tania's interest in the tragedy read like a critique of the kind of imperialist anthropology authorised by the ideology of empire. Suki's "tourist" diatribe recognises that Tania's visit reifies the ethnic specificity of the tragedy, rendering it in commodified form. Both the visit and the film, when read through Kwame Anthony Appiah's famous formulation of postcoloniality, suggest that Tania's exploitative acts reflect an unspoken desire for validation from the centre.

Postcoloniality for Appiah

is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa.⁴³

⁴³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1991), pp. 336-357 (p. 348).

Appiah largely echoes Arif Dirlik's suspicion of postcoloniality, suspecting it of complicity with a global capitalism centred in the West.⁴⁴ From this perspective, Tania appears to be exploiting her knowledge as a cultural insider by interpreting that culture in commodified form for the mainstream West. The magazines and newspapers that proclaim her "the voice of Brit-Asian Yoof" appear to corroborate this; she acknowledges, after all, that Asians themselves are not part of their readership (p. 316). The authority to make value judgements on British Asians, then, is assumed by a white-dominated media that feels little need to reflect the perspectives of those they assess and represent; in this respect, Syal's London corroborates Edward Said's claim that the discursive construction of the Other in Orientalist pronouncements does not require the cooperation or participation of their subject matter.⁴⁵

Both Kureishi and Syal explore the relationship between the metropolitan valuation of postcolonial cultures and the evident material hardships or social exclusions endured by London's postcolonial subjects. While *The Black Album* delves into the overtly subaltern circles of postcolonial London (the middle-class origins of the protagonist notwithstanding), Syal takes on a markedly different sphere of the city, one populated by sophisticated professionals and entrepreneurs. Both novels, however, understand postcolonial London's architecture of power in remarkably similar ways. What appear to be two distinctive kinds of experience of a city dominated by global capitalism and the postmodernisation of culture become, once postcoloniality is introduced into the reckoning, a reflection of the broad purchase of the postcolonial exotic as a mechanism that adapts itself across class differences. This

⁴⁴ See the Introduction.

⁴⁵ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* [1978], with a new Afterword (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 54.

mechanism institutes a regime of cultural valuation that ultimately reinforces the normative status of white London, while ostensibly celebrating the fashionable cultures of postcolonial London that draw much of their metropolitan allure from their subaltern status. Postcolonial London as conceived by Kureishi and Syal thus evince an economy of postcolonial agency that might be understood as diametrically opposed to that prevailing in Hwee Hwee Tan's Singapore novels. Considered critically alongside my analysis of the Singapore writing in the next section of this chapter, the insights that emerge from my readings of Kureishi and Syal's novels – involving the complex intersection of class, agency, and the postcolonial exotic – challenge some of the major theories of postcoloniality and globalisation that take class and the relationship between cultural and material agency as their focus. In the conclusion to this chapter I address the theoretical implications of this challenge, alongside that of the Singapore writers, and consider alternative theories of the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship that are enabled by my readings.

Postcolonial Singapore: Asian Values, Global Capitalism and the West

There are at least three major stereotypes by which Singapore is perceived globally. Firstly, it is widely regarded as a wealthy global city and major financial capital. Secondly, its urban environment and urban culture apparently ape that of the West, evidence of its instrumental strategy to attain the material standards achieved by the latter. Most significantly, perhaps, it has been understood as marrying advanced capitalism to a non-liberal and non-Western style of government; in particular, Singapore's championing of Confucian ethics as a system of values superior to Western liberalism has been at the forefront of the recent international debate on "Asian Values". These perceptions hint at an ambivalence at the heart of Singapore's

social ethos, as well as a palpable selectiveness in its management of the intersection of local and global, with the global understood as synonymous with the West.

I argue below that for all its official rhetoric promulgating “Asian Values” and its defensive cultural stance against a Western outside, the city-state’s recent representation in certain literary texts testifies to the strategic concessions to Western influences and practices Singapore makes in its attempt to succeed as a developed city within the global economy. Despite Singapore’s official promotion of “Asian Values” as superior to Western ones in negotiating global capitalism, these texts register the extent to which the West is readily admitted into the Singaporean social milieu insofar as Western practices and standards are deemed crucial to economic success. Given the city-state’s explicit national agenda of economic development, it might be argued that its commitment to Asian culture masks an implicit admission of Western cultural superiority in the context of global capitalism. Two forms of Occidentalism – one involving animosity toward the West, the other involving emulation and admiration for it – are simultaneously professed and held together in a pragmatic but uneasy tension. The price paid by Singapore society for its material and economic agency, the writing suggests, is a grudging cultural subordination in the context of globalisation. A correlation between economic and social empowerment on the one hand, and cultural dependency on the other, then, lies at the heart of the politics of postcolonial agency in these Singapore texts.

I develop my argument through an examination of two novels of contemporary Singapore: Hwee Hwee Tan’s *Foreign Bodies* (1997) and *Mammon Inc.* (2001). Contemporary postcolonial Singapore, in my reading, appears in these texts generally as a wealthy global city that has benefited from global capitalism, but whose cultural engagement with the global ambivalently oscillates between an insular

exclusion of all cultures alien to a parochially conceived Singaporean Asian culture on the one hand, and a strategic concession to “foreign” cultural influences in the name of material advancement on the other. Inherent in the latter is the valorisation of Western standards as the arbiter of global success. The tension at the heart of Singapore’s cultural milieu, then, is one that emerges from the partial acceptance of external cultural forces in aid of economic and social progress, a move that sits uneasily alongside the more conservative elements in Singapore society. Singapore’s mixture of cultural defensiveness and a capitulation to global cultural forces, in other words, might be collectively seen as the ambivalent price paid for material success. Tan portrays these Singaporean contradictions as specific to this postcolonial global city, and identifies the accommodations made to sustain them in aid of local agendas; it is precisely in an ex-colonial global city, I would argue, that First World standards of material development may be linked to a postcolonial dependence on Western culture.

Before turning to the literary texts themselves, some brief comments on what I have referred to above as the “Asian Values” debate, a transnational discourse of which Singapore has often been regarded as chief representative, are necessary. A sense of how Singapore’s brand of “Asian Values” is complicated by different versions of Occidentalism, in particular two distinctive attitudes toward the West that are useful for explicating the ambivalence that marks Singapore’s negotiation of local and global culture, is also important here. Singapore’s uneasy balancing act between Asian culture and its instinctive reference to the West as arbiter of global standards is, I suggest, a unique instance of deliberate, pragmatic self-contradiction that yields a social milieu in crucial ways diametrically opposed to that which obtains in postcolonial London. I begin with a brief outline of the important distinction between

two kinds of Occidentalism, and go on to examine how these different attitudes toward the West colour Singapore's social milieu, with particular reference to its problematic avowal of "Asian Values". These insights will then be brought to bear upon my readings of the politics of agency in the selected texts.

Occidentalism, at least in its crude manifestations, appears to be little more than a reversal of Orientalist or (neo)colonial discourse.⁴⁶ In this essentialising and largely hostile mode, Occidentalism is guilty of the same sins imputed to colonial discourses. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, for example, have recently suggested that Occidentalist views of the West mirror the worst, most dehumanising aspects of its Orientalist counterpart, effecting a mere inversion of Orientalism. In their view, "Occidentalism is at least as reductive; its bigotry simply turns the Orientalist view upside down."⁴⁷ Their study of Occidentalism in fact reinforces this reading by defining it extremely narrowly as a hatred of the idea of the West. While this is a highly circumscribed sense of Occidentalism's conceptual purchase, their account is helpful in identifying the difficulty involved in trying to define the Occident precisely. The modern, the European, science, capitalism, democracy, sexual license and notions of individual freedom have all been regarded at one time or another as characteristic of the Occident.⁴⁸ They highlight, in particular, capitalism as definitive of Western culture in Occidentalist portrayals that describe "a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites" (pp. 10-11).

Not all commentators, of course, are as unsubtle as this. Alastair Bonnett, for example, demonstrates this in providing a taxonomy of perspectives on the West,

⁴⁶ Orientalism, in Edward Said's sense of the term, refers primarily to the way the "Orient" was constructed in European high culture and learned discourses. While I understand the term "Occidentalism" as a counterpart to Orientalist thought, it will refer here as much to common perspectives and prejudices as to learned and systematic discourses. See Said, *Orientalism*.

⁴⁷ Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), p. 10.

⁴⁸ See pp. 2, 5 and 11.

ranging from relatively favourable attitudes in Japan to outright hatred within radical Islamic circles.⁴⁹ But for the purposes of our examination of Singapore I want to focus on a particularly apposite theorisation advanced by Tamara Wagner in her work on Singapore literature. The narrowness of definitions such as that adopted by Buruma and Margalit prompts her to caution about their limitations. She warns that such a narrow definition of Occidentalism, particularly one that functions as a “retaliatory” discourse, is

constantly in danger of inadvertently re-establishing stereotypes through its affirmation of polarizations and cultural alignments [...] The result of Occidentalism at its most basic level is indeed often a polarized juxtaposition of Occidental and Orientalist prejudices that ends up reinforcing both groups.⁵⁰

In light of this, she declares that “[a] theory that categorizes the different forms or variants of Occidentalism with their divergent potentials and problems still needs to be conceived” (p. 79). Her own effort in this area advances a more nuanced model of Occidentalism that distinguishes between its “emulative” and “revisionist” modes. The revisionist mode is similar, at least in spirit, to the anti-Westernism diagnosed by Buruma and Margalit, being a “despising, rejecting, retaliatory” form of Occidentalism (p. 78). As described above, it reinforces stereotypes and essentialist identities of both the Orient and Occident. Emulative Occidentalism, on the other hand, is “admiring, imitative, appreciative”, enamoured of Western culture. For Wagner, Occidentalism “refers as much to an emulation of ‘Western’ ideals as to an equally reductive rejection of them” (p. 78). This distinction is particularly important in the context of Singapore’s ambivalence toward the West. The official promotion of

⁴⁹ Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵⁰ Tamara S. Wagner, “Emulative versus Revisionist Occidentalism: Monetary and Other Values in Recent Singaporean Fiction”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2004), pp. 73-94 (p. 77). See also her *Occidentalism in Novels of Malaysia and Singapore, 1819-2004: Colonial and Postcolonial Financial Straits and Literary Style* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

an essentialised Asian culture is very much about producing a negative image of the West; Singapore's pragmatic engagement with the West, on the other hand, is a recognisably emulative mode of Occidentalism.

The public and political rhetoric involved in what has become known as the "Asian Values Debate" can thus usefully be categorised as a revisionist mode of Occidentalist thought. At the height of the debate during the 1990s, Singapore was perhaps the most internationally prominent champion of a New Asia espousing "Asian Values", as well as serving as an enticing target for intellectuals who favoured Western liberalism.⁵¹ Michael D. Barr goes as far as to open his detailed study of the discourse by declaring that former Singapore Prime Minister "Lee Kuan Yew is the undisputed architect of the 'Asian Values' argument."⁵² The debate, which appears never to have been satisfactorily resolved, centred on different kinds of political governance and social ethics, diverging definitions of the idea of democracy and the role of cultural difference in accounting for this variance. Foremost among the alleged cultural differences that undergird "Asian Values" are a hierarchical understanding of society, the valorisation of industriousness and thrift, and the assertion of the primacy of society at large over the concerns of the individual. But the term "Asian Values" arguably refers less to a determinate set of cultural values that characterise all Asian societies, than to a strategic notion of cultural relativism, as Barr pointedly notes:

The prime tactical premise of the 'Asian values' argument is [...] one of cultural relativism. It claims not only that many of the hegemonic political, social and cultural norms of the late twentieth century (especially liberal

⁵¹ For a sense of Singapore's prominence in the "Asian Values" debate, see Bilahari Kausikan, "Governance That Works", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997), pp. 24-34; Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think?* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1998); Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, "The Singapore Way of Multiculturalism: Western Concepts/Asian Cultures", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995), pp. 65-89; Donald K. Emmerson, "Singapore and the 'Asian Values' Debate", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1995), pp. 95-105; Eric Jones, "Asia's Fate: A Response to the Singapore School," *The National Interest*, No. 35 (1994), pp. 18-28. Much of this debate has also taken place in the international press.

⁵² Michael D. Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values: The Tepid War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

democracy and the mainstream human rights agenda) are Western, rather than universal norms, but that they are no more legitimate than alternative norms that could be considered 'Asian'. (p. 4)

Inherent in this relativist strategy, then, is an antipathy that can be read in terms of revisionist Occidentalism. Significantly, in the case of Singapore, the rejection of foreign influences extends to Western culture but not to the encroachment of cultural productions from other Asian sources. Citing the lack of official ideological critique of the cultural penetration of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan into Singapore society, sociologist Chua Beng-Huat argues that “[t]his is an absence that is only intelligible in the official presumption of cultural affinities, if not similarities, between [these] locations, within a discursively mystified ‘Asia’.”⁵³

The discursive incorporation of Singaporean culture into a larger, “mystificatory” idea of Asia or the “East” has provoked sustained treatment in Singapore literature, emerging as one of its major themes. Suchen Christine Lim’s *Fistful of Colours* (1993) is fairly typical in the way it presents a Singaporean parochialism conceptually reliant on “Asian Values”. The protagonist Suwen, a teacher, raised in a conservative Chinese family but educated in English (and in England), embodies a vexed cultural hybridity that fails to place itself in either the “Western” liberal camp or the moralistic “Eastern” one. At school, she is surrounded by chauvinistic Chinese colleagues who deride her alleged Western leanings. To her Scottish friend and colleague Mark, she confesses her cultural dilemma:

“We’ve got to face this black-white thinking all the time. East is good; West is bad. East is disciplined; the West is permissive. More and more I’m beginning to feel that because I can read and think a thousand times better in English than I ever can in Mandarin, I am seen as being tainted.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Beng-Huat Chua, “World Cities, Globalisation and the Spread of Consumerism: A View from Singapore”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 35, Nos. 5-6 (1998), pp. 981-1000 (p. 988).

⁵⁴ Suchen Christine Lim, *Fistful of Colours* [1993] (Singapore: SNP Editions, 2003), p. 187.

Her “Western” leanings, however, fail to counter the innate feeling she has that on some fundamental, ineffable level she is Chinese. The suppressed attraction she feels for Mark elicits a gut reaction that she is ashamed of: “She was too much of a Chink [...] She simply could not see herself locked in copulation with a white hairy body” (p. 125). *Fistful of Colours* thus dramatises what Grace V.S. Chin, in her analysis of Lim’s novel, describes as the “paralysis of agency and voice” caused by “the uncompromising dichotomies produced by Singapore as well as by Western liberalism”.⁵⁵ The problem is one that even Suwen, who recognises it explicitly, fails to resist.⁵⁶ There is, then, a significant concurrence of critical attention to Singaporean cultural conservatism in both sociological and literary writing that bespeaks its profound influence on local debates and agendas.

Alongside this exclusionary discourse, Singapore’s government has somewhat incongruously yet assiduously promoted the pursuit of the material fruits of a Western-dominated global capitalism. The result has been the city-state’s much-vaunted elevation to the upper ranks of the global city hierarchy. Yet this success has ironically been a source of considerable anxiety for the conservative establishment. In a recent study of Singapore politics, Souchou Yao suggests that national culture functions partly by constructing “figures of the evil Other” against which it defines itself. In Singapore’s case, the West has long played the role of bugbear, constantly set up as a cultural Other; but instead of a simple cultural adversary, it has been the seat of an ambivalence between animus and desire, being “remarkably double-faced”.⁵⁷ The state’s attempt to yoke Asian culture to Western capitalism and

⁵⁵ Grace V.S. Chin, “The Anxieties of Authorship in Malaysian and Singaporean Writings in English: Locating the English Language Writer and the Question of Freedom in the Postcolonial Era”, *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2006), pp. 1-24 (p. 20).

⁵⁶ See Wagner, *Occidentalism*, p. 302.

⁵⁷ Souchou Yao, *Singapore: The State and the Culture of Excess* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 53.

consumerism relies on the conceptual bifurcation of the material and the cultural in Singaporean social life. But in practice this conceptual distinction has often been blurred. “Asian Values” are thus invoked as a safeguard against the ills of globalisation, allowing Singapore to continue enjoying the fruits of the latter without paying a perceived price in cultural degeneration; they are what Chua labels “counters” to a perceived Western cultural imperialism.⁵⁸ Yao similarly describes Asian Values as “a panacea, a wall of immunity against a world increasingly coming together” (p. 73).

It is, however, the impossibility of completely severing the link between the material and the cultural that accounts for the anxiety at the heart of Singapore’s engagement with the West and the globalising processes the latter epitomises. This has been, and continues to be, a vexing issue for the state, which undertakes the management of the balance between “Asian” culture and “Western” materialism in obsessive fashion. Singapore’s predicament has been precisely its simultaneous articulation of two seemingly incompatible attitudes toward the West – the emulative on the one hand, and the revisionist or rejective on the other. Yao captures the problem succinctly:

If the West is the place of bodily indulgence and moral decadence that can infect our society and culture especially in these globalizing times, it is also the source of foreign capital, technology and, not least, designer goods of lifestyle consumption. For the Singapore State, the dilemma may well be phrased this way: what is to be done when the West matters so much to our prosperity and place in the modern world, and yet poses dangers of moral decay and cultural regression? (p. 53)

In her novel *Following the Wrong God Home* (2001), Catherine Lim gives us a most telling image of how the state has unashamedly found a pragmatic solution to this dilemma. Her fictional Singapore leader Mah Tiong Chin, known only by his

⁵⁸ Chua Beng-Huat, “Postcolonial Sites, Global Flows and Fashion Codes: A Case-Study of Power *Cheongsams* and Other Clothing Styles in Modern Singapore”, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2000), pp. 279-292 (p. 281).

“awesome initials”,⁵⁹ is a thinly-veiled portrait of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who is indeed often referenced by Singaporeans acronymically. MTC’s attitude to Western academics based in Singapore is split between a recognition of the value of their intellectual capital to the country, and the censuring of their propensity toward open criticism of local politics. Lim’s image of how MTC “stretched out one hand in welcome and clenched the other to show the famously ruthless knuckles at the ready” (p. 55) vividly captures the compromise adopted by the state. The uneasiness that marks the local engagement with the West, however, is rendered in Hwee Hwee Tan’s novels as something far more problematic than this accommodation might suggest.

These novels, to which I now turn, explore this postcolonial dilemma and divulge something of its complexity. They reveal the selective nature of local, postcolonial engagements with the Western other, and the unconscious admission of certain forms of Western superiority. It is in the way Singapore is represented as valorising the West even as attempts are made to enlist the latter into the role of an unwelcome, hostile interloper that a relationship between material empowerment and cultural subservience may be identified. Tan, a Western-educated Singaporean novelist and, on the evidence of her work, something of an Anglophile, casts a critical eye in her fiction over Singapore’s ambivalence toward the Western presence in the city-state and its culture. Tan’s work offers a particularly acute examination of global and local cultural ambivalence, playing off the local against the global in both critical and celebratory modes. Her first novel, *Foreign Bodies*, describes the plight of Andy, a young and naïve provincial Englishman, who goes to Singapore to broaden his horizons and falls foul of the power games played by wealthy and influential Singaporeans. The plot revolves around Andy, his Singaporean lawyer girlfriend Mei,

⁵⁹ Catherine Lim, *Following the Wrong God Home* (London: Orion, 2001), p. 4.

and Eugene (Mei's childhood friend and Andy's university roommate in Britain). The villain of the piece is Loong, an Oxford graduate, son of a diplomat and a stereotypically overachieving Singaporean. Portrayed as a thoroughly Machiavellian elitist, he is suspected of framing Andy as the head of an illegal football betting syndicate. In the end it is Eugene who is revealed as having inadvertently framed Andy while attempting to implicate Loong for the crime over a past grudge. The way in which the conservative Singaporean authorities deal with the case smacks at once of a negative Occidentalism and the peddling of a chaste Asian self-image. Tan's main Singaporean characters stand out as worldly East-West hybrids, in complete contrast to most of the local population described in the novel. Their hybridity enables a critical and at times sardonic view of the parochialism that can afflict Singaporean cultural perspectives. But Singapore is also presented as a space shot through by global cultural flows, in particular what one might term capitalist monoculture;⁶⁰ this element of the urban experience receives its share of critique. The city-state, I will argue, is characterised in the novel as a highly contradictory space that reinforces certain colonial structures even as it inverts others.

Foreign Bodies is variously narrated from the first-person perspectives of Mei, Andy and Eugene. Each of them presents their views on the tensions between local and global and East and West, views that can collectively be read as Tan's complex portrait of Singapore. The titular notion of foreign bodies is used in a number of ways, but most saliently in respect of the exclusionary conservatism that animates this cultural dichotomy. More specifically, it is taken up as a metaphor for the West as an interloping, corrupting presence in the local body politic. A consistent pattern of negative Occidental thought pervades the milieu of Tan's Singapore, in which

⁶⁰ See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999) for a useful account of this kind of global culture.

“Eastern” values are defended against the baleful intrusion of these foreign elements. While Mei’s Singaporean identity is a self-reflexive and hybrid one, Mei’s mother and the parents of both Loong and Eugene assert in their own ways an essentialised Asianness. Their respective Asian parochialisms and anti-Western attitudes, however, are variably modified by stark distinctions in class interests and values.

This overlapping of class and ethnic values creates diverging attitudes: while many Singaporeans in the novel express anti-Western sentiments and are convinced of the moral fallibility of the West, significant differences exist in how the potential benefits of engagement with the latter are perceived. Mei’s mother, conservatively Chinese and quite clearly of a poorly-educated background, evinces a working-class fixation with money that makes her reluctant to finance Mei’s London education; her ambitions for her daughter extend only to a good husband.⁶¹ This reluctance is partially dissembled as a fear of losing her daughter to the West,⁶² although the negative Occidental views she espouses are real enough:

‘How long is Andy going to be in jail?’
‘I don’t know. It depends. It could be up to five years.’
‘Five years is a long time to wait. To get married.’
‘I’m not going to marry him.’

My mother looked relieved. ‘You know, it’s good that you’re not going to get married to an *ang mo*. I read in the newspaper, that scientists found that the Chinese IQ is higher than the *ang mo* IQ. If you get married to an *ang mo*, it might make your children more stupid.’ My mother’s greatest phobia was that I would get married to an *ang mo*, like Mrs Lam’s daughter, move abroad and leave her alone in Singapore. She was always trying to put me off Andy. (pp. 150-1)

In stark contrast to this artless ignorance, Loong’s father, an influential and wealthy diplomat,⁶³ is portrayed as holding ambivalent views on the West. His tenure as a diplomat in Holland, while undoubtedly beneficial to his career, does not prevent him from adopting an unfavourable stance to what he regards as the West’s moral

⁶¹ Hwee Hwee Tan, *Foreign Bodies* [1997] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p. 151.

⁶² See p. 139.

⁶³ See ch. 23 for a portrait of the wealth and influence of Loong’s family.

fallibility. When Loong ends up responsible for the death of a fellow teenage Singaporean in Holland, the influence of Western society and culture is conveniently cited by Loong's father and Loong himself as the root cause of his degeneracy:

Loong's father looked out of the window at the flashing lights on the police car. 'I tell you if we were in Singapore, this kind of thing wouldn't have happened.'

Loong told the police he was sorry. Again, he pretended to be stupid, and everyone bought his excuse. He was a victim of his environment, he said. He had been ripped from the shelter of Eastern values in Singapore, and thrown into a decadent Western society. (p. 117)

Invoking an essentialist idea of place, the Occidentalism at work here reverses the imaginative geography that Edward Said identifies as legitimising Orientalist discourses,⁶⁴ achieving in the process a similarly stark othering of the Occident. As members of the "upper" strata of Singapore society, however, Loong's family combine the stereotypically Chinese veneration of education with a reverence for the social validation that accrues to a Western university qualification; following the unfortunate death, notably, Loong is allowed to go on to Oxford, its cachet clearly outweighing any considerations of possible moral corruption. The judge presiding over Andy's case is also as clearly swayed by the class and intellectual superiority connoted by the prestige of Oxford as he is dismissive of the Englishman's claims of innocence; he is described as smiling for the first time during the proceedings upon learning that Loong read PPE at Balliol.⁶⁵

The overdetermination of the result of the case by the contradictory elements of, on the one hand, class prestige coloured by an emulative Occidentalism, and on the other, a narrow and self-aggrandising notion of ethnicity, is patently obvious to Andy. His assessment condenses Tan's critique of Singapore society:

⁶⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 54.

⁶⁵ See p. 261.

Standing before the judge, I finally saw that I was always going to lose the case, and now I knew why. In the end, it was me versus Loong. And what chance did I have against Mr Singapore Fantasy? With good grades, solid family ties, branded clothes and landed property, Loong had everything every Singaporean valued in life. I, on the other hand, was an *ang mo*. Expatriates are always seen as a hostile force. In recent years, all the crimes in Singapore that hit the international headlines had been committed by expatriates, like Fay and Leeson. When a crime occurred, it would be all too easy to blame it on someone like me, to see him as the foreign body, the element that infected a once healthy society. (pp. 266-7)

Tan's recourse to a foreigner's perspective in her critique of Singapore's exclusionary cultural ideology is particularly apt, given the prevalent sense in the novel that Singaporeans themselves are oblivious to blatant cultural contradictions in their quest for upward social mobility and their defence of a narrowly conceived ethnicity against the global outside. For Tamara Wagner, *Foreign Bodies* "deliberately and rather bluntly stands Orientalist views on their heads".⁶⁶ The truth is more complex: Singapore society in the novel is poised ambivalently between the emulative and revisionist modes of Occidentalism, balancing both with stereotypically Singaporean pragmatism. A commonly held reactionary ethnocentrism is filtered through the varying lenses of class ideologies, producing in some cases overt cultural hypocrisy. For all their rhetoric warning against the ills of Western values and asserting the superiority of Asian culture, Tan's elite Singaporeans implicitly concede the cultural authority of the West and its dominance over the generic standards and agendas of a globally constituted capitalist modernity. Tan identifies an established structure in Singapore society, then, that links upper-class cosmopolitan prosperity to the pragmatic concession to Western culture; it is precisely those who stand to benefit materially from engaging with the West and global flows, indeed those who are most

⁶⁶ Tamara S. Wagner, "'After another round of tissues': 'Bad Time' Fiction and the Amy Tan-Syndrome in Recent Singaporean Novels", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2003), pp. 19-40 (p. 36).

comfortable with such engagements, who demonstrate the most glaring selectivity and inconsistency in their exclusionary attitudes.

The significance of uneven class ambitions brings a wholly different slant to long-standing debates on the relationship between East and West in Singapore. This has in fact become an important issue in local politics. In their discussion of globalisation in Singapore, Brenda S.A. Yeoh and T.C. Chang identify the tensions between Singapore's global city aspirations and the localised concerns of its heartland population as central to its contemporary predicament. Such tensions are not, of course, endemic only to Singapore; other global cities, not least London, grapple with similar issues. But the extent to which it has become explicit in public discussion in such binarised terms as a direct result of state rhetoric is stereotypically Singaporean. In public discourse these tensions have been discussed in relation to two classes of Singaporeans, the cosmopolitan at home in global networks and the parochial heartlander.⁶⁷ Yeoh and Chang highlight the difficulties Singapore faces in trying to reconcile and profit from this dichotomy within society. But *Foreign Bodies* presents a less neatly divided culture than is acknowledged in official formulations, foregrounding the ways in which the cosmopolitan and the heartlander mentalities can coalesce around acutely ambivalent positions based largely on self-interest. In the official construction of a divide between these two classes, the local and the global appear entirely discrete and in tension with each other; what the novels reveal, however, are the inconsistencies and prejudices that often mark the intertwining of local and global in a Singapore milieu shot through by different Occidentalisms.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and T.C. Chang, "Globalising Singapore: Debating Transnational Flows in the City", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (2001), pp. 1025-1044 (p. 1040).

⁶⁸ See my chapter on postcolonial cosmopolitanism for an extended examination of how cosmopolitanism has been explored in contemporary Singapore literature.

Another aspect of the local-global nexus in the novel lies in the marketing of Singapore as an exemplar of the exotic “Orient” in an attempt to profit from the global and Western demand for “cultural” tourism. Singapore’s self-Orientalising strategy successfully exploits Andy, who lacks the kind of cultural perspective needed to deconstruct its workings. His own crudely Orientalist notions are reinforced, in fact, by Singapore’s exoticised marketing in the form of global tourist advertisements. In taking the decision to move to Singapore and thus escape the moribund ordinariness of provincial Britain, he conjures up a fantasy of a tropicalised Orient replete with the possibility of adventure:

Singapore loomed before me, a great escape route. You know, the exotic East and all that. Maybe I would find jungles and elephants, Buddhas in golden temples, Asian babes, especially babes like those girls in the Singapore Airlines ads – ‘Singapore Girl, you’re a great way to fly’. Yes, I would fly a Singapore girl anytime [...] I might have a few James Bond type adventures – speedboat chases in mangrove swamps, near-death experiences while having sex with dragon ladies. I would travel the green waters in sampans, and the roads in rickshaws, pulled along by toothless old men. (p. 201)

The success of Singapore’s exoticist self-promotion and its undercurrent of sexual innuendo relies on a willingness on the part of the global, and more pointedly Western, tourist to submit to the fantasy. In his eagerness to fulfill this requirement Andy appears a caricature of the quintessential, intrepid imperialist explorer. But the most telling aspect of this passage is the Orientalised and sexualised economy through which Singapore’s self-Orientalising at once exploits and complies with Western Orientalist fantasies. The economic imperative, much like the class concerns of Loong’s family, overwrites and complicates the narrow culturalist imperative underpinning the conservative Asian self-conception in Singapore. There is a clearly discernible tension, therefore, between the pragmatic cultivation of exoticised self-constructions pandering to Western perspectives on the one hand, and the negative stereotyping of Westerners on the other; Andy’s misfortune is to be caught on the

wrong side of this divide. What can be gleaned from Andy's fantasy of Singapore is the latter's willingness to be complicit with, indeed to an extent encourage, an Orientalist view of the city for material gain. While the economic imperative is well served by this accommodation of globalisation, both the conservative anti-Westernism and its attendant Asian self-aggrandisement so prominent in Singapore are rendered hollow in Tan's representation of its society's cultural capitulation to the power of Western capital.

The East/West clash of values in *Foreign Bodies* does not, then, result in a simple cultural impasse. Tan's novel, even as it points to the enshrining of the West as unquestioned arbiter of educational achievement, effects an inversion of colonial structures by demonstrating how, in a series of events redolent of postcolonial revenge, an innocent person from the former imperial centre is painted as a criminal, dismissed as a corrupting "foreign body" and destroyed by the machinations of Singaporeans. This inversion is particularly pronounced because of Andy's provincial background and relatively humble status as a teacher. Singapore's overt display of capitalism's global monoculture elicits from Andy the kind of awe often expressed in postcolonial representations by postcolonial migrants to London;⁶⁹ presented with "the magical skyline" (p. 212) of the city-state's downtown and financial district, he ascribes to it an aura of power. Both Eugene and Loong appear to wield almost total authority over Andy. Eugene "saves" Andy from his own drunken ineptitude during their first week at university; significantly, this takes place in Britain, with faint echoes of the "civilising" mission of colonialism against the backdrop of one of the

⁶⁹ See Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *Half a Life* (2001) for notable examples of this.

bastions of British civilisation.⁷⁰ Tan thus contrasts the social agency of these Singaporeans with the social impotence of a bumbling Englishman.

Sustaining this air of dominance, Loong repudiates Andy's stereotypically English championing of the underdog through a cynical disparagement of Andy's loyalties to Fallensham, a distinctly average football club:

'That's why an estimated four million viewers will be tuning in to watch the match,' I said. 'All the neutrals will be rooting for Fallensham.'

'I have never understood this strange English delight in killing giants, this "may the crappier team win" philosophy,' Loong said. 'Why does everybody here get so ecstatic when a team from a lower division defeats a Premier outfit, when Bolton beats Liverpool, and York topples Manchester? It's like this sick socialist fantasy – the rabble overthrowing the rulers, the giftless beating the gifted, rubbish overwhelming genius. The nation rejoices when a bunch of poor, unfit, drab amateurs defeat the brilliant, the creative, the deservedly highly paid. I'm with Nietzsche. Victory to the mighty! Kill the underdogs! Salute the Superman! Destroy the weak and helpless, get rid of those useless runts! If there's any justice, Amstelbruge will run Fallensham into the ground, crush them like the pathetic cockroaches that they are.' (pp. 129-30)

Loong's Nietzschean vision, of course, embodies an extreme version of Singapore's official state ethos of meritocracy; in this sense he is very much a stock character, a vehicle for ideological satire. His contempt for Andy's populist sentiments reads like a ruthless inversion, but also perpetuation, of the Eurocentric Social Darwinism that underwrote European empire,⁷¹ although race does not appear to be significant in his elitist conception. The distinction between meritocracy and the "sick socialist fantasy" ascribed to English culture cannot, of course, be constructed along East/West lines; neither has exclusive claim to these ideological perspectives. But the irony here is that Loong's recourse to Nietzsche in his elitist expressions and disparagement of an allegedly English egalitarianism continues to reflect the hold that Western culture has over postcolonial minds. One might argue with some justification that Loong's

⁷⁰ See ch. 9 of the novel.

⁷¹ For a concise account of the shared features of Social Darwinism and European imperialism, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 201-2.

invocation of Nietzsche is an exemplary instance of what Bill Ashcroft calls *interpolation*, or the postcolonial appropriation of Western culture as a positive strategy for transformative engagement.⁷² But there is little doubt that Andy's provincial background, particularly stark in comparison with his cosmopolitan Singaporean counterparts, plays an important role in his inferior status; Tan's portrayal of Andy as a bumbling Englishman is clearly intended to flag up this lack of urban sophistication. The perpetuation of colonial mentalities in Singapore is partly determined, Tan suggests, by class interests that are ambiguously positioned between an emulative and revisionist brand of Occidentalism.

Her second novel, *Mammon Inc.*, explores a similar range of concerns to that of her first, but distinguishes itself from her debut effort by its overt treatment of the culture of neoliberal globalisation, as well as being set in Singapore, Oxford and New York. A satire on globalised, homogenised and corporatised culture that is at the same time a comic look at how cultural parochialism functions in different places around the globe, *Mammon Inc.* centres around a Singapore enamoured of global consumerist culture. Chiah Deng, a Chinese Singaporean girl about to graduate from Oxford, receives a job offer from Mammon Inc., the world's largest company with interests in every aspect of global consumerism. She is to be hired as one of the CorpS, Mammon's fashionably elite group of Adapters who are responsible for helping the company's top global executives and talent adapt to different cultures – in other words, she is to be a facilitator of cosmopolitanism. To get the job, however, she must pass three Tests: first, to get herself admitted into the ultra-hip Gen Vex (Generation Vexed) party in New York; secondly, to teach her parochially Chinese Singaporean sister how to blend in with an upper-class British crowd in Oxford; and finally, to turn

⁷² See my discussion of Ashcroft in the Introduction.

her white British friend Steve into a stereotypical Singaporean. The glamorous allure of the job sits uneasily with her own commitment to a mystical form of Christianity and to her Christian mentor at Oxford, who offers her a poorly-paid position as a research assistant. Complicating this dilemma are her ties to her traditionally Chinese, and stereotypically Singaporean, family, who expect her to fulfill her filial obligations and take on the role of bread-winner of the family, aided by the Oxford degree they assume is an automatic passport to affluence.

While *Mammon Inc.* rehearses several themes from *Foreign Bodies* (not least the notion of Asian moral superiority, negative Occidentalist sentiments and the cultural cachet that Western educational qualifications have in Singapore), Tan's later novel also addresses a subtly new dimension of Singapore's engagement with notions of the East, West and global capitalism. *Mammon Inc.* explores how the West is dissembled and recoded as global capitalist modernity in the Singapore milieu for pragmatic purposes, despite the negative Occidentalist sentiments that dominate local mores in the novel. Global capitalist modernity is at the same time conflated with the values and culture of an "Asian" Singapore. The distinctions between East and West in the novel's account of Singapore culture are therefore provisional, blurred at the convenience of local economic agendas. Tan bears witness, then, to the extent to which Singaporeans are willing to compromise their cultural self-definitions and reshape them in accordance with economic imperatives, even at the cost of admitting Western culture, in "global" guise, into the normative conception of Asia and Singapore. Her novel plays off the material empowerment of Singapore with its disavowed cultural dependence on the West, suggesting a degree of reluctance to admit the existence of such an accommodation.

A close reading of the rapprochement of East and West in *Mammon Inc.* suggests that for Tan, Singapore society's uneven accommodation of the global (and the West it most often signifies) is heavily dependent on the schematic ideological codification of these external forces. One crucial distinction is that which holds between the material and the cultural. Western cultural values – stereotypically understood as those involving liberal mores and individualistic attitudes – are regarded with suspicion, while the material fruits of the West that feed Singapore's insatiable consumerist appetite are embraced wholeheartedly.⁷³ Chiah Deng's Oxford degree is considered valuable to the degree to which it supposedly allows her to provide for her family's materialistic wants, and therefore to demonstrate her filial piety.⁷⁴ The job offer from Mammon Inc. takes on a cultural significance insofar as rejecting it would be a symbolic rejection of the biblical (and therefore, in the conservative Singaporean understanding, Western) sign of greed; such a rejection, however, is paradoxically also seen as tantamount to a betrayal of traditional Chinese mores, given that the job would enable Chiah Deng to carry out her family duties.⁷⁵

A suggestive subtext in the novel, then, is the irony of the translation of Western greed into a salutary Chinese value. To some extent this negotiation involves the appropriation and local translation of Western capitalism into the Chinese cultural code of prosperity, as Chiah Deng's sister's reaction to her potential employment by Mammon Inc. indicates:

'Wah, Mammon Inc. very good. Last year, Auntie Lin's son Loong became a mcManager. You should see the things he bought for them. Gold teeth for his father, jade bracelet for Auntie Lin. They threw out all their old furniture from Yaohan and filled the whole house with rosewood antiques. But the most beautiful thing – *ai-yah!* so jealous – was their new Mercedes. Licence plate

⁷³ On this distinction in the Singapore context, see Beng-Huat Chua, "World Cities", pp. 987-88, and Souchow Yao's work cited above.

⁷⁴ See pp. 35-8.

⁷⁵ See pp. 37-8.

SZ 88. Everybody want the 88 licence plate, the number so lucky, you guess how much it cost?' (p. 35)

Mammon Inc. in fact adapts this Chinese code for its own purposes. Its symbol, a red dragon, is interpreted by Chiah Deng's mystical Christian mentor at Oxford as a sign of Satan.⁷⁶ According to the Chinese beliefs she was raised in accordance with, however, the dragon is a benign and protective force, who "scared away evil spirits" and "carried blessings from Heaven" (p. 31). The company's assurance that their dragon emblem is indeed derived from imperial Chinese symbolism rather than biblical tradition prompts Chiah Deng's condensation of Singapore's East-West compromise, which is predicated on the conceptual dichotomy between the cultural and the material:

Maybe Mammon CorpS wasn't God's enemy, the ancient serpent. Maybe they were just believers in Neo-Confucianism, fusing Eastern traditions with Western commercialism. This 'Chopsticks and Credit Cards' philosophy has made Asia an economic boom minefield, so maybe Mammon CorpS was being more New Singapore than Neo-Nazi. (p. 65)

Ultimately, however, Singapore's reliance on the West as arbiter of global standards betrays its neocolonial dependence and cultural subordination; significantly, Mammon's global presence, while filtered through a kind of corporate multiculturalism, is administered from its headquarters in New York. Tan visually signposts this cultural derivation in her portrait of the city's urban landscape. Steve finds Singapore's downtown shopping and entertainment district repulsively Americanised, dismissing it as "an American strip mall running through the middle of a tropical botanical garden" (p. 244); the global brand names make it seem as if "Fifth Avenue invaded Shangri-La" (p. 245). Chiah Deng, while concurring with Steve and lamenting the fact that American culture, while largely unexceptionable in the hands of Americans, is tacky and inauthentic when transposed onto the Singapore

⁷⁶ See pp. 30-1.

context, persists in defending Singapore's corner in order to convince Steve to continue with the Test:

So I shrugged and said, 'You're missing the point entirely. You see your hotel over there?' I pointed to the Westin Stamford, a white obelisk that dwarfed all the other skyscrapers. 'It's the tallest hotel in the world. A monument to the triumph of a single-party capitalist technocracy. It's designed by I.M. Pei.'

'Wasn't he the geezer who designed that hideous glass pyramid by the Louvre?'

'Yeah. He also designed the Four Seasons Hotel in New York. He's an architect raised in China, but who made his reputation as one of the greatest Modernist architects through his work in America. It's no coincidence that he was chosen to design the Westin Stamford. The powers that be obviously wanted someone who could fuse American expertise with Chinese philosophy. You see, Singapore *wants* to be America. Like America, but run by Chinese people. A cyber city built with Western infrastructure, ruled by Eastern values.'

Steve snorted. 'Eastern values. And what might those be? Greed and rampant consumerism? A life centred around shopping and eating?' (pp. 245-6)

Both Chiah Deng's acknowledgement of Singapore's emulation of America and Steve's critique of Eastern values vitiate her efforts to justify the local compromise between East and West. Singapore's ethos of pragmatism is once again central to the way it locates itself, somewhat contradictorily, at the intersection of East, West and capitalist modernity. Its status as a modern Asian city turns on a privileging of the East in the cultural sphere that is married to a technological modernity instinctively regarded as Western in origin. The drive toward capitalist advancement and its material trappings explains the strategic hybridity of Singapore society, in particular its selective memory when assessing the value of the West; for Steve, whose interaction with culturally conservative Singaporeans is largely dominated by evidence of their material concerns, Singapore's self-conception of its Eastern culture is little more than a dissembling of its underlying avarice.

In some ways, Singapore's lack of a coherent precolonial or "tribal" culture does allow for the conceptualising of global capitalism as modernity rather than as

something specifically Western.⁷⁷ Chua Beng-Huat also offers the alternative observation that the assertion of the East Asian economic success story had a visual marker in the re-emergence of the cheongsam during the 1990s as a form of power-dressing among Singapore's wealthy and elite women, a development significant in terms of the symbolic association of global capitalism and Asian culture.⁷⁸ These perceptions militate against any definition of global capitalism as a strictly Western formation. Indeed, the mediating element of global capitalism elides clear distinctions between East and West. Chiah Deng's recourse to the skyscraper hotel as a physical emblem of advanced capitalism, however, betrays the city's emulative aping of America as the arbiter of global-city standards. Anthony King's detailed account of the global race to build the world's tallest building is instructive in this respect: he observes, firstly, that the urban architecture of the industrialised West (in particular America) is generally taken as the model for Asian cities wishing to assert their presence within the world of capitalist modernity through the building of record-breaking skyscrapers; and secondly, that many Western commentators oppose any attempt by the West to reclaim its former position as home to the world's tallest buildings on the grounds that such a move would merely echo a developing-country mentality.⁷⁹ Seen from this perspective, Singapore's skyscrapers embody derivative standards and betray a subordinate mentality that is obscured by urban bravado. While Singapore has by no means been among the major players in the Asian skyscraper race, Chiah Deng's tying of national success in the global economy to such urban expressions exposes Singapore's concession to a Western version of the global imaginary.

⁷⁷ See Chua, "World Cities", pp. 985-6.

⁷⁸ See Chua, "Postcolonial Sites".

⁷⁹ Anthony D. King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture, Urbanism, Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), ch. 1.

The negative correlation between cultural and social agency that prevails in Tan's novels clearly reveals an opposing trend to that uncovered in the postcolonial London texts: Singapore's accommodation between cultural and sociomaterial agency is skewed in favour of economic empowerment. This accommodation, unlike that explored by Syal and Kureishi, is characterised as a deliberate and sometimes strategic one. But variations in local attitudes toward the perceived necessity of Western norms and practices for material achievement in the global arena appear, in *Foreign Bodies*, to be bound up with class differences. Sentiments range from a fairly simple rejection of the West and its cultural associations on the part of the novel's non-elite Singaporeans to a strategic acceptance of the West in the name of material achievement on the part of social elites who have the most to gain from the global circulation of Western capital. In *Mammon Inc.*, the currency of Western culture is sustained, but also marked by disavowal: Singaporeans are represented here as unconsciously recasting the cultural purchase of the West in the more neutral terms of the cultural practices of global capitalism. Tan's work identifies, then, class differences and a concessionary cultural politics in tension with an influential Asian Values discourse as the intertwined underpinnings of the specificities of postcolonial agency in an advanced global city still grappling with a residual neocolonial cultural politics. In the final section of this chapter, I bring together the insights that have emerged from the analyses of London and Singapore writing above to interrogate certain existing theories about the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship. I also suggest a new way of understanding the relationship between the regimes of postcoloniality and globalisation from the standpoint of postcolonial subjects in highly globalised contexts, one involving partial and strategic accommodations between different kinds of agency.

Postcolonial Agency and Globalisation: A Politics of Accommodation

The complex conjunction of class, global forces and postcolonial agency in the London and Singapore texts examined in this chapter problematises a number of arguments within the postcoloniality/globalisation debate that involve the issue of class. Globalcentric critics of postcoloniality, in particular, have argued most forcefully that (transnational) class positioning is a more important criterion than postcolonial subjectivity or ethnicity for understanding the social agency of postcolonials. In particular they highlight what they see as the privileged class position of postcolonial intellectuals in the West and how it places them within the hegemony of global capitalism. Aijaz Ahmad is scathing about concerns like the condition of postcolonial migrancy, diaspora and hybridity, and any tendency in these to draw attention away from the structural power relations wrought by globalised capital. Arif Dirlik goes a step further by suggesting a complicity between postcolonial critics and global capitalism that emerges from postcolonialism's putative masking of the contemporary hegemony of neoliberal globalisation insofar as it diverts attention toward the power relationships of past empires. He even perceives a vested interest on the part of postcolonial critics in global capitalism, given the class position occupied by these elite intellectuals within the West, which is more privileged than that of most Westerners. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's assertion that the hybridity and postmodern difference emphasised by certain strands of postcolonial thought have in fact been co-opted by the global forces of Empire represents a more charitable stance toward postcolonial intellectuals, but nonetheless similarly insists that contemporary world conflicts are dominated by global forces. In

effect, they advance their own model of global class conflict which declares that postcolonial models have been hijacked by the logic of global capital.⁸⁰

These globalcentric theories are totalising and at times abstractly global: they lay claim to relevance across localities and contexts. But the literary contexts I have addressed here – postcolonial London and Singapore – refuse to conform neatly to these narrow, class-based analyses of agency. Instead, they reveal contextually specific contradictions between cultural and social agency at the confluence of class, the global and the postcolonial, and disclose the spatiohistorical divergences of the postcolonial across these two major global cities. Class difference is an obvious theme in both Kureishi and Syal's postcolonial London narratives, although it is played out to very different ends in these texts. Brownlow's comic misunderstanding of the social predicament of Riaz's religious Asian group in *The Black Album* might be read as Kureishi's dig at the kind of unyieldingly socialist class critique peddled by the globalcentric critics, as well as at its limitations: it is a critique palpably incompatible with the firm sense of cultural, racial and religious discrimination experienced by Riaz and members of his group. But the similarities in the consumerist, postmodern lifestyles adopted by Deedee and Chili which place them, if partially, within a common ideological framework, can be fairly neatly juxtaposed with the social pressures experienced by many in both the Asian and white working-class communities of the novel. While these observations impute significance to both class-based and racialised categories of analysis for postcolonial London agency, the novel's primary insight is into the negative correlation between the cultural power of postcolonial London and its material subalternity through the postcolonial exotic. This mechanism traverses both the global and the postcolonial. Shahid's relatively affluent

⁸⁰ See the Introduction for a detailed account of these globalcentric theories.

background does not exclude him from Deedee's neocolonial gaze; indeed, his simultaneous Asian otherness and shared class origins with Deedee fulfill the latter's exoticist demands without being so different as to be thoroughly incommensurable with her moderate requirements for ethnic consumption, as fundamentalists like Riaz and Chad clearly are. Even the latter, however, are said to be of exotic interest to a media industry in search of commodifiable difference, and therefore possess a significant degree of cultural capital in contemporary London.

The mechanism of the postcolonial exotic proves even more adaptable across social classes in Syal's novel. Tania's complicity with the white-dominated media industry and its desire to satisfy public demand for exotic, subaltern cultural productions is ironic insofar as she is herself perceived by that industry as an exotic cultural commodity. To some extent she is aware of her ironic position, and prepared to exploit it: she revels in her financial and exotic cultural empowerment, but her reification by a normative white middle-class London as an exotic, commodified other rankles with her. While the embattled women of the Asian London ghetto both endure an impoverished material existence and are reified as culturally exotic, Tania's role as a middle-class cultural mediator between this postcolonial London existence and a privileged London audience gives her both a significant cultural authority over London's market for cultural commodities and financial success. Her ability to be a mediator in these instances, however, is predicated on her cultural and discursive association with these London subalterns. Her social agency, then, understood in broad terms, is constrained by an enforced accommodation with the global capitalist logic of the postcolonial exotic that is itself the source of her cultural authority. Cultural and material forces clearly overlap in complex ways in Syal's postcolonial London.

Certain aspects of the class-related arguments made by globalcentric critics are also borne out by Tan's Singaporeans in *Foreign Bodies*. These are, however, coloured and complicated by Singapore's specific postcolonial modes of Occidental thought in the novel. Loong's father and Mei's mother concur on the moral undesirability of Western influence on a Singapore in thrall to conservative "Asian" values, and therefore share something of what Wagner calls revisionist Occidentalism. Both regard the West as the seat of moral corruption. But they are also quite starkly distinguished by their class backgrounds, which shape responses to Singapore's overt identity as a global city. As a worldly diplomat and elite Singaporean, Loong's father's pragmatic view of Western influence on global matters means he simultaneously embraces an emulative Occidentalism born of economic prudence. As someone largely unable to inhabit elite global networks or recognise global opportunities, Mei's mother's notion of prudence is entirely inimical to any admission of the global into her local milieu. *Foreign Bodies*, from this perspective, recognises class as a transformational element in postcolonial Singapore's engagement with the global: class differences shape diverse responses to, and receptions of, the West, just as postcolonial modes of thought continue to effect points of convergence across the Singaporean class divide. In her novel Tan holds in tension an uneven contradiction between class and ethnic concerns, a tension that resolves itself into a marked degree of material agency that has been partly achieved by a reluctant cultural dependence on or unspoken elevation of the West. What the London and Singapore texts suggest (in contradistinction to the globalcentric critics), therefore, is the possibility of being implicated in global hegemony through mechanisms of cultural or capital exchange while also being subject to neocolonial pressures.

Given the overt argument of this chapter involving the relationship between cultural and material or social agency in postcolonial entanglements with global forces, the other major position in the postcoloniality/globalisation debate I want to interrogate here unsurprisingly addresses precisely this same relationship. The globalcentric critics, of course, work primarily from materialist perspectives and largely relegate culture to a position of secondary significance for considering global power relations; Hardt and Negri even suggest that the culturalist arguments of certain strands of postcolonial theory have been absorbed by global capitalism and made to serve its hegemonic logic.⁸¹ My readings in this chapter emphasise cultural concerns and thus implicitly contest these globalcentric perspectives as inherently limited. More fruitful and complex insights, however, emerge when we interrogate the arguments of Robert Young and Simon Gikandi, who, as we saw in the Introduction, confront the relationship between the cultural and the material in their attempts to explicate the link between postcoloniality and globalisation. For Young, global cultural hegemony mirrors global dominance in the economic and material sphere. This analogy assumes the continuing hegemony of the West on the global stage; Young writes of “the continued dominance of the west, in terms of political, economic, military and cultural power”⁸² that sustains the relevance of postcolonial critique. His version of the Marxist base-superstructure model adapts its linear determinism to the contemporary postcolonial-cum-global world order.

Gikandi’s analysis of the relationship between cultural discourse and material reality in a postcolonial, globalised world identifies a somewhat more disjunctive link between the two. The postcolonial and globalisation are intimately intertwined in his view, but he distinguishes this intertwining in the cultural, discursive sphere from its

⁸¹ See my account of this in the Introduction.

⁸² Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 5.

intertwining in material reality. In the cultural sphere, he perceives the celebration of hybridity, global media flows and postmodern subjectivity in certain strands of postcolonial theory as underpinning the culturalist optimism of globalisation theory. This perception depends on his peculiarly narrow understanding of both postcolonial and globalisation theory, given that he takes Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai to be somehow representative of postcolonial theory, and ignores the fact that globalisation is popularly understood to be an economic phenomenon and has inspired an astonishing amount of scholarly work focusing on its economic implications for the world. Gikandi takes issue with the focus of these culturalist discourses on the ease with which media and cultural flows transcend borders, arguing that these flows do not reflect a similar degree of global material agency for postcolonials. In his view, globalisation, far from enabling unfettered global flows, oversees an unequal world in which postcolonials enduring material deprivation yearn, not for hybridity or the pleasures of global media, but for the material fruits of the West; they yearn, in other words, for the kind of globalisation represented by Western capitalist modernity. Importantly, however, he qualifies this argument insofar as he distinguishes between the failed narrative of globalisation for Africa and the narrative of global success for Asian countries like Japan and Korea; the non-Western world has had uneven success with globalisation, and by no means reflects a simple Western hegemony over the latter.⁸³

The London and Singapore writers considered in this chapter, in bearing witness to what I have characterised as a negative correlation between cultural agency and social agency for postcolonials in the cities they explore in their writing, expose Young's assumption of a direct correlation between cultural and material power in the

⁸³ Detailed accounts of Young's and Gikandi's work are in the Introduction.

global milieu as incapable of registering the contradictions of postcolonial agency in global cities. His totalising analysis of world power relations is complicated by the workings of the postcolonial exotic in the London novels. For characters like Kureishi's Shahid or Syal's Tania, most notably, their relatively privileged middle-class backgrounds do little to prevent them from being interpellated as exotic, as Other, and being associated with a subaltern and therefore culturally fashionable South. The cultural power they exert in London society is cast in these narratives as a function of this subaltern image. While they are not economically under-privileged, their sociomaterial existence is characterised by a subaltern aesthetic that discursively associates them with postcolonial stereotypes of economic and social deprivation. Their cultural power in the London milieu, then, while affording actual agency, is inextricably tied to neocolonial social regimes that exclude them from genuine membership of London's normative centre. Conversely, Tan's representation of Singapore's wealth and economic development places the city and its subjects firmly within a Northern sphere of global capitalist influence, but its cultural dependence on and spatial aping of the West means it remains subject to a postcolonial structure of cultural relations. These complexities of postcolonial agency, refracted through the globalised urban milieux of London and Singapore, represent very different and uneven regimes of agency and domination from that delineated by Young.

Gikandi's theoretical assessment of the disjunction between cultural and material forms of globalisation relies chiefly on his focus on societies marked by postcolonial underdevelopment, though, as we have seen, he does qualify his assertions by referencing the global capitalist success of Japan and Korea. The writing examined in this chapter reveals a different picture of the disjunctions that emerge between the cultural and the material from the intersection of globalisation and the

postcolonial. By focusing on representations of two leading global cities and their postcolonial presences – one a postcolonial global city, the other a postimperial one with a significant if conflicted internal postcolonial element – I reveal the different ways in which direct exposure to the full potential of globalisation shapes the still-uncompleted narrative of postcolonials in the process of shedding their postcoloniality for globalised agency. For Kureishi's Asian Londoners, Gikandi's claim that postcolonials seek material security rather than subjective freedoms would be inadequate as an explanation of their concerns. Shahid's initial interest is in postmodern culture and identity, but he increasingly inhabits an ambivalent space between a postmodern position and ethnic tribalism. For Riaz and his associates, their obsession is unequivocally with their social exclusion and experience of racism and religious intolerance. Brownlow's attempt to articulate their social problems in terms of class or material deprivation is rejected out of hand. In their own ways Shahid and Riaz wield a certain power over London's cultural fashions, but this is, instructively, related to their social subordination. The relatively privileged Asians of Syal's London are significantly characterised as financially empowered individuals, but this is tempered by a concern over the politics of Asian representation in London and British media. The negative Asian responses to Tania's documentary, and Tania's own disgust at how Asians are arbitrarily (re)constructed by the media to suit the demands of the market, testify to their genuine vulnerability to racial stereotyping and neocolonial patronage. Gikandi's characterisation of the cultural dimension of postcolonial globalisation as an illusory form of agency is only partly resonant here: while the Asian Londoners in both texts lay claim to a form of cultural agency rooted contradictorily in social subordination, they assert the inalienable importance of culture and subjectivity to their place in the world, unlike the Africans who, in

Gikandi's version of them, at least, are concerned purely with sharing in the West's capitalist modernity.

The contrast between Gikandi's Africa and Tan's Singapore is telling in a different way. While Singapore hardly resembles Gikandi's Guinean case in point, its present level of economic development arguably stems from the same impulse to attain Western levels of progress. Tan's fiction, however, particularly in *Mammon Inc.*, diagnoses a society loath to admit its deliberate emulation of Western standards and forms of material development. In her portrayal of Singaporeans she deliberately dissolves the notion of the West into a more neutral concept of global capitalist modernity. I read this as a grudging, almost self-deluding reconceptualisation, hardly the open embrace adopted by Gikandi's Africans toward the West. In Gikandi's analytical framework, postcolonials enduring conditions of underdevelopment in the postcolony yearn for a simple transferral to Western living standards. Tan's Singapore society is significantly more ambivalent, disavowing its unmistakable aping of Western capitalist forms while professing anti-Western cultural attitudes that bespeak an unacknowledged cultural dependency on the West.

The London and Singapore texts examined in this chapter enable a new perspective on the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation. They bear literary witness to the view that cities like London and Singapore, being among the most intensely globalised urban centres and thoroughly saturated by global circuits of various kinds, offer postcolonial subjects the potential for a partial contestation of the hegemony of globalisation as well as of the power structures globalisation sets up in tandem with the West. But while postcolonial Singapore and London subjects are represented in these texts as possessing a partial yet significant agency within advanced global circuits, the precise nature of this partiality, and its inherent ironies

and contradictions, are shaped by the specific nature of the postcolonial modality in which globalisation is lived. In other words, my comparative examination of postcolonial London and Singapore writing juxtaposes two postcolonial modes of inhabiting advanced global circuits through global cities, one the postcolonial diaspora in the postimperial Western metropolis and the other the emergent global ex-colony. This juxtaposition yields an understanding of postcolonial agency in global cities as partial empowerment shaped by what I would term a politics of accommodation.

This politics of accommodation is embodied in the negative correlation between cultural and social agency represented in these texts; it gives theoretical form to the perception by these postcolonial writers that while globalisation in leading global cities offers postcolonials a significant degree of empowerment, it is a compromised empowerment subject to the pragmatics of accommodation. The compromise is necessitated by the continuing pressures exerted by the postcolonial condition in its different variants; the work of these postcolonial London and Singapore writers foregrounds the extent to which the postcolonial condition can curtail, if partially, the fruitful and empowering involvement of postcolonials in globalisation. But while it would be tempting to suggest that the London and Singapore writing examined in this chapter exactly reflects diametrically opposed negative correlations between cultural and social agency for postcolonial Londoners and Singaporeans, the issue of class adds a layer of complexity to this politics of accommodation. It is the Singaporean elite class in the novels that is socially empowered within global capitalist circuits and Singapore society, not the parochial, lower-middle or working class. In the case of the London fiction, class differences do not materially modify the potential ability of postcolonials to exploit the cultural

agency afforded by the mechanism of the postcolonial exotic. The central argument I make here about a politics of accommodation rooted in this negative correlation is intended precisely to flag up postcolonial involvement in the most intensely globalised networks of global cities, and the uneven effects this has on how postcolonial writers have perceived the imbricated concerns of agency and class.

Reading postcolonial London and Singapore literature together suggests that the overlapping forces of globalisation and postcoloniality hold the possibility of a partial resistance to their own dominance. Singapore represents a glaring case in which its command over global capital has afforded it a remarkable degree of material agency that places it among the global cities of the developed North. Postcolonial Singapore is coterminous with Singapore itself: its encounters with the West are mediated through its own political and cultural borders, as well as its successful negotiation of global capitalism. Globalisation, therefore, can be strategically appropriated by the postcolonial world in order to decisively jettison its subordinate material development and achieve something like parity with the West. It can be potentially empowering for postcolonial societies and can serve as a mechanism through which the material inequities that are a legacy of colonialism might be redressed. But these possibilities must be considered alongside the postcolonial nature of the compromise, effectively dramatised in Tan's fiction, that Singapore society has had to make in its quest for such parity. The implicit admission by Tan's Singaporeans of the greater influence of the West over global engagements is also a recognition that globalisation's agendas and standards continue to be shaped primarily by the West.

Globalisation thus recasts the power relations structuring the contemporary world and affords the possibility of material development for postcolonial societies,

but to a significant extent on the sociocultural terms designated by the West. An anecdote by Fareed Zakaria gets to the heart of this compromise:

About a decade ago, in a casual conversation with an elderly Arab intellectual, I expressed my frustration that governments in the Middle East had been unable to liberalize their economies and societies in the way that the East Asians had. “Look at Singapore, Hong Kong, and Seoul,” I said, pointing to their extraordinary economic achievements. The man, a gentle, charming, erudite, and pro-Western journalist, straightened up and replied sharply, “Look at them. They have simply aped the West. Their cities are cheap copies of Houston and Dallas. That may be all right for fishing villages, but we are heirs to one of the great civilizations of the world. We cannot become slums of the West.”⁸⁴

Implicit in the Arab intellectual’s retort is a conception of capitalist modernity as an essentially Western formation; for him, achieving such high levels of material development is tantamount to denigrating one’s own culture. The Western provenance of global capitalism, of course, is precisely what Singapore society often attempts to disavow. But on the evidence of Tan’s portraits of Singapore, its material achievements have certainly owed much to a concession to the influence wielded by Western culture within global circuits. A conscious compromise, in other words, has been made whereby the price for material success appears to be the marginalisation of non-Western cultures in favour of the culture of Western modernity. The postcolonial Singaporean condition, it appears from Tan’s work, is both empowering and attenuating of agency within the circuits of globalisation.

London, on the other hand, continues to interpellate postcolonials as socially-subordinate minorities, although in their status as exotic subjects they appear to have a degree of jurisdiction over metropolitan cultural markets and agendas. In the context of London’s postmodern, globalised cultural economy, postcolonial cultures appear to have a certain contemporary relevance that eludes the normativity of white London.

⁸⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* [2003] (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 139.

Syal and Kureishi recognise, however, that this empowerment takes place within the limits established by that normativity, which continues to cast a colonial eye over its postcolonial Others and imposes perspectival categories of material and social subordination upon them. In other words, for Kureishi and Syal, postcoloniality in London is at once empowering and disempowering, a Janus-faced condition. The price of commanding a high value within the circuits of metropolitan cultural exchange, these writers aver, is a profound sense of alterity at the margins of London society. London's minorities, in contradistinction to postcolonial Singaporeans, are on the receiving end of internal social exclusions. London's postcolonials inhabit the West in a mode unmediated by geographical distance and political borders; they are immanent to the West, but at the same time cannot escape their racially-inscribed Otherness. This diasporic challenge to the spatial definition of the city goes a long way toward explaining why postcolonials are generally constructed in metropolitan discourse as interlopers, even if they are often conceived as valuable commodities that may make for cultural enrichment and the fulfilment of the desire for difference. Postcolonial London represents, in this schema, a postmodern embellishment to mainstream London's securely-defined modernity.

Postcoloniality, then, for ex-colonials of wealthy global cities, is a contradictory condition, one that permits the fruitful mining of globalisation in certain ways even as it vitiates agency in others. The relationship of postcoloniality and globalisation in global cities, it appears from my reading of postcolonial London and Singapore writing, is one in which globalisation is a potential boon that postcoloniality mediates in both positive and negative ways. The subjects of these texts are beneficiaries of globalisation, at times even implicated in the intertwined market-driven hegemonies of culture and capital. This empowerment, however, must

reckon with the countervailing influence of postcolonial forces as they manifest themselves in these London and Singapore texts. The London and Singapore writers testify to the advances made by postcolonials toward shedding historical subordination or dependence on the West, partly by insinuating them into certain aspects of global hegemony. But the work of these writers serves ultimately to foreground the specific challenge faced by postcolonials in global cities: namely, the challenge of achieving globalised empowerment in both cultural and social terms by contesting residual postcolonial pressures while grappling with the ethical predicament of being partially bound up in global hegemonic structures. Tan's fiction documents the moral concessions Singapore society makes to global capitalist hegemony, while Shahid's moral irresolution at the end of *The Black Album* fails to contest either the implications of Deedee's neocolonial patronage or the neoliberal logic of the postcolonial exotic. Even more damningly, Tania's London career trajectory in Syal's novel is directly analogous to the extent to which she is willing to act as a mediator of an exoticised Asian culture for the London market. What all these texts ultimately do, then, is to lay bare the scope of the task that remains for postcolonials contesting postcolonial-cum-global hegemonies from within global cities.

CHAPTER 2: PLACE, POSTCOLONIALITY AND GLOBALISATION

Both globalisation and the postcolonial are concepts rooted in notions of space and place. The discourses that have developed around them encompass the increasing interconnectivity of world geography, the interrelationship of different territories and locations (often involving asymmetrical power relationships) and transformations in the character and experience of place. Their theoretical relationship, we have seen, has been constructed around generalising spatial tropes such as deterritorialisation, the contemporary (re)articulation of centre-periphery power relations, and North-South divisions in the global dispensation. A more specific spatial or geographic category of analysis, however, is available, one that allows us to address globalisation in its various forms and give thought to the fullest extent of its effects, benefits and challenges for postcolonials. In this chapter I examine postcolonial London and Singapore writing in order to consider how a global-cities perspective on representations of place in Western and non-Western postcolonial cities challenges existing theories and develops new insights into the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation.

London is an archetypal capitalist global city, but my focus on its postcolonial literary spaces in this chapter foregrounds the globality that derives from the displacements and reterritorialisations effected by postcolonial migration and diaspora. The London texts I examine sustain the continuing conceptual purchase of the postcolonial on the idea of the global and problematises neat discursive formulations about neoliberal globalisation and global cities. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) will be read as a text that insistently rehearses the city's postcolonial social conflict and locates the troubled globality of postcolonial London squarely within the problematics of its diasporic space. Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), by

contrast, takes a more utopian view of London's postcolonial space. While Evaristo does coincide with Smith insofar as she also explores the conflictual spatiality of postcolonial London, her perspective on the city becomes progressively more positive and outward-looking as the poetic narrative moves into the 1990s. By undertaking a narrative tour of her protagonist's constituent cultural geographies, she develops an affirmative, future-oriented global vision of postcolonial London.

Singapore shares with London the characteristic of being a major global city. It is also at the same time a city the postcoloniality of which serves two complex roles in the Singapore texts I consider below. Firstly, its postcolonial urban forms serve as a treasured legacy to be preserved against the perceived cultural debilitations wrought by global capitalism, particularly in selected texts by Lee Tzu Pheng and Hwee Hwee Tan. Secondly, the hybrid Western and Oriental spatial identity of the city is taken as a point of departure in the Singaporean exploration of global virtual space. Heng Siok Tian's poetry, in particular, adduces the possibility of the postcolonial as a mode of inhabiting global space and its virtual networks. For her the postcolonial is also a neutral concept through which to examine one's relationship with distant subordinate Others. Her poetry urges a simultaneous engagement with postcolonial and global space, recognising how far the effects of disavowing either may be culturally impoverishing.

Existing theories focus narrowly on whether postcolonial forms of dominance have contemporary relevance, or whether globalised forms of hegemony now hold sway over subaltern groups everywhere. In contrast, this chapter examines place and spatial experience in the writing of postcolonial global cities, and considers how the globality of these sites holds both peril and possibility for postcolonial subjects. Globalisation has opened up various ways for postcolonial writers to reconceive

place, but postcolonial spatiality is itself also an historicised outcome of older globalising forces. Reading these texts together reveals certain aspects of the different spatial politics that writers ascribe to Western and non-Western postcolonial cities respectively. This comparative reading also uncovers how writers have explored these places as global cities that represent globalisation's fullest potential purchase on postcolonial experiences of place. These writers capture, then, the spatial tensions between an enduring postcoloniality and the subjective possibilities of global space. In the concluding section of this chapter I consider how far my comparative reading challenges certain aspects of existing theory and suggests a way of understanding postcoloniality and globalisation in global cities through a simultaneous attention to the problematics and utopics of place.

Thus far I have invoked the notions of space and place in relation to globalisation rather loosely. In order to ground my analyses of the texts in more precise theoretical terms, I provide in the following section an account of existing, relevant theories of space, place and globalisation. These theories will be brought to bear upon my literary readings in this chapter, and used to shape my arguments about both cities and their writers.

Space, Place and Globalisation

Globalisation can – indeed must – be understood as a fundamentally spatial process, as a transformation in the way we experience space and place. This may seem self-evident, but as Doreen Massey has suggested, there exists an hegemonic, uncritical and self-legitimising conception of globalisation that disavows the actual spatiality of

the phenomenon.¹ However, an important strand of globalisation studies, drawing in particular on the insights of cultural geography and cultural theory, has usefully foregrounded the spatial transformations wrought by globalisation and their impact on contemporary culture. Several divergent positions have emerged from this body of work. To differing degrees, all of these positions contest and complicate traditional, unitary understandings of place and culture. Most germane to my examination of place and globalisation in postcolonial London and Singapore writing are the theories of Doreen Massey and Manuel Castells, and to a lesser extent that of David Harvey, which focus on different ways of understanding globalisation as a spatial process. While none of these represent a comprehensive theory of spatial globalisation's multifaceted character, they do usefully serve as conceptual tools for distinguishing how the London and Singapore writers have variously characterised the globalisation of space/place in their work. Thus far, I have invoked the terms "space" and "place" without specifying the distinctions that accrue to them within existing theory. I therefore begin with a brief account of traditional, uncritical notions of place and their theoretical articulation with the concept of space, before turning to discourses of globalisation and their transformations of these two concepts.

Perhaps the most substantial exploration of the traditional concept of place has been carried out from within the disciplinary sub-field of humanistic geography.² Before the emergence during the 1980s of globalisation as a critical concept, place was largely theorised as unitary and one-dimensional. In particular, two features of place are consistently highlighted in the literature: the mutually defining relationship

¹ Doreen Massey, "Imagining Globalization: Power-Geometries of Time-Space", in *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization*, eds. Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman and Máirtín Mac an Ghail (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 27-44. See below for a fuller account of Massey's work on globalisation and space.

² See Yi-Fu Tuan, "Humanistic Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (1976), pp. 266-76, for something akin to a manifesto of humanistic geography.

between space and place, and the direct, unitary relationship between place and identity. The following exposition by Yi-Fu Tuan, arguably the most prominent of humanistic geographers, pointedly asserts the former:

“Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value [...] The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.³

For Tuan, then, place is space endowed with value and stability, a “fixing” of a slice of abstract space through the laying down of human roots. A similar assertion is made by the humanist geographer Edward Relph, for whom space is a concept too vague to be explicated without reference to place: “space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places.”⁴ More recent definitions by cultural theorists foreground human agency in the transformation of space into place. Space turns into place when it is “named”, when “meaning has been ascribed” to space.⁵ Place, in other words, “is personalized space, occupied space.”⁶

The values and meanings that turn space into place are intimately tied up with the perceived relationship between place and identity. In a largely unitary fashion, identity is understood within the humanistic vision as almost an embodiment of one’s place, involving what Phil Hubbard describes as “a definite but complex relationship between the character of specific places and the cultural identities of those who

³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 6.

⁴ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 8.

⁵ Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires, “Introduction”, *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), vii-xv (xii).

⁶ John Rennie Short, *Global Dimensions: Space, Place and the Contemporary World* (London: Reaktion, 2001), p. 15.

inhabit them.”⁷ But a politics of power underpins such apparently innocent equations of place with identity. Assertions of place-identity concomitance involve, John Rennie Short suggests, the “demarcation, exclusion and containment” bound up in what he calls the “geography of power” (p. 15). Short thus invokes the kind of imaginative geography identified by Edward Said as underpinning the colonialist ideology of Orientalism.⁸ The politics of place bequeathed by the colonial legacy is an issue central to the debate on globalisation and postcoloniality, an issue I will foreground in this chapter.

The related concepts of space and place have been transformed more recently by globalisation theory. Globalisation as an historical process can be traced at least as far back as the beginnings of European expansion,⁹ but what I want to call contemporary globalisation has a more recent provenance. The idea of the “global village”, most closely associated with Marshall McLuhan, dates from the 1960s,¹⁰ but globalisation as a critical concept only became established as late as the 1980s. Within the discourse of contemporary globalisation, existing unitary, place-based understandings of culture have been taken up, complicated, transformed and in some cases comprehensively exploded. Developments in cultural theory, in particular the work of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, have established a

⁷ Phil Hubbard, “Space/Place”, in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, eds. David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 41-48 (p. 43).

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* [1978], with a new Afterword (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 54.

⁹ The link between globalisation and European empire has been traced to what Mary Louise Pratt calls Europe’s planetary consciousness. This European ability to perceive the globe as a single entity has been broadly identified as fundamental to the earlier era of globalisation and European expansion. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 246, 250, 252; Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 213; Malcolm Waters, *Globalization*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 6; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, “Afterword: Empires and Globalization”, *British Imperialism: 1688-2000*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Longman, 2002).

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

framework for understanding place as a contested, protean and multiple specification of space.¹¹ But contemporary globalisation discourse, in a further complication of spatial theory, builds on these developments by positing place as a potential articulation of local and global. Notions of deterritorialisation, spatial flows and time-space compression dominate the discourse. But many debates and differences mark this area of inquiry, these common themes notwithstanding. What follows is an account of some major positions in recent work explicitly theorising the relationship between place, globalisation and culture that have particular relevance to different aspects of the London and Singapore writing examined in this chapter.

David Harvey and Doreen Massey are among the most prominent theorists in the recent literature on the general relationship between place and globalisation.¹² Their writings share a common concern with the effects of what Harvey calls “time-space compression” – a phrase taken up by Massey in her own writing – but diverge dramatically in terms of their understanding of both the fundamental causes of the globalisation of place and what the prospects for place in the face of globalisation are. For Harvey, time-space compression – the spatial result of globalisation – is made possible by new technologies of communication and travel that erode spatial barriers and the constraints of time posed by space:

As space appears to shrink to a ‘global village’ of telecommunications and a ‘spaceship earth’ of economic and ecological interdependencies – to use just two familiar and everyday images – and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1986), pp. 22-27, for his elaboration of the notion of heterotopia; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974] (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984). Their work has been important in the formation of postmodern geography as a field of inquiry; see Edward W. Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1989) and *Thirdspace* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

¹² As evinced by Tim Cresswell’s acknowledgement of their work as a central paradigm of debate on place and globalisation. See Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), ch. 3.

learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds. (*Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 240)

What this formulation leaves out is Harvey's understanding of its underlying cause. In his analysis, it is a process driven primarily by the forces of global capitalism. This speeding-up of life and compression of space does not imply, however, a simple homogenisation or the decreasing importance of place. Place has in fact become more important, according to Harvey, precisely because of the demands that globally mobile capital makes on different places everywhere.

In a widely-cited essay, Harvey asserts a direct causal link between the various dimensions of capitalistic production and the identities of places:

“Difference” and “otherness” are *produced* in space through the simple logic of uneven capital investment, a proliferating geographical division of labor, an increasing segmentation of reproductive activities and the rise of spatially ordered (often segregated) social distinctions [...] ¹³

The crux of Harvey's claim here is that differences between places are differences born of contrasting degrees of capitalistic development and viability. The determining effects on place that Harvey ascribes to capital are linked to capital's expansionary logic.¹⁴ Because contemporary capital is globally mobile rather than fixed in place, different places effect self-transformations to make themselves more attractive to it. Individual places are threatened with marginalisation within the global economy, a possibility they seek to preempt, Harvey suggests, by making themselves distinctive places that appeal to capital.¹⁵ In the long term, however, Harvey sees a potential homogenisation of place insofar as cities everywhere will converge on a particular proven model of urban place development that possesses this appeal.¹⁶ This serves, of

¹³ David Harvey, “From Space to Place and Back Again”, in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 291-326 (p. 295).

¹⁴ See p. 295.

¹⁵ *Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 294-6.

¹⁶ *Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 295.

course, to support his theory that capital is the primary determinant of the characteristics of place.

Harvey's theory of the relationship between place and globalisation privileges economic factors as the primary determinants of spatial transformation. While this focus limits his theory's ability to illuminate the multifaceted nature of globalisation, as we shall see, it does resonate with a number of postcolonial Singapore writers in this chapter who take specific issue with global capital's transformative effect on place. His definition of time-space compression is also reflected in Evaristo's portrayal of Lara's globe-trotting relationship with London. A more subtle and complex account of the globalisation of place, however, is available in Massey's work. Attending more substantially to cultural realities, Massey elaborates a theory of spatial globalisation that is fully cognisant of the importance of history. Central to her theory is the belief that capital serves as only one of many different determinants of the process of globalisation; ethnicity, gender, and the history of colonialism, for instance, are of equal importance in our experience of place. This is not, she hastens to add, an anti-materialist position; it is merely a refusal "to reduce materialism to economism."¹⁷ Positing a progressive, global sense of place, she calls for the acknowledgement of the uniqueness of different places, not in their bounded specificity, but in their nature as meeting points for various local and global flows and relations.

Massey invokes her own neighbourhood, Kilburn, as an example of how a global sense of place might be conceived. Describing it as a multicultural, multiethnic place, she draws attention to its role as a node in the London transport network as well

¹⁷ Doreen Massey, "Power-geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place", in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, eds. Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 59-69 (p. 60). This is a modified version of her well-known and influential essay "A Global Sense of Place"; I refer to this updated version primarily because it explicitly critiques Harvey's theory of spatial globalisation.

as in the larger context of Britain and the world. Contesting the essentialist notion of place, she highlights the multiple identities that Kilburn can lay simultaneous claim to. Crucially, her theory is an explicitly spatio-temporal one; a place is conceived not merely as a meeting point for various local and global elements, but also at the same time as a site of accumulated history: “[...] it is (or ought to be) impossible even to begin thinking about Kilburn High Road without bringing into play half the world and a considerable amount of British imperialist history” (p. 65). This progressive sense of place has several characteristics. It is not static.¹⁸ It does not involve simple boundaries that define a place as an inside distinct from an outside, but rather involves place as partially defined by its specific linkages to that outside.¹⁹ It does not view place as having a single, uncontested identity, allowing instead for conflict over that identity.²⁰ A progressive sense of place does not preclude the uniqueness of place, but conceives that uniqueness as involving a specific interaction and conjunction of various local and wider social relations. Finally, these different relations are also bound up in highly specific ways with “the accumulated history of a place, with that history itself conceptualized as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages both local and to the wider world” (p. 68). In other words, the globalised specificity of place is a deep historical palimpsest of both past and present sets of local-cum-global relations, all in complex interaction.

Massey’s refusal to privilege the role of capital in spatial outcomes in no way ignores the issue of wealth and power in relation to place. In a more recent essay she repudiates “aspatial” globalisation – a self-legitimising neoliberal narrative of globalisation that posits a single world of open, unbounded space devoid of borders of any kind while concealing the inequalities of globalisation and the “power-

¹⁸ See pp. 66-7.

¹⁹ See p. 67.

²⁰ See pp. 67-8.

geometries” that underpin it.²¹ This critique is extended in *For Space* (2005), in which she highlights how local places “are characteristically understood as *produced through* globalisation.” The local, “in other words, is figured as inevitably the *victim* of [neoliberal] globalisation.”²² This fails, however, to acknowledge the power-geometries of globalisation that Massey has consistently foregrounded in her work. Citing Chad and Mali as indubitably powerless in the face of global forces, she identifies, in contrast, cities like London as places where globalisation is produced and managed; these latter places are, for her, the “agents” of globalisation (p. 101). But these sites also harbour areas of marginalisation and deprivation. Massey urges the recognition of those parts of London marked by “poverty and exclusion” (pp. 156-7) as deprived, not in spite of, but because of, the same forces that allow London to be a producer of global wealth. These observations suggest interesting possibilities for our analysis of contemporary postcolonial London and Singapore, insofar as both are – to different degrees – agents of neoliberal globalisation. Postcolonial subjects in either place might therefore be complexly and variably positioned, for example, in relation to the politics of ethnicity on the one hand and the ambivalent spatial politics of neoliberal hegemony on the other.

Massey’s theory of spatial globalisation, however, focuses on the historical, material linkages that a place has with the wider world. What seems absent from her work is the more recent concern with the impact of electronic communication and virtual spatiality. A radical split between material and virtual space has been proposed by Manuel Castells. At the heart of his analysis of “the information age” – his broad term for the contemporary era of globalisation – is a bifurcation of the contemporary world (or what he calls “the network society”) into the “space of flows” and the

²¹ See Massey’s “Imagining Globalization: Power-Geometries of Time-Space”.

²² Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 101.

“space of places”. These two kinds of space are fundamentally distinct, even at odds with each other, in particular with respect to power. Castells begins from the premise that

our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols. Flows are not just one element of the social organization: they are the expression of processes *dominating* our economic, political, and symbolic life.²³

From this he proposes the existence of a space of flows, “a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society” (p. 442). This space of flows has three constituent layers. Firstly, it is both a network of electronic exchanges and the technology that makes such a network possible.²⁴ Secondly, the space of flows consists of places in the form of nodes and hubs (the global city, for example) linking global networks.²⁵ The third layer is the space of the managerial elites of the network society, which is characterised by a globally homogeneous lifestyle, culture and architecture.²⁶ The space of flows, therefore, is the space of a global elite, who occupy a global network linked by electronic exchanges.

Distinct from this elite space of flows is the space of places, which in Castells’s schema is akin to the traditional, territorial notion of place examined earlier. Castells argues that only the elites of the network society inhabit the space of flows; most others inhabit the space of places. He understands place as “*a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity*” (p. 453). But because the dominant logic of the network society is the logic of the space of flows, there is “a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society” (p. 459).

²³ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), p. 442.

²⁴ See pp. 442-3.

²⁵ See pp. 443-5.

²⁶ See pp. 445-8.

From the dominance of the space of flows over the space of places emerges a new dominant culture, the “culture of real virtuality”, whereby virtual images and symbols constitute reality.²⁷ James Donald has observed that both London and Singapore, particularly during the eighties, “seemed to confirm that Manuel Castells was right to believe that ‘the meaning of the space of places’ was being superseded by the ‘space of flows’”.²⁸ In light of this comment, the more recent intensification of globalising processes generates an urgent relevance for the present examination of globalisation and place in the post-1989 postcolonial literature of both cities.

The theoretical positions elaborated above will be used in this chapter as points of conceptual clarification in my analysis of representations of postcolonial London and Singapore space. My implicit argument will be that postcolonial-cum-global cities are complex formations that can only be fully illuminated by expanding our definitions of the globalisation of space and place. By situating postcolonial London and Singapore representations in relation to these theoretical positions, my examination of these literatures will lay bare the distinctive spatial perspectives that accrue to each respectively.

Space, Place and Globalisation in Postcolonial London

In this section I focus on two texts that explore postcolonial London as a global space. I read Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) as a text that yearns to see London as a global city that transcends postcolonial tensions, but fully recognises the enduring nature of London’s postcolonial spatial character and conflicts.²⁹ Bernardine

²⁷ See pp. 403-4.

²⁸ James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 175.

²⁹ In my chapter on the nation elsewhere in this thesis, I argue that Smith’s London offers a form of locality through which postcolonial Britishness might be conceived. My focus here is instead on the enduring purchase of the postcolonial on London’s global sense of place, and the challenges this poses

Evaristo's novel-in-verse *Lara* (1997) similarly explores the city's hostility to postcolonials, but discursively sidesteps (rather than portrays an actual transcendence of) that history of conflict in favour of recasting postcolonial London as a genuinely global site that provides cultural anchorage for the protagonist's protean, multispatial identity. Both texts present postcolonial London as a spatiohistorical palimpsest characterised by the global sense of place described in Massey's work, and foreground the multiple postcolonial geographies inscribed upon the city. They differ, however, in their portrayals of the postcolonial experience of London space. For Smith the city's postcolonial tensions are depressingly abiding, notwithstanding her frequent attempts to conceive of neutral London spaces that are free of postcolonial conflict. Evaristo, while acknowledging the continuing existence of this conflict, asserts a positive perspective on postcolonial London that downplays its tensions in favour of understanding it as a liberating global space. Smith therefore addresses postcolonial London's troubled global spatiality as a predicament to which Evaristo's global vision can be read as a positive subjective response. *Lara* gestures hopefully toward a globalised era of intensified time-space compression in which postcolonials are fully involved, and in which their postcoloniality is a significant enabling factor in their global spatial experience. This represents a discursive manoeuvre by Evaristo that ultimately downplays social conflict in London in favour of seeing it as a site from which its constituent transnational geographies can be explored. Her outward-looking perspective is at odds with Smith's more grounded portrayal of the postimperial metropolis, in which various postcolonial and other geographies coalesce discordantly. The two texts set up a tension, then, between the problematics and utopianism of globalisation and place in postcolonial London.

for ex-colonials who yearn to embrace the city's liberating potential as a neutral global space. Both readings of the novel can, in my view, be sustained.

Before delving into these literary explorations of postcoloniality, place and globalisation, some consideration of the way postcolonial London might be understood as a spatial concept is necessary, if only to avoid the conceptual pitfalls of characterising without qualification the capital of the erstwhile imperial power as a postcolonial city. In the Introduction to his recent book on *Postcolonial London* (2004), John McLeod urges caution in ascribing the postcolonial condition to a city such as London, wary of the danger of obscuring in the process the abiding effects of colonialism in formerly colonised countries:

An articulation of the postcolonial in relation to a significant Western metropolis, which might be regarded generally as the beneficiary of imperial power rather than as a site of subjugation and exploitation, potentially deflects critical attention away from the economic, social and cultural circumstances in countries with a history of colonialism [...] When proceeding with a perception of London in terms of the postcolonial we must be careful to note that its postcoloniality is not at all commensurate with sites of colonial settlement in once-colonized countries.³⁰

Implicit in these lines is the recognition that London can be understood as a postcolonial space, but also one that must be analysed in the context of its specific positioning with respect to the history of imperial power relations. The concept of “postcolonial London” does not mark a period in London’s history so much as designate the cultural and subjective spaces of the city occupied either by migrants from the ex-colonies or their descendants. Postcolonial London is only one of many ways of conceiving the city; the clash between conflicting visions of London might be taken to reflect the specificity of what McLeod calls “the city’s architecture of power” (p. 11).

The postcoloniality of London space can be traced directly to emigration from the (ex)colonies to the British capital. Peter Fryer’s influential work has established

³⁰ John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 14.

the existence of a black and colonial population in Britain going back hundreds of years,³¹ but it was the post-war period, particularly the arrival of several hundred immigrants from the Caribbean on board the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, that inaugurated a genuine sense of British postcoloniality.³² The appearance of people from the colonies in the imperial centre laying legitimate claim to their rights as British subjects³³ posed a fundamental challenge to the spatial fixity of the Self/Other binary of colonial relations and to Britain's sense of ethnic homogeneity. The specificity of London's postcoloniality, then, is bound up in its postcolonial diasporic communities. For example, Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani conceive of Britain's postcoloniality, in contradistinction to that of formerly colonised countries like India, as the re-siting, in postcolonial diasporic communities, of the colonial contact zone within the postimperial metropolis:

BRITAIN: 'postcolonial' signals loss of most, though not all, former colonies [...] the appearance on British landscapes of a significant number of people from the former colonies: 'We are here because you were there.' The transition from a society of predominantly white ethnic groups to one that is multiracial. The 'Other' no longer geographically distanced, but within, and over time significantly shaping landscape and culture. Samosas at the National Theatre café. Race riots.³⁴

This schema of the "postcolonialisation" of Britain offers a hint of the transformations effected by what Louise Bennett famously termed "Colonization in

³¹ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984). See also Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* [2003] (London: Harper Perennial, 2004) and C.L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writers in Britain, 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³² See, in particular, Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* [1998] (London: HarperCollins, 1999), and Onyekachi Wambu (ed.), *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain*, preface by E.R. Brathwaite (London: Phoenix, 1999).

³³ These rights were established by the 1948 British Nationality Act. See Phillips and Phillips, pp. 73-74. See also Dennis Kavanagh, *British Politics: Continuities and Change*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 32-4, for a useful overview of the history of post-war Acts affecting (post)colonial immigration to Britain and ideas of British nationality.

³⁴ Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location", *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1993), pp. 292-310 (p. 293).

Reverse”.³⁵ London’s position in relation to these transformations has been complex; McLeod, significantly, sees a need to outline the contested role London plays in discourses of English, British and postcolonial British identities.³⁶ What is not in doubt is London’s centrality in the postcolonial conception of Britain. Hanif Kureishi cites London as a globalised space belonging to those whose claims to a British identity have been refuted by the white establishment.³⁷ For Stuart Hall, London is a cultural space that black British people can feel at home in, even under conditions of extreme socio-cultural duress.³⁸ But the city’s more negative, unwelcoming, and violently racist dimension has also been a major preoccupation in postcolonial London writing.³⁹

Both positive and negative elements of postcolonial London are present in Smith’s *White Teeth*. Her novel clearly testifies to the continuing postcolonial tensions within contemporary London; she explores its historical and geographical traces, and in the process presents the city’s postcolonial dimension as a global palimpsest broadly analogous to that theorised by Massey. Early, largely unconsidered responses to the novel tended toward the view that it was a celebration of a peaceful, salutary multiculturalism that transcended postcolonial tensions. One early reviewer of the novel suggests that “the real spark of the book is not post-colonial, but post-post-colonial. The younger generation – which is where Ms Smith

³⁵ Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse”, in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, ed. Paula Burnett (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 32-33.

³⁶ See McLeod, pp. 16-19.

³⁷ Bart Moore-Gilbert, “London in Hanif Kureishi’s Films: Hanif Kureishi in interview with Bart Moore-Gilbert”, *Kunapipi*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1999), pp. 5-14 (p. 9).

³⁸ Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”, in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 114-19 (p. 114).

³⁹ See, for example, Linton Kwesi Johnson’s *Mi Revaluashanary Fren: Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), Beryl Gilroy’s *Boy-Sandwich* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), and many of the London texts examined in this thesis.

is – has had history; they couldn't give an f-word for it".⁴⁰ Later, more considered readings, however, have identified an ambiguous tone in the novel and recognise the continuing tensions that mark Smith's portrayal of postcolonial London. In my analysis of the novel below I make references where appropriate to such corrective readings, but John Clement Ball's general observation can be taken as broadly characteristic of this more recent work; with reference to the novel's recurring images of various kinds of excrement, he argues that "Smith's narrative and its metropolitan setting can only comprehend any 'post-post-colonial' possibilities from amidst the cluttered relationality of a postcolonial perspective that is far from clear of 'historical shit'" (p. 239).

White Teeth holds in an unresolved tension a yearning for London as a neutral social space and an acknowledgement of the city's seemingly intractable postcolonial conflicts. It flirts with the idea of the city as a utopian space, only to repudiate or undermine that idea by acknowledging the social abrasions wrought by fundamentalism and racism alike. I read Smith's novel as a kind of retrospective in which postcolonial London's various globalist elements – the colonial cultural legacy, migration, and the transformations of place that result – accretively impact upon, indeed shape, the narrative space of 1990s London. Smith gestures toward the possibility of a peaceful multicultural milieu, but this is as yet unrealised, as the postcolonial character of Smith's London spaces serves to curtail such ambitions.

I want first briefly to examine the novel's exploration of place in postcolonial London during the pre-1990s period. The London of *White Teeth* has been described by Ball as "inescapably transnational" (p. 238), a fact inscribed upon the urban

⁴⁰ "Pulling Teeth", review of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in *The Economist*, 19 Feb 2000, p. 5. Quoted in John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 238. For a summary account of similar early reviews, see Claire Squires, *Zadie Smith's White Teeth: A Reader's Guide* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002).

landscape and recognised by Alsana Iqbal as early as the 1970s. Newly arrived in Willesden, she takes in the multicultural landscape of her neighbourhood's high road: "*Mali's Kebabs, Mr Cheungs, Raj's, Malkovich Bakeries*" (p. 63). Her tour of the high road is reminiscent of Massey's own mapping of the cultural landscape of nearby Kilburn as a global space. Alsana's own presence in Willesden is also part of the transformation of its ethnic scenery. O'Connell's Pool House, the favourite haunt of Bangladeshi immigrant Samad Iqbal and white Londoner Archie Jones, confounds natural expectations by being "neither Irish nor a pool house" (p. 183). A café owned by an Iraqi family, its transnational character can be attributed to its regular clientele: Samad, Archie, and two old Jamaican men. Its owners have hybrid names like Abdul-Colin and Abdul-Mickey, while a more explicit hybridity is proclaimed within the premises by "an Irish flag and a map of the Arab Emirates knotted together and hung from wall to wall" (p. 183), as well as by its signature dish, an English fry-up marked by the glaring absence of pork on religious grounds. By rendering such sites in terms of spatial hybridity and multiculturalism, Smith signals her view of postcolonial London as a layered text of various historical and geographical inscriptions.

London's hybrid spatiality is responsible, however, for a keenly felt cultural erosion on the part of the first-generation postcolonial diaspora. Samad increasingly views London as the seat of Western corruption, lamenting both his continuing presence in the city and his own complicity in the way London appears to have subverted his own Muslim culture: "I should never have come here – that's where every problem has come from. Never should have brought my sons here, so far from God. Willesden Green!" (p. 145) Samad clutches desperately onto the traditional idea of a unitary relationship between place and culture, a yearning that is quite comprehensively frustrated by the discordant globality of London (and Bangladesh) in

the later parts of the novel. The family at large, in fact, suffers from this kind of disillusionment, prompting the question of “*what was wrong with all the children, what had gone wrong with these first descendants of the great ocean-crossing experiment?*” (p. 218) These frustrations are born of the illusion that diasporas can take advantage of the material opportunities of the West while still existing within an imagined cultural microcosm of “home” that they transplant in their new surroundings.

Smith’s portrayal of this earlier period of postcolonial London installs the linked globalising processes of migration and transformation at the heart of the novel’s treatment of place. This is sustained in the 1990s sections of the novel, where the younger postcolonial generation revisit in various ways the cultural politics of place and globalisation while also exploring the subjective viability of inhabiting a neutral, ahistorical London. The later period covered by the novel sees Smith satirise the racialised ignorance and spatial exclusions still faced by postcolonial Londoners,⁴¹ even as they assert a continuing influence on the character of certain places in the city. She addresses the postcolonial yearning for a neutral space in London primarily through her authorial intrusions. The gulf between her idea of neutral space and her fictional reality sets up postcolonial London as a space of illusory utopianism that frustrates any conception of the city as a post-postcolonial one.

As the narrative moves into the 1990s, it captures a London riven by multiple socio-political fractures, some of a postcolonial nature, others of a more contemporary provenance. These fissures in London’s contemporary milieu, particularly those generated by the clash of various fundamentalisms and ideologies (Christian, Muslim, animal rights activism, scientific rationality), evince a global sense of place that is

⁴¹ See my discussion of this aspect of the novel in Chapter Three.

characterised by confrontation and discord. Smith weaves her portrait of contemporary London around a number of globalised sites that, to different extents, testify to the enduring postcolonial contest over the city. In a passage that has been widely cited as emblematic of *White Teeth*'s multicultural metropolis, Smith offers a depiction of its globalisation through immigration:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. (p. 326)

The use of children to signify the global mix of London's ethnic landscape points to the continuation of that process, a perpetuation of multi-ethnic mixings that leads to the undermining of roots in favour of routes as determinants of culture. The playground, then, is a site on which global ethnic flows become intertwined, creating increasingly complex ethnicities.

This global multicultural playground, however, is not unproblematic. It bears witness to the harsher realities and indignities that attend the act of migration: "mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks" (p. 326). Neither is its peaceful future assured. While Smith's playground holds a degree of promise, it cannot yet serve as a representative space for an ethnically harmonious Britain. Her recognition of this takes the form of a sobering qualification to the playground's utopian potential:

Yet, despite all the mixing up, despite the fact that we have finally slipped into each other's lives with reasonable comfort (like a man returning to his lover's bed after a midnight walk), despite all this, it is still hard to admit that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English. There are still young white men who are *angry* about that; who will roll out at closing time into the poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist. (p. 327)

In his study of the novel, Peter Childs suggests – immediately after quoting both this passage and the description of the playground – that “Smith’s narrative paints a generally optimistic view of multicultural Britain; one that largely directs its gaze away from issues of social difference between ethnic groups.”⁴² Quite how he arrives at this conclusion is hard to fathom, given that Smith’s contention that racism still plagues Britain is both blunt and borne out in reality by the sobering history of racist violence and murder in the 1990s and beyond. Laura Moss gets much closer to a realistic (if pessimistic) assessment when she urges an attention to “the obverse to growing racial multiplicity in contemporary Britain: the history out of which the multiplicity often comes and the violence that is sometimes the result”.⁴³

Part of Smith’s treatment of contemporary London is built around a comparative view of London and Bangladesh. Samad sends one of his twin sons, Magid, to Bangladesh with the express purpose of erasing the Western culture he appears to have embraced and to immerse him in Samad’s own Bengali Muslim culture. But globalisation exhibits its less salubrious aspect in the form of fundamentalism which confutes established conceptions of the fixed ethnic character of different places. Millat, who remains in London, turns from a Westernised Asian teenager into a tortured Islamic fundamentalist, while Magid’s Bangladesh experience sees him become a caricature of an English gentleman-intellectual. Samad’s lament turns into a bitter critique of the cultural disorientations wrought by the diasporic experience; he lays the blame for both London and Bangladesh’s unexpected transformations squarely at Britain’s door:

‘There are no words. The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is fully paid-up green bow-

⁴² Peter Childs, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 210.

⁴³ Laura Moss, “The Politics of Everyday Hybridity: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*”, *Wasafiri* 39 (2003), pp. 11-17 (p. 14).

tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. [...] These days, it feels to me like you make a devil's pact when you walk into this country. You hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started . . . but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? [...] In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. [...] Who would want to stay? But you have made a devil's pact . . . it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere.' (p. 407)

The migrant predicament is fuelled by global shifts that confound expectations. Thus Samad's unchanging assumptions about the fixed cultures of London and Bangladesh mean, according to Jan Lowe, that "he misreads the global current of politics that blows the winds of change and continuity in the most unpredictable directions."⁴⁴ His conviction demonstrates an inconsistency, however, when he refutes Alsana's argument that second-generation Magid's Western leanings are a result of being born in Britain by asserting a timeless, essentialist ethnic heritage as a kind of perpetual biological inheritance: "And don't speak to me of second generation! One generation! Indivisible! Eternal!" (p. 289)

Magid's return from Bangladesh as an Anglophile intellectual serves to further complicate the place identity of London. O'Connell's, a thoroughly hybridised and globalised place by virtue of its multicultural denizens and protocols, is once again transformed; this time, though, Magid poses a challenge to its hybrid character by imposing his Westernised self upon the culture of the café, in the manner of a superior coloniser. The long-standing house rule forbidding the serving of pork is broken when Magid successfully demands a bacon sandwich.⁴⁵ This "corrupting" Westernisation originates, however, not from the heart of the metropolis but transnationally from Bangladesh: in a letter written from Bangladesh, Magid declares that "*We must be more like the English*" (p. 288). If colonialism forcibly introduced Englishness to

⁴⁴ Jan Lowe, "No More Lonely Londoners", *Small Axe* 9 (2001), pp. 166-180 (p. 171).

⁴⁵ See pp. 450-1.

Bengal, then, this assimilated Englishness returns to a metropolis already hybridised and globalised by postcolonial migration and proceeds to complicate the cultural transformations wrought by postcolonials upon the postimperial centre. Magid serves therefore as a symbol of the enduring character of colonial cultural power, and can be read as a sobering rejoinder to excessively celebratory narratives of cultural decolonisation. If postcolonial migration is a form of “colonisation in reverse”, Smith seems to suggest that it can also take the form of a subversive recolonisation of the postcolonial diaspora from within, through the workings of a diasporic *comprador* subject.⁴⁶

Toward the end of the novel, Smith explores the possibility of transcending history through the notion of neutral spaces. She delivers perhaps the most sympathetic articulation of this yearning for neutrality through Irie Jones, while at the same time alluding to the difficulty of achieving it:

In a vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter any more because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it. (p. 527)

This ambivalence is played out several times in the later sections of *White Teeth*. A neutral place, for example, is desperately sought for Millat and Magid to meet after years apart, but the room's theoretical emptiness is filled by the symbolic history that the two brothers represent:

The brothers begin to argue. It escalates in moments, and they make a mockery of that idea, a neutral place; instead they cover the room with history – past, present and future history (for there is such a thing) – they take what was blank and smear it with the stinking shit of the past like excitable, excremental children. They cover this neutral room in themselves. (p. 464)

⁴⁶ Ashcroft et al. define the term “comprador” as follows: “In post-colonial theory the term has evolved a broader use, to include the intelligentsia – academics, creative writers and artists – whose independence may be compromised by a reliance on, and identification with, colonial power.” Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 55.

Using the furniture in the room, the two brothers map out the opposing belief systems of Islam and Western science. The episode eloquently articulates the persistence of the colonial legacy into the contemporary age, its dogged quality: the idea of future history, after all, implies that the possibility of transcending postcolonial politics has not come into view.

The science institute that hosts the launch of Marcus Chalfen's FutureMouse experiment is another ostensibly neutral space, given its spatial associations with scientific objectivity. Far from remaining a neutral space, however, it becomes the arena for a clash of different ideologies. The FutureMouse is a strictly controlled genetic experiment designed to exclude contingencies of any kind. But the designated room for the exhibition of the mouse, labelled the "final space" (p. 517) by the novel's narrator, is replete with irony because the proceedings are about to be disrupted by events which serve to perpetuate long-standing patterns of historical conflict. Smith's final space aspires to a neutral emptiness, but becomes overdetermined by multiple cultural geographies and a number of different ideological factions: the South Asian diaspora, some of whom are Muslim extremists; both black and white British Jehovah's Witnesses; animal rights activists. All are intent on disrupting the proceedings, although some are at odds with each other as well. London's contemporary diversity is global, therefore, but also clearly conflictual. Foremost among these conflicts is the continuing social purchase of the colonial legacy.

Millat embodies the enduring nature of this history. On his way to disrupt the launch with his band of religious fundamentalists, he stops by in Trafalgar Square to consider its monuments to the British Empire. Redolent of the colonial past, this imperial site is juxtaposed quite starkly with the ostensible scientific objectivity of the

institute in which the launch takes place. Years before, Samad had inscribed his name in blood on a bench in Trafalgar Square, an inscription that Millat finds extant. Samad's act, by his own admission, "meant *I wanted to write my name on the world*" (p. 505). The act is symbolic, also, of the world (particularly postcolonial migrants) writing itself on London. But for Millat, "It just meant *you're nothing*" (p. 506). Juxtaposed with the statue of the imperialist Havelock, Samad's feeble word elicits a depressing and colonial history-laden interpretation:

It means you're nothing and he's something. And that's it. That's why Pande hung from a tree while Havelock the executioner sat on a chaise longue in Delhi. Pande was no one and Havelock was someone. [...] Don't you see, Abba? whispered Millat. That's it. That's the long, long history of us and them. That's how it was. But no more. (p. 506)

Trafalgar Square is written here as a globalised historical site, but while some aspects of its global history are openly celebrated, others struggle to assert more than a merely spectral presence; this discrepancy is shaped by the asymmetries of colonial power. Millat's detour into a space pervaded by colonial history, then, is a prognosis of things to come.

Immediately before the launch, Smith's authorial voice interjects with a discourse on the elusiveness of a genuinely inclusive British space, a neutral space shorn of past conflicts. She begins by positing the alluring prospect of a clean slate, a space in which the past has no purchase. The room in which the launch takes place is mooted as one such possible site, described as

a corporate place, a clean slate; white / chrome / pure / plain (this was the design brief) used for the meetings of people who want to meet somewhere neutral at the end of the twentieth century; a virtual place where their business [...] can be done in an emptiness, an uncontaminated cavity; the logical endpoint of a thousand years of spaces too crowded and bloody. (p. 517-8)

On one level this passage represents a (possibly deliberately) feeble attempt to shift attention to the capitalist dimension of the city. This authorial utopia posits the

jettisoning of history in favour of a new beginning as a way of transcending the troubled legacies of (post)coloniality. Smith, however, almost at once mocks her own idea, or at least the possibility of her idea, of a neutral space by alluding to the inescapable, fraught histories of the city's migrants. Smith slyly undermines the concept of a neutral room by introducing the presence of migrants inhabiting the marginal spaces of the science institute. The seemingly pristine room is "pared down, sterilized, made new every day by a Nigerian cleaning lady with an industrial Hoover and guarded through the night by Mr De Winter, a Polish nightwatchman" who "can be seen protecting the space, walking the borders of the space with a Walkman playing Polish folk-tunes" (p. 518). These marginal figures, and the histories of domination and displacement they embody, mar the putatively ahistorical purview of the room by foregrounding within it the continuing social asymmetries of the city. Coupled with the postcolonial (and other) conflicts that the room soon plays host to, this sly disruption of the room's neutrality bespeaks Smith's qualified pessimism over the prospect of a post-postcolonial London space.

Evaristo, like Smith, characterises contemporary London as a city whose globality can be traced in part to the far-flung historical legacies of its postcolonial subjects. Her novel-in-verse, *Lara*, explores the subjective spatial possibilities of postcolonial London's global historical underpinnings; in the process, postcolonial London's contemporary globality is cast, as in *White Teeth*, as an extension of the historical global roots of its postcolonial communities. In the course of the poetic narrative, however, its conceptualisation of the globality of postcolonial London shifts from a conflictual, racialised one, to a celebratory understanding of the city as a global site from which its postcolonials might extend their subjective horizons. *Lara* is a self-consciously retrospective text, moving back and forth in history and between

globally dispersed geographies. It also installs global historical presences within the postcolonial city that link the latter to nineteenth-century slaves in Brazil, the Middle Passage slave trade and Nigeria. This globality is not limited to those of a strictly colonial provenance, but embraces a genuinely global cultural vision. Ultimately, this narrative strategy works to supply a clear sense of the spatiohistorical layers of her unmistakably affirmative portrait of postcolonial London and its prospects of a positive future.

Lara is marked by a broad historical and geographical sweep, but the protagonist's formative years in London make up much of the narrative. The novel serves to generate a retrospective understanding of contemporary postcolonial London as a globalised historical palimpsest of different cultural geographies. Evaristo's London will be analysed here through the global model of place developed in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and Massey's notion of the global sense of place, while being read at the same time as a cultural space that has its own specific complexity. In my analysis of the text below I examine how Evaristo first introduces the multiple geographical and cultural roots of Lara's ancestral history, before tracing the latter's personal development toward a view of London as the primary site from which her postcolonial-cum-global self can assert a celebratory, non-conflictual sense of belonging to the wider world.

Evaristo's verse novel explores the globality of London through the multiple ethnic and geographic genealogies bound up in the central character, Lara. Born to a black Nigerian migrant father and white English mother, Lara embodies, ostensibly, a simple ethnic hybridity. But Evaristo painstakingly unravels the intricate web of Lara's biological roots, and in the process lays bare the global nature of her identity. The novel's representation of London as an ethnic-cultural space moves through

different phases. Its portrait of London from the late 1940s to the 1970s is characterised by a conception of the city as a binarised ethnic space; subtle ethnic differences are subsumed by a dominant black-white social divide. One strand of Lara's maternal lineage, for instance, can be traced to nineteenth-century German immigrants, who changed their family name from Wilkenig to Wilkins when their East End bakery was burnt down by locals during the Great War.⁴⁷ Another strand leads back to nineteenth-century arrivals from Ireland, whose working-class descendants have striven to become part of middle-class English society.⁴⁸ Lara's maternal relations therefore are, according to Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, "relatively recent newcomers to the gift of Englishness, obtained in a cosmopolitan London by means of a series of 'vanishing acts', such as a change of surname and an erasure of foreign accents, and by assuming the values and habits of the middle class."⁴⁹ This white English identity has its Manichaean counterpart in an essentialised black identity. From the moment of his arrival as a student in 1949, Lara's father, Taiwo, is made aware of how black people in Britain are interpellated as black: "in this country I am coloured. Back home I was just me" (p. 4). Lara's early school years in London see her become increasingly aware of this interpellation. Her white friend Susie's boyfriend, for example, mocks Lara by aping a monkey in her presence,⁵⁰ while her family become targets of the racist activities of National Front thugs.⁵¹

Coeval with this sense of London as a binarised ethnic space is the idea, increasingly contested as the narrative progresses, that a quasi-mystical relationship exists between race and place in London. Her consciousness of her difference begins

⁴⁷ Bernardine Evaristo, *Lara* (Tunbridge Wells: Angela Royal Publishing, 1997), p. 15.

⁴⁸ See pp. 12-15.

⁴⁹ Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, "Ethnic Cartographies of London in Bernardine Evaristo and Zadie Smith", *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2004), pp. 173-188 (p. 177).

⁵⁰ See p. 68.

⁵¹ See p. 70.

at school; while her schoolmates initially appear oblivious to this difference, her friend Susie soon broaches the inevitable question about her place of origins:

‘Where’ you from, La?’ Susie suddenly asked
one lunch break on the playing fields. ‘Woolwich.’
‘No, silly, where are you from, y’know or[i]ginally?’
‘If you really must know I was born in Eltham, actually.’
‘My dad says you must be from Jamaica,’ Susie insisted.
‘I’m not Jamaican! I’m English!’ ‘Then why are you coloured?’
Lara’s heart shuddered, she felt so humiliated, so angry.
‘Look, my father’s Nigerian, my mother’s English, alright?’
‘So you’re half-caste!’ Lara tore at the grass in silence.
‘Where’s Nigeria then, is it near Jamaica?’ ‘It’s in Africa.’
‘Where’s Africa exactly?’ ‘How should I know, I don’t
bloody well live there, do I!’ (p. 65)

Susie’s childlike assumption that black people must come from “elsewhere”, that Lara’s place of birth (and therefore nationality) is at odds with her racial difference, positions Lara outside normative material or imaginative identifications with place. Neither England nor Nigeria, in that historical moment, truly qualifies as a place that allows her to ground her identity.

The exclusionary climate of London precipitates in Lara an inchoate interest in her Nigerian roots, marking the beginning of her engagement with her relationship to the wider world. Evaristo’s novel begins from this point to move toward the revelation of the global milieu that postcolonial London culture can lay claim to. Lara grows into a realisation that the black cultures historically bound up in Brazil and West Africa are also primary determinants of her identity as a young Londoner. It is at this point that the significance of the aquatic symbolism permeating the novel emerges. We are told that Lara’s full name, Omilara, means “‘the family are like water’” (p. 43), an allusion to the globally dispersed ancestral histories that are crystallised within her. Lara’s family home, suggestively named “Atlantico” in the novel, supplies a related trope through its evocations of the Atlantic and its historical pathways. Lara’s explorations of Brixton, Ladbroke Grove and Shepherd’s Bush –

London's black enclaves – reveal the exhilarating existence of “Atlantic faces” (p. 88) that offer a stark counterpoint to her upbringing in a predominantly white part of the city. Evaristo's celebration of the enriching presence of Atlantic cultures in London reverses the tenor of the racist revulsion in Enoch Powell's famous “Rivers of Blood” speech, a revulsion which Paul Gilroy has identified as Powell's response “to the liquid contamination that the Atlantic ocean had conducted into the vulnerable generous heart of London”.⁵²

The exploration in the novel of the fluid and multiple nature of postcolonial London cultures as a manifestation of the history of human movement and transcultural exchange within and across the geography circumscribing the Atlantic bears certain analogies to the theory of transnational cultural exchange developed in Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. An examination of *Lara* through the lens provided by this theory reveals the transnationality of London's postcolonial space in terms of the histories of colonialism and slavery. One important trope in Gilroy's book, the ship, supplies a fluid, dynamic symbolism to the cross-cultural processes that obtain within the Black Atlantic. The image of the ship references the human and material flows that have marked this region since the beginnings of colonialism and the slave trade. For Gilroy, each point within the Black Atlantic is determined by its interfaces with other places within that world; ships have played an important role in facilitating these interfaces by connecting different nodes on the map.⁵³ The ship, therefore, is a constituent, shifting space of the Atlantic, redolent of the age of empire and of the history of the Atlantic slave trade.

⁵² Paul Gilroy, “A London sumting dis ...”, *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1999), pp. 57-69 (p. 64).

⁵³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 16-17.

The fluid nature of this maritime history allows Gilroy to “develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (p. 15). He takes, in other words, Europe, Africa, America and the Caribbean as demarcating the transnational space he calls the Black Atlantic. Much of this transnational arena serves as the constituent geography of Lara’s identity. Her roots in Europe, Nigeria, and Brazil represent some of the primary nodes of the Atlantic slave trade and the colonial economy. Ships, and their traversal of these fluid spaces, play a prominent role in the uncovered history of Lara’s ancestry.

As Lara moves into the 1980s, she begins to develop a positive understanding of her multicultural identity through her art. Showing her painting at a makeshift art gallery in central London, she affirms the multiple, hybrid, syncretic cultural influences that inform her identity: “‘Eat yer art out Jean Michel-Basket! This is London-stylee! / My influences are Hackney, afro-beat and Blue Peter!’” (p. 95) As she moves into the centre of the metropolitan capital, a sense that the conflictual nature of postcolonial London can be transcended begins to emerge in the novel. For Patricia Murray, this episode marks the moment at which “Lara begins to discover, or rather produce, her own version of post-colonial London; a new, hybrid identity that challenges the inevitability of a divided and racist national capital to suggest, instead, a positive diasporic space.”⁵⁴ Lara’s emerging confidence as a “native” Londoner coincides with her desire to travel, to embark on a quest of self-discovery. In particular, the question of whether or not London is the determining cultural location of her identity weighs heavily on her mind; when her friend Trish dismisses her travel

⁵⁴ Patricia Murray, “Stories Told and Untold: Post-Colonial London in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara*”, *Kunapipi*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1999), pp. 38-46 (p. 38).

plans as mere escapism, Lara concedes the point: “I s’pose I am escaping. I’ll soon know if it’s from myself” (p. 95). But it is instructive that Lara only feels herself “whole” (p. 98) when she is out at sea on a boat; befitting the aquatic significance of her name, this fluid subjectivity dovetails with the dynamic and global identity to which she lays progressive claim.

In the 1993 section of the novel, Lara and her parents visit Lagos. Their arrival by air reverses the journey to London Taiwo made by boat in 1949, and prefigures Lara’s affirmation of the intensification of global movements through air travel at the end of the novel. For Taiwo, absent for forty-four years, Lagos continues to function imaginatively as “home” and its residents as “my people” (p. 103). Not so for Lara, for whom Lagos is new and foreign; it is a place that interpellates her as a White Other,⁵⁵ in the same way that certain elements of London interpellated her as a black person. Lagos also makes her yearn for the European culture that is one of the central determinants of her identity.⁵⁶ Her paternal homeland does to some degree shape her complex cultural landscape, making her “wonder if I could belong” (p. 104). But her sojourn in Lagos, the first leg in her attempt to retrace her paternal roots, already elicits the desire for a fluid, transnational wholeness that takes in the Black Atlantic’s constituent locations:

On her last days she surveys the Atlantic from fashionable
Bar Beach on Victoria Island, where the ocean attacks
the sand in hostile waves, her bare feet sink deeper
as each wave retreats, she toys with the idea of crossing
over to Brazil, completing her own three point turn. (p. 108)

The final section of the novel, set in 1995, sees Lara in Brazil, exploring the last major node of her subjective geography. Rather than the fixity of Brazil as a cultural space, however, it is the fluidity of the Amazon that reflects her hybridity and

⁵⁵ See p. 104.

⁵⁶ See p. 107.

frees her of the subjective shackles of the urban environment.⁵⁷ The Catholic service she witnesses in a remote Amazonian settlement reminds her of the history of colonial relations and imperialist cultural hegemony, but in a way that hints at the complexities of contemporary cultural transformations:

[...] Catholic hymns hybridized by drums,
it is a hilltop church, Indian congregation, holding flowers
and palm fronds. It is Palm Sunday! I hum from the door,
witness to one culture being orchestrated by another,
yet the past is gone, the future means transformation. (p. 139)

Implicit in the local variant of Catholic worship is the mutually transformative nature of the colonial encounter. The “orchestration” of one culture by another here is ambivalent, perhaps deliberately so; the transculturation process functions in both directions. But Lara recognises that contemporary reality is already moving beyond the legacies of colonial history, leaving her without a firm sense of rootedness.

Lara’s personal reenactment of the various flows across the Black Atlantic involves the same geographical nodes that were central to the colonial slave trade, but her journey subverts the historical power trajectories that underpinned it. Her journey between London and Lagos inverts the journey made by her father years before; while Taiwo travels as an idealistic colonial to the imperial capital, however, Lara arrives at the postcolonial city as a relatively sophisticated metropolitan subject. She visits Brazil as a tourist, lamenting its dispossessed communities,⁵⁸ in stark contrast to her Yoruba ancestors who arrived as slaves from West Africa. Her exploration of her Black Atlantic roots at once affirms her cultural inheritances and propels her beyond these legacies. The recognition of the asymmetrical power relations that prevailed across the Black Atlantic colonial world allows Lara to move beyond these specific histories and imaginatively inhabit a more contemporary, utopian and future-oriented

⁵⁷ See p. 139.

⁵⁸ See p. 137.

globalised sphere. Her cultural engagement with Brazil is the final piece of the complex puzzle of her historical identity and allows her, after her cathartic journey of self-discovery across the Black Atlantic, to view her native London as a global space; if a city is defined culturally by its subjects, then Lara's transnational identity is a determining factor of London's nature as global city.

The cognisance of her multiplicitous, transnational culture leads Lara toward the embracing of the liberating possibilities of a utopian global perspective. A genuinely global syncretism is confidently asserted; at times, she indulges in an irreverent cosmopolitan self-fashioning: "I locate a Chinese eaterie, replenish my / banana self on noodles" (p. 140). The final lines of the novel shift seamlessly between the idea of London as a mere dot on the world map and London as a site that encompasses within itself infinite global possibilities:

I savour living in the world, planet of growth, of decay,
think of my island – the 'Great' Tippexed out of it –
tiny amid massive floating continents, the African one
an embryo within me. I will wing back to Nigeria again
and again, excitedly swoop over a zig-zag of amber lights
signalling the higgledy energy of Lagos.

It is time to leave.

Back to London, across international time zones,
I step out of Heathrow and into my future. (p. 140)

This exultant climax to the novel is the culmination of a journey of historical and geographical discovery, the unravelling and unveiling of the multiple places and cultures that retrospectively define Lara's identity. London's identity can also be seen anew, because its spatial character has been significantly determined by the presence of people like Lara, who stand in a mutually transformative relationship to her native city. Evaristo's novel develops a complex conception of London that McLeod calls a "space of cultural admixture and part of a wider transcultural web that connects London to related locations overseas" (McLeod, p. 178). Lara's discovery of her

transnational roots in European colonialism and the Black Atlantic paves the way for a fully global perspective on London, a spatiohistorical way of understanding the city through “a global sense of place”. This is achieved through a liberating exploration of the globe as the subjective spatial horizon for London’s postcolonials.

Lara’s assertion of her global citizenship appears to transcend the enforced subjective positions of alterity and racial difference into which London once interpellated her. She envisages a symbolic decolonisation of Britain through the discursive erasure of its “Great”ness, with London being the space that crystallises the possibilities of this decolonised future. Symptomatic of this imaginative decolonisation is her determination “to paint slavery out of me” (p. 140), a reference to the transcendence of both her slave ancestry and of her former subaltern existence as a postcolonial in London, as well as an allusion to her role as an artist who insists on the right to self-portrayal. It is also worthy of remark that the global perspective achieved by Lara at the end of the novel is facilitated through air travel; it reflects an intensification of time-space compression that, in Lara’s case, allows for something of a transcendence of the postcolonial condition. Lara’s experience of London at the conclusion of the novel has seemingly been divested of its postcolonial, asymmetrical power geometries. The latter recede from view in the face of Evaristo’s celebration of globality. But the shift from a view of postcolonial London as a spatial accretion of far-flung, often conflictual postcolonial histories to one that openly lauds it as a global site relies on a discursive manoeuvre that directs our attention onto the centrifugal global energies of postcolonial London and away from the city’s postcolonial confrontations that are very much in evidence in the earlier parts of the novel.

Contemporary London, viewed through superficial lenses, can produce an untroubled vision of a global, multicultural space. Paul Gilroy has this in mind when

warning against easy celebrations of London as a “post-colonial heterotopia” (“A London sumting dis ...”, p. 59): “We may find that London’s cosmopolitan post-cultures are more fragmented, fragile and unevenly developed formations than the stronger versions of the automatic multicultural thesis would lead us to believe” (pp. 59-60). Smith’s *White Teeth* captures this view of postcolonial London quite vividly in portraying it as a space that links its postcoloniality to historical processes of globalisation that continue to generate conflicts in the contemporary era. Evaristo’s verse novel, on the other hand, attempts to transform this conflictual globalisation perspectively, through an excavation of the layers of spatiohistorical postcoloniality that she inscribes upon the city. While recognising the postcolonial conflicts of the city, Lara chooses to recast her native city as a global site that encompasses traces of various postcolonial geographies as well as other global links. Collectively, these two texts embody a tension between the problematics of place and a spatial utopianism at the confluence of postcoloniality and globalisation in contemporary London. Something analogous to this is discernible in the Singapore writing, albeit with very different implications. The next section will examine how Singapore writers have developed an unusual postcolonial stance on place in the global city even while looking toward a thoroughly globalised urban future.

Space, Place and Globalisation in Postcolonial Singapore

A considerable amount of critical attention has been paid to the cultural politics of space in postcolonial Singapore. A concerted effort to build a new city almost from scratch after independence involved the erasure of much of the urban and rural

landscape of the colonial era,⁵⁹ and with it much of Singapore's material history and cultural memory. At the heart of this effort was the postcolonial state's modernising ethos. James Donald, in observing that the "unsentimental pragmatism with which Singapore has been rebuilt recall[s] Le Corbusier at his most ruthlessly visionary" (p. 175), captures the modernist spirit of this national project. Rajeev Patke gets to the crux of the matter in identifying a kind of utopian impulse underpinning these urban transformations:

It has become almost a cliché – without becoming any less a truism – that Singapore is a site for energies whose propulsion is deeply ambivalent between the creative and the destructive. This applies, in varying degrees, to all contemporary cities [...] What makes Singapore distinctive in this context is [...] the single-minded eagerness to technologize with which the state has reacted to its belated entry into the post-Enlightenment project of modernity. Invoking the compulsion to modernize, the New incessantly and obsessively makes room for itself in place of the Old.⁶⁰

One major concern generated by this futurist stance on nation-building was over a perceived collective amnesia, a sense that the Singaporean identity was without solid foundations. The rationalisation of this modernising impulse in the form of state urban planning, according to Robert Powell, resulted in the erasure of cultural memory through an almost wholesale remaking of the Singapore landscape.⁶¹ A similar argument is adduced by Rem Koolhaas in his influential essay on urban Singapore, where the destruction of colonial-era slums and the pervasiveness of new public housing projects in their place is seen as leading to a societal amnesia, or a condition Koolhaas terms *tabula rasa*.⁶²

⁵⁹ See C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 302-4, for an overview of these developments.

⁶⁰ Rajeev Patke, "To Frame a City: The Singaporean Poet in the Postmodern City", in *Postmodern Singapore*, ed. William S.W. Lim (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2002), pp. 106-117 (pp. 110-11).

⁶¹ Robert Powell, "Fragments of a Postmodern Landscape", in *Postmodern Singapore*, ed. William S.W. Lim (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2002), pp. 84-105 (p. 87).

⁶² Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis . . . or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa", in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL*, ed. Jennifer Sigler (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995).

Such has been Singapore's postcolonial engagement with urban space. Its writers, on the other hand, have frequently lamented the ruthlessness of the city's redevelopment, and sought to preserve a memory of its urban history. Notably, they often address these concerns in terms of the spatiocultural legacies of colonialism. The speed of urban transformation and the transience of place have long found poetic expression in the work of writers like Edwin Thumboo, Robert Yeo, and Arthur Yap, as well as in novels like Koh Buck Song's *Bugis Street* (1994).⁶³ The sardonic title of one of Yap's well-known poems, "there is no future in nostalgia", is a pointed distillation of the state's futurist approach to urban space in Singapore.⁶⁴ Recent writing sustains these concerns, but globalisation, particularly in its neoliberal guise, has emerged as a central theme for postcolonial Singapore writers dealing with both perspectives on, and transformations of, the city.

The central problematic addressed by the Singapore writers examined in this section, then, is the spatial tension between the old (the colonial urban legacy) and the new (global capitalist/virtual space) forms of globalised Singapore place. Daren Shiau, Lee Tzu Pheng and Hwee Hwee Tan evince a nostalgia for an older (but still extant) sense of the city's globality, one rooted in the colonial legacy and its inscription upon the city. Lee and Tan further juxtapose their nostalgia with a critique of the more recent transformations wrought by capitalist globalisation. Their work collectively subverts established paradigms of postcolonial thinking by setting up capitalist globalisation as the ideological adversary of the postcolonial, rather than as the latter's successor or contemporary bedfellow. These writers endorse the postcolonial dimension of place as an integral part of Singaporean spatial identity, one

⁶³ See Arthur Yap, *The Space of City Trees: Selected Poems*, intro. Anne Brewster (London: Skoob Books, 2000); Robert Yeo, *Leaving Home, Mother: Selected Poems* (Singapore: Angsana Books, 1999); Edwin Thumboo, *A Third Map: New and Selected Poems* (Singapore: UniPress, 1993); and Koh Buck Song, *Bugis Street: The Novel* (Singapore: Pacific Theatricals, 1994).

⁶⁴ Yap, *The Space of City Trees*, p. 59.

that is being undermined by the transformations of place by capitalist globalisation. In contrast, Heng Siok Tian's poetry explores both (post)colonial and contemporary capitalist forms of globalisation and their influence on place in Singapore. Declining to favour one over the other, Heng addresses each kind of globalisation in turn, viewing them as distinctive modalities of spatial experience. But in "City-girl's Tribute" she effects a rapprochement between the colonial spatial legacy and capitalist globalisation's spatial transformations, whereby the capitalist space of flows is recast as a substantive horizon for the contemporary extension of Singapore's postcolonial spatial identity. The Singapore writing, then, enacts a tension between an unusual problematic of postcolonial place in a global city and the utopian possibilities enabled by an engagement with globalised electronic reality.

Through his exploration of colonial remnants such as place names and monuments in his poem "The Patterns of Departure", Daren Shiau evokes a sense of how the colonial legacy can still lay claim to being an integral part of Singapore's place identity. Singapore's global sense of place is nostalgically rendered through London and Britain's spatiohistorical imprint upon Singapore. From the initial perspective of a tourist or visitor to London, Shiau proceeds to find traces of Singapore, in the form of place or street names, in London and Britain at large, names which of course signify London and Britain's earlier cultural and social inscription upon Singapore space:

the rest of the day, i slid along the tube,
matching, catching names

we have a Knightsbridge too:
off the Tampines Expressway, it passes
Lancaster Gate to Regent Street
crossing distances; and even a Harrods,
an epilogue in later years –
deeper inland, near Serangoon are
Essex, Dorset and Bristol;

York is near Alexandra Hospital
i know because i spent an evening
with her in Cornwall, looking at
the deserted black-and-white bunks
of British troops
and teasing forget-me-nots⁶⁵

Part of the poetic effect here is to cause the reader to lose absolute certainty about which city is being described. So disorientingly do the names overlap in their geographical reference that, even given the diametrical positions the two cities occupy on the spectrum of postcolonial geography, one can temporarily lose the clarity of one's sense of location in the poem.⁶⁶ The poet sustains the concern with the colonial legacy through the image of abandoned colonial barracks, devoid of imperialist habitation but still bearing historical traces that, though overgrown, are overgrown suggestively with "forget-me-nots".

While Shiau does not claim any degree of homogenisation between London and Singapore, the spatial legacy of London on culture in Singapore is quite apparent, as in his two opening stanzas:

my plane booked for seven-thirty: I set out to
absorb the dregs of a city i knew vicariously –
seeking traces of images,
nuances and humour which occupy
my annexed mind and
colonised tongue

weaned on beano, dandy and enid blyton,
and later, yes, prime minister,
yes, quite
(p. 21)

London is never explicitly named in the poem, but it looms large in the poet's cultural psyche. It is a city the poet "knew vicariously", through a process of cultural

⁶⁵ Daren V.L. Shiau, *Peninsular: Archipelagos and Other Islands* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2000), pp. 21-22.

⁶⁶ The historical truth of this is corroborated by Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh in their observation that the significant Eurasian population that lived in the area around Bristol, Essex and Dorset Roads referred to the area as "'Little England'." See Savage and Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), p. 63.

transmission clearly underwritten by colonial history. But the linguistic inheritance is here reinforced by the colonial imprint on the landscape, rendered aptly by Shiao in a linguistic trope when he posits the impossibility of discarding the colonial heritage when faced with its material inscription: “how could i ignore it, when they left edifices / like notes scribbled in a borrowed book; / penned and forgotten” (p. 21). He draws on his familiarity with English culture in his positive assessment of colonial buildings like “Fullerton Building and Raffles Hotel”, which are “beautiful as a verse by Keats” (p. 21). The cultural and spatial bequests of the British are inextricably linked; Shiao presents them as mutually reinforcing elements of a postcolonial milieu and culture.

Shiao’s feeling of “crossing distances” (p. 22), brought on by recognising Singapore place names in London, imaginatively overlays Singapore with a transnational London spatial presence. Read in this way, Singapore space is clearly a palimpsest – in the sense that Massey has it – of the local and a (post)colonial (global) outside. But “The Patterns of Departure”, in focusing solely on the colonial dimension, affords a limited (if global) perspective on Singapore space and alludes to an older paradigm of globalisation. Lee Tzu Pheng’s “Amoy Street Houses” addresses this older sense of the global in respect of urbanisation’s threat to the dwellings – and therefore the collective memories – of old Chinese immigrant communities. The old houses, represented in the poem as repositories of history and memory, are threatened with effacement by modern urbanisation. In a telling image, Lee alludes to the inexorable forces of global capital and their emergent dominance of material history. The old houses “huddle together / in the shadow of the giant / bank tower”,⁶⁷ as if in deference to the transformative menace of capitalistic interests. Lee’s sense of

⁶⁷ Lee Tzu Pheng, “Amoy Street Houses”, in *No Other City: The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry*, eds. Alvin Pang and Aaron Lee (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2000), p. 52.

resignation is palpable in her ironic observation that the loss of these houses represents a challenge to the continuing existence of certain old cultures in Singapore: “No matter that lingering dialects / are drowned by the wrecking team’s / levelling din two streets away” (p. 53). Her elegy for the impending demise of the houses laments the multiple immigrant and colonial legacies and histories whose spatial representations are threatened with effacement; she mourns the potential loss of both the “letters from China yellowing / in the tea-chest under the ancestral altar” and “the photographs gathering nostalgic bloom / in the Huntley & Palmer’s *Assorted Variety* tin” (p. 53). The poem thus adumbrates a sense of how the nature and characteristics of place and the cultures that inhabit it have been transformed according to the logic of global capital. To this extent, and in this narrow spatial context, Lee gives imaginative form to Harvey’s theory that transformations of place are determined largely by global capital. A particular place in Singapore is here understood as a palimpsest of history and culture that has been obscured or disavowed by the instrumental needs of the present.

A similar sentiment underpins the assessment made of the Singapore skyline by Mei, one of the Singaporean protagonists in Hwee Hwee Tan’s *Foreign Bodies* (1997). Her musings on place in contemporary Singapore constitute a direct critique of the officially sanctioned transformation of parts of the cityscape into a deliberately exoticised, tourist-oriented destination:

To be fair, there is something exotic about Singapore. The only problem is it’s all manufactured by the Tourist Board. They bulldozed all the old colonial, Peranakan shop houses to promote commerce and maintain cleanliness. Then they built new replicas of the condemned buildings, so you’ve got all this historical stuff that’s so quaint, just like in the olden days, but with all the dirty and dangerous bits taken out. But a house that looks like it was built in the age of Raffles, only it’s shinier than a hot waxed Ferrari and reeks of fresh paint – it’s just not the same.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Hwee Hwee Tan, *Foreign Bodies* [1997] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p. 136.

Singapore, on this interpretation, makes a strategic play for a share of the global tourist dollar by remaking itself as a postmodern copy of the old colonial city. But Mei's observation that "it's just not the same" suggests that the postmodern quality of Singapore is flawed; its attempt at engineering exoticism ironically destroys any genuine exoticism that the city might have had. The whole idea of the exotic, of course, is in the Asian context an Orientalist one, pandering to stereotypical Western notions of the postcolonial Asian urban landscape; Mei's characterisation of the exotic nature of the city thus belongs to a colonialist frame of thought. In trying to simultaneously modernise and satisfy Orientalist fantasies, Singapore, according to Mei's assessment, fails to hide its own schizophrenic artificiality; it "is like Disney World minus the giant rodents and the fun" (p. 137).

For Mei the colonial legacy is central to Singapore's ontology, a primary constituent of its reality that has been perverted by the logic of global capital. Her reference to "the age of Raffles" calls to mind a real-life instance of the replication of colonial urbanism. The famous Raffles Hotel, named after Singapore's colonial founder and opened in 1887, was extended as part of a refurbishment project completed in 1991. The new section, built in the style of the original hotel and now indistinguishable from the original, further complicates Mei's repudiation of colonial replicas, since the new Raffles Hotel blurs the boundaries between colonial authenticity and simulacrum. For Robert Powell, the hotel's extension has resulted in the distortion of history and "a collective amnesia" (Powell, "Fragments", p. 90). Place in Singapore is thus confusingly overdetermined by the competing discourses of global capital and colonial authenticity.

Shiau, Lee and Tan collectively acknowledge the erasures and transformations wrought by globalisation on place while lamenting the loss of colonial urban history

and memory. Lee and Tan, in particular, evince a sense of nostalgia for the colonial urbanism that they fear is disappearing in the face of neoliberal global forces. They corroborate, in other words, Harvey's claim that capitalist globalisation has a profound effect on place identities. But his suggestion that globalisation has made place more important than before takes on a different slant for these Singapore writers, insofar as their concern is with the preservation of historical spatial forms. Writing from the perspective of nostalgia over a postcolonial sense of place that is being lamentably effaced, they embrace Singapore's postcolonial urban history and pit it against what they see as the culturally debilitating influence of global capitalism's spatial transformations. For these nostalgists the colonial spatial legacy is a valued aspect of Singapore's place identity that is under threat from neoliberal global forces; in their work, postcoloniality designates the fundamental Singaporean spatiohistorical condition and a form of cultural ballast against the disorientations generated by the impact of global capitalism upon place.

This position, markedly against the grain of conventional postcolonial critique, is in keeping with Singapore's roots as a British colonial construct. Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, in recognising "Singapore's intrinsically Western parentage",⁶⁹ testify to the relatively substantive legitimacy of the Western legacy in Singapore. This has much to do with the nebulous precolonial history of the island, such that the colonial fulfills the role of the historically authentic.⁷⁰ This legitimacy has survived independence

⁶⁹ Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, "The Singapore Way of Multiculturalism: Western Concepts/Asian Cultures", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995), pp. 65-89 (p. 72).

⁷⁰ "Practically nothing certain", Albert Lau declares, "is known about the Singapore past before 1819 [the year Singapore was founded as a British colony] and the little that can be known must be based on textual references which are, unfortunately, difficult to interpret." See Albert Lau, "The National Past and the Writing of the History of Singapore", in *Imagining Singapore*, eds. Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir and Tong Chee Kiong (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), pp. 46-68 (p. 55).

from Britain; the founding father of independent Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, provides a summary account of local sentiment:

What made Singapore different in the 1960s from most other countries of Southeast Asia was that she had no xenophobic hangover from colonialism. The statue of the founder of Singapore, Sir Stamford Raffles, still stands in the heart of the city to remind Singaporeans of his vision in 1819 of Singapore becoming, on the basis of free competition, the emporium of the East, on the route between India and China. There were then 120 people on the island. They lived by fishing. Within five years of its founding, there were 5,000 traders – British, Arabs, Chinese, Indians, and others drawn in by this principle of free and equal competition, regardless of race, language, or religion.⁷¹

It is interesting to note, against this discursive backdrop, the Singapore government's recently inaugurated project to turn Singapore into a leading global "Renaissance City",⁷² a plan that includes the development and global marketing of the downtown civic and financial district and its historical and cultural sites, most of which, as Robbie Goh observes, are "heavily loaded with the history and symbolism of colonial culture".⁷³ The official, instrumental attempt to leverage on the perceived grandeur of the colonial inheritance in an effort to compete for global capital is clearly at odds with the ideal of the colonial as part of a substantive, complex Singaporean culture suggested in the literary examples above. Lee and Tan, in particular, decline to address the continuities between the incipient globalised character of colonial space and the global imperatives of contemporary capitalism. Their focus is on the urban legacy of the colonial, on Singapore as a colonially inscribed palimpsest, and their cultural investment in this global sense of place.

⁷¹ Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan (eds.), *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas* (Singapore: Times, 1998), p. 111.

⁷² The Renaissance City project has been part of public debate and government discourse for a number of years. See Ministry of Information, Communications and The Arts, *Renaissance City Report*, accessible online at http://app.mica.gov.sg/Portals/0/2_FinalRen.pdf [Accessed on 6th Sept 2009].

⁷³ Robbie B.H. Goh, *Contours of Culture: Space and Social Difference in Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), p. 51. See Goh, ch. 1, for a discussion of the Renaissance City Report.

At times Heng Siok Tian's poetry echoes this nostalgia, but her work also addresses the spatiocultural effects of capitalist and electronic globalisation. In stark contrast to Lee and Tan, Heng largely avoids repudiating neoliberal globalisation and its transformative influence on place. Instead she casts a cool eye over both Singapore's colonial spatial legacy and contemporary manifestations of global capitalism's impress upon place in the city. A number of her poems explore how the contemporary sense of place in Singapore is transformed, not merely by the power logic of capital, but by new communication technologies, virtual-global spaces and the speeding up of life through the global processes described by Harvey and Castells. These facets of the new globalised experience of place and culture are acute concerns for her, provoking a range of responses in her poetry that, collectively, have interesting implications for our understanding of how postcoloniality is transformed when refracted through the lens of globalisation.

In "Naming of Parts of a CBD, Shenton Way 1992", Heng acknowledges the multiple identities place can lay claim to in contemporary globalised Singapore, not least those enabled by the colonial urban residue and by contemporary capitalism. The poem portrays a polyvalent, multiplicitous global Singapore space that attempts to integrate the colonial inscription into a broader contemporary conception of the city's spatial identity. From the outset, the title of the poem registers the spectral presence of a colonial past in the street name "Shenton Way", a major thoroughfare through the CBD (Central Business District) named after a former British Governor of Singapore.⁷⁴ Unlike Shiau's "Patterns of Departure", however, Heng's poem testifies to the multiple place identities that can be invested in a single locale. A faint irony marks the final stanza, in which the poet admits that the built environment – rendered

⁷⁴ See Savage and Yeoh, p. 349.

in its multi-dimensionality in the poem – does not lend itself naturally to poetry, but rather to lists:

Lines, lies, lives are lease-worthy.
The business of verse
is not landed property.
A listing is in keeping
with Shenton Way lyrics.⁷⁵

The poem as a whole therefore sustains the structure of a list, albeit a poetic one. Its “named” parts are not merely the physical locations that make up the CBD; Heng presents a schematic representation of different dimensions of the CBD’s reality – its human, physical and urban landscape alongside its historical, economic and social functions. Its present dominant function as a fast-paced centre of global financial activity appears to disavow, or at least elide, much of the colonial-historical layers that might still be retrieved through a syncretic view of the constituent elements of place. But for Heng these constituent elements form a fragmented experience: “one part healthy haste / one part haloed history”. Singapore’s colonial past remains in evidence, if spectrally; Heng perceives only “ghosts of john little / johnston bonham / robinson and company” (p. 64). The opening stanza, then, announces the poet’s intention for the poem to be at least partly recuperative of this spatial history and urban identity:

One part is streetly directional.
CBD is Shenton Way,
road names being
Cecil, Robinson, Cross,
Maxwell, Anson, Collyer.
(Some discreetly colonial.)
(p. 63)

This ironic parenthetical acknowledgement of the depth of the colonial imprint seems to the poet entirely divorced from the CBD as part of the capitalist space of flows:

⁷⁵ Heng Siok Tian, *Crossing the Chopsticks and Other Poems* (Singapore: UniPress, 1993), p. 65.

Hub of credit,
facilities,
facsimiles,
facile credibility.
(p. 64)

Each aspect of the CBD's ontology is afforded its own stanza in the poem. But the list structure – and character – of the CBD as rendered in the poem is deliberately artificial and fragmented. To adapt Castells to present purposes, one might suggest that Heng captures “a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics” (Castells, p. 459) – a diachronic, historically syncretic notion of place as palimpsest on the one hand, and a synchronic, ahistorical sense of place as a node in the flow of global capital on the other. The human modes of spatial habitation here feel as instrumental as the politics of urban planning, at odds with the diachronic sense of the CBD as historical palimpsest. The pragmatism that is the dominant spatial logic here means that the deep historical sense of the CBD is at best a “crumbled continuity” of “sepiaed stories” (p. 64).

Central to the contemporary Singaporean experience explored in Heng's poetry is the global sense of place that derives from the different kinds of networks suffusing Singapore space and society. “Sonnet to an Arrival: Changi Airtropolis 1992” captures a temporal disjuncture, a decoupling of Western cultural influence and the contemporary Singapore sphere. The irony bound up in the title stems from its dual meaning: the arrival refers not merely to the poet's ostensible arrival at the glittering local airport, but also references the city's success at connecting itself profitably to the global economy and therefore having “arrived” on the world scene:

Engineered fantasies (nothing airy)
is wizardry, winning streak, will – ingness;
taxiways ease economic esteem,
Raffles class, duty free ... bolster business.
(*Crossing*, p. 66)

The airport's "taxiways" function in the poem as spatial symbols of the global networks linking the city to the global economy. Singapore's space, embodied here by its airport and a reference to the national airline, is global capital made flesh, being the "engineered" result of economic pragmatism. "Raffles class", the national airline's business class, appears in the poem as the sole concession to cultural history by referencing Singapore's colonial founder. Even so, Raffles – a brand name with elite connotations in Singapore society – is used here to evoke the lifestyle of the jetsetting business elite, rather than as an engagement with colonial history.

Against the purely instrumental uses of air travel, the poem confronts the classical Greek myth of Icarus and emphasises the conceptual chasm between a view of air travel as facilitating global capital on the one hand, and as foundational narrative in Western culture on the other:

Airy aeons ago, t'was ancient dreamer
Icarus gave flight to aero-history.
Could he have surmised dual terminals
or today's Changi techno-sophistry?
(p. 66)

Heng's perspective is infused with a sense of debt to Western culture, quite unlike her portrait of an Asian modernity that, in its pragmatism, finds little room for acknowledging the Western dimension of its social ontology. Like many of the texts already examined, this poem highlights the disavowal of its Western component by a Singaporean modernity, and proffers a vision of place in Singapore as a deliberate response to the demands and promises of global capitalism.

A more recent piece, "Singing Urban", sees Heng's poetic focus shift toward the global space of flows, or the virtual space, that constitutes the locus of Singaporean capitalist identity. Heng continues to allude to Singapore as a space of global capital, but shifts focus to an understanding of Singaporean subjectivity as

constituted in, and through, the global network of electronic media and virtual spaces. The opening stanza of the first section registers the fact that, in terms of electronic and virtual connectivity, Singapore is one of the most thoroughly globalised cities around:

I am in my room on an island swift,
near an equator with beaches and tourists,
shops to surf, cybersurf or drift;
an e-commerce site for all to reach.⁷⁶

The lines shift from the poet's room, to the physical form of Singapore as an island, to an acknowledgement of its place (near the equator) in a larger world, to its global ubiquity as a virtual place accessible to, and thoroughly penetrated by, mobile capital and electronic networks. Contemporary Singapore space is, in this conception, an explicitly and simultaneously local and global site.

Heng goes on to posit a Singaporean subjectivity in terms of its insertion into the global arena of cyberspace, where one is free to assert one's identity in myriad forms. The globalised Singaporean subject, in other words, can be grasped in terms of what has been theorised – most prominently by Donna Haraway – as the cyborg.⁷⁷ The term refers to the “interrelationship and the increasingly murky boundaries between the human and nonhuman that we now experience in our dependence upon Web-based communication, controlled living environments, pace-makers, and even contact lenses.”⁷⁸ Thus Teng Qian Xi's rewriting of the Rapunzel story updates it for Singapore's wired generation, recognising that the physical limits of one's spatial reach can be transcended through cyberspace:

it is only three storeys down,
but my hair only reaches my shoulders
so I turn instead to the computer
and press the Get Mail button,

⁷⁶ Heng Siok Tian, *My City, My Canvas* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1999), p. 53.

⁷⁷ See, in particular, Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991) and *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

⁷⁸ Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 131.

stretching the capability of
an infinite braid of optic cables
trying to summon
you.
("Rapunzel Waiting", *No Other City*, p. 162)

Similarly, Heng's third stanza, by invoking the computer as a medium through which the individual becomes part of a virtual society, explores and asserts her own cyborg identity:

I click a screen for commands to revamp,
retrieve lost files, savour menus,
dithering for a software programme
to convert feelings into milieu.
(p. 53)

That one's "milieu" might be asserted in the virtual space of electronic media, rather than the material world of history and geography, suggests – against the grain of established stereotypes of Singaporean society – a freedom or an arbitrariness to globalised Singaporean culture. The fourth and fifth stanzas reflect something of this polyvalence:

At one webpage, I am a crayon bird
striking at winds across broad, benign skies.
At another, I am a silly girl
foraging among storage drawers.

I yearn to sail the seven seas, be lady pirate
in search of lovers and my holy grail,
be cleansed by stormy waters, be wise,
encrypt my tales that others might download.
(p. 53)

Cyberspace, therefore, might be conceived of as a spectral "layer" of Singapore space that mediates between the local and the global with a degree of immediacy that the experience of material place fails to provide.

One effect of this aspect of Singapore's spatiality is the ostensible decline in the impact of historicity and territoriality on culture. Alfian Sa'at, for example, bemoans the lack of purchase that geography and history have on Singapore's spatial

identity in the climactic final stanza of his belligerent poem “Singapore You Are Not My Country”: “I have lost a country to images, it is as simple as that. / Singapore you have a name on a map but no maps to your / name.”⁷⁹ The sense of identity and culture imbued in historical understandings of place gives way here to a seemingly deterritorialised, floating identity. Heng’s work does at times appear also to disregard the historical – in particular the postcolonial – facet of her culture. The respective claims of the virtual and material worlds present a dilemma involving two realities, a dilemma vividly demonstrated when her computer “crashes”:

Once I crashed headlong into blank hysteria,
a shattered screen sank into my wrist.
Do I go gentle into a good night with no rage?
Should I live a life dreaming and rebooting?
(p. 53)

The foregoing discussion of Heng’s poetry develops a perspective on Singaporean spatial identity as involving membership of the advanced capitalist world and its space of flows. In “Documentary”, she links this to the shifting position occupied by Singapore within global power geometries. Here, the television screen mediates an uneven relationship between the “postcolonial”, impoverished subject of the documentary and the poet. The poem calls attention to those segments of the globe that are marginalised from the experience of globality, and posits a spatial disjuncture between her own privileged, globalised location and the impoverished world captured in the documentary that is accessed merely as electronic image:

A screen’s keen frame showed
a sheet of scaled shrivelled skin
stretched thinly over your wrist.
I cringed at
the breakable brittle joint:
the hunger looked unfamiliar.
My own wrist:
fatly disguised,

⁷⁹ Alfian Sa’at, *One Fierce Hour* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1998), p. 41.

admittedly my hunger is of a different kind.

Should I only say
the unkind geography
is to be blamed?
If I offer my T.V. dinner,
you would offer your hunger.
The geography now
is the screen and I,
your scream, my witness
– both silent.
(*Crossing*, p. 57)

“A Documentary” obliquely gestures toward Singapore’s recent realignment within the geopolitical model of North-South relations.⁸⁰ Heng’s poem assumes a Northern or First World optic that attenuates any clear-cut distinctions between a postcolonised Singapore and the postimperial First World.

Heng perceives the screen as a space that catalyses a focus on geography and the specificities of place implied by the existence of an “unkind geography”. On one level, therefore, the poem challenges Joshua Meyrowitz’s claim that electronic media have left contemporary life with “no sense of place”.⁸¹ But the force of this challenge is attenuated by the detachment born of the virtual geography of the screen; the silent scream and silent witness on either side of the screen opposes helplessness to a blasé perspective. The poet, with a knowing irony, develops the virtuality of the encounter on two levels through the trope of the TV dinner: the offer of her TV dinner is a kind of silent witness, because it is little more than a televirtual, symbolic gesture requiring no actual effort; but the TV dinner is also a play on the modern trend of convenience, ease and speed, which dovetails with the poet’s admission of her own half-hearted commitment to aid. Seen in this light, Heng’s positioning in relation to cyberspace

⁸⁰ On the complications generated by the North-South distinction, see Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman and Máirtín Mac an Ghail, “Introduction: Whither ‘the Global’?”, in Brah et al. (eds.), *Global Futures*, pp. 3-26 (p. 15); for a more unequivocal view of the displacement of the Three Worlds model by the North-South axis, see my account of Arif Dirlik’s work in my Introduction.

⁸¹ Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

and Singapore's geopolitical status places her firmly outside the realm of the postcolonial as it is defined in developmental terms. In speaking on behalf of the undefined subject of the South, she knowingly (and thus ironically) reenacts something of the colonialist anthropological gaze.

Considering Joseba Gabilondo's idiosyncratic essay on "postcolonial cyborgs" usefully demonstrates how the global space/place divide has been understood in developmental terms, and how Heng's poem both blurs and clarifies the boundary between global capitalist space and postcolonial space:

As soon as the adjective 'postcolonial' is added to 'cyborg,' the latter shows its historical and geopolitical boundaries: there is no such thing/subject as a "postcolonial cyborg," because postcolonial subject positions are always left outside cyberspace [...] the postcolonial, subaltern subject position is also left outside of consumer culture by capitalism, thus signifying the exteriority of both cyberspace and consumer culture. [...] To put it bluntly, Africa only owns 1% of all the television sets in the world.⁸²

Gabilondo's argument sets up a clear distinction between postcoloniality and capitalist culture; postcolonial subjects, he argues here, are those excluded from the fruits of capitalism, consumerism and cyberspace.⁸³ Within this schema of global divisions, the term "postcolonial" appears to designate the subaltern classes relegated to the margins of the capitalist world. What he understands as cyberspace is an elitist space inhabited by non-postcolonials.⁸⁴ His critical perspective is limited, therefore, by an economistic and oddly ahistorical definition of the postcolonial that ignores the broader legacies of colonialism around the world. By working with a broader historical definition Heng, in common with Shiao, Lee, Tan and other Singapore writers, posits Singaporean subjects as exemplifying the ostensibly impossible

⁸² Joseba Gabilondo, "Postcolonial Cyborgs: Subjectivity in the Age of Cybernetic Reproduction", in Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook*, pp. 423-432 (p. 424).

⁸³ Gabilondo's definition of cyberspace goes beyond the Internet and the World Wide Web to include all aspects of human-technological imbrication. "Cyborg subjectivity", he writes, "stretches as far as capitalist individuals access the cyberspatial interface of the apparatus-continuum constituted by phones/modems/PCs/cable-television/cellular-phones/faxes/etc. of late capitalism" (p. 425).

⁸⁴ See Gabilondo, p. 426.

postcolonial cyborg, given that these writers retain a firm identification with the postcolonial but yet are full-fledged inhabitants of the Castellan, capitalist space of flows.

While Heng has addressed the Singaporean experience of place in terms of globalised space, as well as hinted at a nostalgia for the colonial spatial legacy that is shared with Shiau, Lee and Tan, her poetry examined above has not arrived at a useful rapprochement between the two positions. Unlike Lee and Tan, she is neither enamoured of postcolonial place nor critical of the imbrication of the capitalist space of flows with Singapore's spatial identity. In "City-girl's Tribute", however, she assays this rapprochement by fusing her postcolonial hybridity with her sense of Singaporean place as a prominent node in the global network society; the global possibilities enabled by this are layers that might be added, accretively, to the palimpsest of Singapore's spatial identity. The poem opens with the felt predicament of having simultaneously to negotiate an older tradition of hybrid cultural forms on the one hand, and one's positioning within the contemporary global network of virtual reality on the other. The poet admits that she is "still seeking modern wisdom / in modern myths" (*My City*, p. 25); reversing the archetypal association of modern life with electronic reality and wisdom with ancient myth, this reflects something of the disorientation born of the simultaneity of the postcolonial legacy and the ubiquitous pathways of virtual reality. In an essay discussing the writing of the poem, Heng draws attention to the way the structure of the poem is an embodiment of her themes. The form of the poem reflects her dual cultural inheritance: the first three stanzas are modelled on Tang quatrains (representing her Chinese origins and family background) while the fourth stanza is in the classic sonnet form of English literature (in which

Heng has been immersed through affinity and education).⁸⁵ Across these four stanzas the theme of hybridity looms large.

The poem was inspired by Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), and shares with the latter a conflation of literary traditions ("In a HDB-Room", p. 71). This duality reflects the cultural hybridity at the heart of Heng's identity, expressed in the third stanza through stereotypical images of Western and Chinese culture:

is it a wonder
I don't clearly hear
angels rejoicing
or sighing Chang-er?
(*My City*, p. 25)

The tensions of this cultural hybridity are echoed in the embedded sonnet, presented as different levels of consciousness:

Winged chariots, ancient seas, nymphs, sirens
I greet in print, dream in asian ethics
remain mute not knowing how to tongue them
when I wake.
(p. 25)

Again, she highlights the literary source of the Western half of her identity; the Asian aspect of that identity is more nebulous, almost inherited unconsciously rather than deliberately developed. Heng evinces, nonetheless, a firm sense of belonging at once to two cultural traditions. "City-girl's Tribute" celebrates the various traditions that constitute the totality of her cultural identity. This is signalled by the epigraph of the poem, a famous line from T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (Heng, *My City*, p. 25). Her declaration of debt to tradition, therefore, is itself an instance of an appeal to one of her cultural traditions.

⁸⁵ Heng Siok Tian, "In a HDB-Room With a View", in *Idea to Ideal: 12 Singapore Poets on the Writing of Their Poems*, ed. and intro. Felix Cheong (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2004), pp. 68-75 (p. 72).

A shift in cultural configurations and experience for the Singaporean subject is, however, also apparent in the narrative development of the poem. The postcolonial hybridity asserted in the first four stanzas is succeeded, in the final two stanzas, by a futurist sense of open spatial possibility. Condensing recent global history, the end of empire and developments in technology, the fifth stanza hints at the spatial reorganisation and time-space compression of the globe:

Meanwhile navigation sees
empires sink, islands rise,
train-traffic technologise,
ocean-air routes redesign.
(p. 26)

Building on this implied context, the sixth stanza is formed from words culled from the titles of significant Singaporean and Malaysian poetry collections.⁸⁶ The words generate something of a spatial poetic, alluding to the centrality of the spatial in the Singaporean imagination:

With my yin-ly pulse, I map prospect commonplace
while gazing still at next waves nearing horizons,
crossing peninsulas, jotting down lines somewhere-
bound, listening to lingering music on a brink.
(p. 26)

These lines are suggestive of movements beyond boundaries, of living on the edge of a deferred future or “prospect”. Heng’s “map” of the “commonplace” of Singapore serves as the solid ground from which the poet can explore global pathways. These new global possibilities can then be understood as new layers to be added to the complex unfolding of contemporary Singaporean culture.

⁸⁶ Heng writes: “The titles of the collections I refer to are *Pulse* by Wang Gungwu, *A Third Map* by Edwin Thumboo, *Prospect of a Drowning*, *The Next Wave* and *On the Brink of an Amen* by Lee Tzu Pheng, *Commonplace* and *Down the Line* by Arthur Yap, *Nearing a Horizon* by Ee Tiang Hong, *Crossing the Peninsula* by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Somewhere-Bound* by Boey Kim Cheng.” “In a HDB-Room”, p. 75. The inclusion of Malaysian texts here can be taken as a nod to the role of Malaysia in Singapore’s history and literature.

The globalisation of place in Heng's Singapore, therefore, offers the possibility of a syncretic vision of the postcolonial and the global, with the postcolonial existing in productive tension with the globalised element of Singaporean culture. In this sense her portrayal of the city crystallises the truth of what Robbie Goh – adapting Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to the postcolonial city – calls

the *chronotopia* – the space of the city which is also the site of layers of time, historical presences, and the experience of memories [...] simultaneously the physical embodiment of historical cultures, present developments and future goals and directions. The notion of the chronotope [...] is a particularly useful analytical tool for the postcolonial city which, despite its protestations and best efforts, never truly leaves behind its colonial past, nor truly wishes to. (*Contours of Culture*, p. 22)

The Singapore texts we have examined collectively, if unevenly, testify to the simultaneity of history, contemporary concerns, and futurist orientations that characterises Goh's *chronotopia*. The colonial legacy is cherished by these writers: there is little, if any, evidence of the politics of blame or postcolonial resentment that has animated much postcolonial literature and theory in general. The virtual spaces of globalisation at times displace the material place that is Singapore in the Singaporean literary imagination; the city in this guise exists within a global space of flows seemingly divorced from physical urban reality. When one considers the body of writing as a whole, however, a developing sense of the city as a globalised postcolonial *chronotopia* – most clearly sustained in Heng's poetry – emerges. The threat posed by global capitalism to colonial place in Singapore as perceived by the Singapore nostalgists represents an unusual spatial introversion rooted contradictorily in far-flung geographies, an introversion at odds with the extroverted spatial utopianism of globalised Singapore place in Heng's poetry. This tension bears an analogy with that identified in the London writing, although significant differences

also obtain between the two bodies of work. A comparative analysis of the question of place in these two urban literatures will be developed in the final section of this chapter, yielding a complex way of understanding place in postcolonial global city writing.

Place and Globalisation in the Postcolonial City

For the postcolonial writers of London and Singapore considered in this chapter, the experience of space and place in their respective cities takes on explicitly postcolonial as well as global dimensions. But the forms that “postcolonial” and “global” take in their writing are at times highly distinctive; the postcoloniality and globality of spatial experience in these postcolonial urban representations diverge from the ways in which these concepts are understood in much existing theory. These representations are properly spatial texts that go beyond simple explorations of power relations to delve into the complexities of postcolonial and globalised spatial experience. This complexity is borne out by the critical purchase of the theories of Massey, Castells and Harvey on my analyses of the London and Singapore texts.

The significance of globalising forces in these representations of the postcolonial spatial experience is unsurprising, given that these are representations of two of the most intensely globalised cities in the world. This global-cities focus enables a view of the spatial possibilities for postcolonials within circuits of advanced globalisation, rather than merely of the problems associated with place and the troubled legacies of colonial history. London and Singapore, at once parts of the global city network and on opposing ends of the geography of (post)colonial power relations, serve as comparative contexts that complicate both globalisation theories of homogenisation and deterritorialisation and theories that perceive the contemporary

link between globalisation and the postcolonial as defined solely by power relations between spatially-differentiated territories. While my comparative analysis of the writing of postcolonial global cities – one Western and postimperial, the other Asian – reveals that the postcolonial condition endures as a significant determinant of how writers perceive these cities, it also clarifies the contemporary spatial nuances that attend the postcolonial within the most globalised contexts and unsettles established notions of Western and non-Western forms of postcolonial power and space. I want therefore to end this chapter, first by examining how comparing the postcolonial London and Singapore writing presents alternative spatial ramifications to those of existing (and often totalising) theories of postcoloniality and globalisation, and then by outlining a new conceptual position made possible by this critical comparison.

The globalcentric critique of postcoloniality has certain implications for the concept of place, as we saw in the Introduction. Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in particular, downplay the spatial determination of world power relations and argue that these relations are now primarily shaped by deterritorialised capital and transnational class conflict. Geographic and territorial considerations are no longer regarded as important. Affluence, in their view, largely invalidates any subjective concern with the fraught legacy of empire and its attendant spatial politics of race, culture and nation. All of this putatively heralds the obsolescence of the postcolonial as a description of the world dispensation; by extension, the notions of postcolonial space and place have become obsolete.⁸⁷

The postcolonial writing of London and Singapore examined in this chapter represents both the complexity and continuing conceptual purchase of postcolonial spatiality within even the most advanced and globalised cities. On a general level, this

⁸⁷ This paragraph summarises the detailed discussion of their work in the Introduction.

already confounds the basic arguments of the globalcentric critics: both postcoloniality and the nature of place, the contemporary significance of which these critics have downplayed, persist as crucial facets of the experience of globalisation for these writers. More specifically, the writing considered here reflects the unevenness of the postcolonial's spatial imbrication with globalisation. Evaristo and Heng share an understanding of postcolonial place as something mediated through a largely positive global spatiality. Evaristo's affirmation of this spatial perspective takes the form of a rewarding globe-trotting exploration of postcolonial London's multiple geographies, while Heng's version of postcolonial place is asserted within global virtual spaces and networks of transnational flows. Both writers adopt an extroverted view of their city's global horizons; they undertake a conceptual renewal of postcolonial place through its global articulations, rather than suggesting its obsolescence. But while Heng recognises postcolonial place in Singapore to be a global historical palimpsest which can be reconceptualised in virtual space, Evaristo takes a deeply historical view of place in postcolonial London that ultimately enables Lara's global spatial perspective on her postcolonial identification with the city.

But the work of the other London and Singapore writers I consider in this chapter warns against any easy recourse to this kind of optimism. The Singapore nostalgists – all of whom write from positions of relative affluence – rather unusually set up postcolonial place as a valuable Singaporean cultural legacy under threat from neoliberal global forces. Smith yearns to see the postcoloniality of London – most attractively rendered in her novel in the image of the multicultural playground – as a positive expression of the city's global sense of place, but perceives that this is likely to emanate from postcolonial contestations over the meaning of place in London. The status of London and Singapore as global cities merely serves to place in stark relief

the sense in these texts that the inscription of the history of empire upon place continues to influence spatial experience even in thoroughly globalised contexts; indeed, these writers invoke postcolonial spatiality to define how the global is experienced. *White Teeth* affirms the postcolonial as a determining element in the spatial experience of globalisation by Smith's Asian and black Londoners; their presence in the city is in fact responsible for part of its globalisation. In contrast, the Singapore nostalgists discursively position their city's colonial spatial inheritance as a valued urban legacy, a view that has less to do with neocolonial ideology than with the unusual legitimacy and authenticity of the colonial in Singapore's history. Singapore has been cited by Ahmad as actually reflecting the obsolescence of the postcolonial, given that its erstwhile subaltern status as an ex-colonial possession and developing city has decisively been displaced by its more recent emergence as a thoroughly capitalist global city.⁸⁸ The nostalgists do not so much give the lie to Ahmad's observation as transpose the debate onto unfamiliar ground: rather than regard the postcolonial as a form of dominance, they cast it as a kind of spatial legacy that is set against the spatial hegemony of globalised capital. Insofar as Smith and the Singapore nostalgists perceive a discordant relationship between the postcolonial and the global in spatial terms, however, they assert the specific relevance of both concepts and their significance in shaping contemporary postcolonial experiences of the global city.

Robert Young continues to assert the contemporary conceptual significance of postcoloniality and globalisation as overlapping forces of international dominance. He argues that contemporary hegemony is exercised on a global scale, with the West still the dominant neocolonial force behind that hegemony. World power relations, in his

⁸⁸ See the discussion of Ahmad in the Introduction.

view, centre around the domination of the three continents of the South (Asia, Africa and Latin America) by the developed North; he terms this analysis of the global dispensation tricontinentalism. This theory is at once geographic and symbolic, given his qualifying observation of the human presence of the South within the geographic North that represents a major example of “the economic, cultural and diasporic imbrication of the north with the south.”⁸⁹ The South thus also represents a discursive political position: for Young, postcolonialism is an oppositional politics asserted by or in the name of the South. While not explicitly spatialised, this theory relies on an assumed homogeneous economic and political geography of the North and South respectively.⁹⁰

As prominent members of the global city network, London and Singapore are integral constituents of the dominant Northern sphere of global capitalism. Insofar as this logic holds the two cities are parts of a broadly homogeneous space that dominates the global economic landscape. The notion of the postcolonial, then, given its connotations of subalternity and resistance to hegemony, seems slightly awkward or anachronistic when used in the context of these cities. Furthermore, the postcolonial sphere of London is decidedly still a minority one, while Singapore’s history as an ex-imperial possession seems to recede into the background in light of its contemporary material development. Nonetheless the postcolonial Singapore and London writers in this chapter offer more complex ways of understanding how postcolonial space is internal to the North, and demand an alternative view of Robert Young’s theories on postcoloniality and globalisation.

White Teeth narrates the presence of the “South” in a Northern space, as evidenced by the novel’s focus on Bangladeshi and Caribbean diasporic subjects in

⁸⁹ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 8.

⁹⁰ This paragraph summarises the detailed discussion of Young’s work in the Introduction.

London. Smith therefore “enunciate[s]”,⁹¹ as Young would have it, the North-South divide within the North on a symbolic and discursive level. But this is a Southern presence that both asserts that subaltern identity and yearns to shed it in favour of becoming part of the North: contrast, for example, Samad’s nativist declarations against the putative cultural erosion threatened by his Western location with Magid and Irie’s infatuation with the Occidental and upper middle-class associations of the Chalfen family. Postcolonial London in Smith’s novel thus confounds Young’s easy assumption of Southern solidarity against Northern hegemony. Evaristo, on the other hand, explores London’s postcolonial spatiality as well as the geographies of the South that characterise that postcoloniality. In her travels through the South, however, Lara comes to recognise her London-wrought identity and her Northern optic that accentuates, for example, her sense of alterity in her paternal homeland of Nigeria. The air travel that allows her to explore her constituent cultural geographies is embodied by Heathrow, which, in serving as a central node in the global networks traversed by Lara, becomes a site in which North and South meld and are hybridised. Metonymically, then, Heathrow represents postcolonial London as a space that blurs the conceptual distinction between North and South in a framework that privileges complex spatial subjectivity over the politics of power and place.

Heng’s poetry shares something of Evaristo’s hybridised definition of postcolonial space in the global city. She combines a view of Singaporean spatial identity as an East-West hybrid with a decidedly Northern perspective on the world. There is in her poetry a marked absence of any animus toward the West and its historical expressions of global hegemony. “Documentary”, her most explicit affirmation of Singapore’s location within the global North, is also a sympathetic and

⁹¹ See Young, p. 4, and my discussion of this aspect of his work in the Introduction.

self-deprecating poem that declares a degree of solidarity, albeit of a detached kind, with the Southern subject. She addresses Singapore's spatial overdetermination by elements of the East, West and North as the ordinary, quotidian condition of the city-state, rather than any indication of its positioning within the global power dispensation. The Singapore nostalgists, by adopting the city's colonial and Asian urban legacy as a valued inheritance to be preserved against global capitalism's destructive potential, deny any local analogy between postcolonial and global power regimes. They disassociate themselves from hegemonic Northern forces while installing the West at the heart of their vision of Singapore's spatial identity. They make a firm distinction, in other words, between Singapore's Northern identity as a centre of global capital on the one hand, and the historical legitimacy and influence of the West on the city, on the other. Globalcentric claims for the dominance of capital everywhere, even over the West, seem to be partly corroborated here. But these nostalgists are less concerned with the question of the continuing prominence of the West within global hegemony than with its cultural significance and coherence for the Singaporean urban identity. The recourse to the spatial legacy of the colonising West in these writers' symbolic defiance of neoliberal globalisation thus unsettles Young's basic assertion that neocolonial and global power work in concert.

Young's theory represents, of course, his general understanding of contemporary world power relations, and unsurprisingly does not capture the complexities of individual cities and social formations in their multifarious engagements with globalisation and other forms of hegemony. Nonetheless, the texts discussed in this chapter lay bare the need to register postcoloniality in global cities, not simply as a subject position within one of globalisation's centres, but as a spatial modality that potentially recasts globalisation as the spatial logic of the postcolonial

North even as it foregrounds postcolonial place as a buttress against neoliberal globalisation's destructive potential.

These London and Singapore writers, then, reveal how the spatial implications of existing theories of postcoloniality and globalisation are challenged and modified through a global-cities perspective that addresses the most globalised contexts while remaining fully cognisant of the diversity of postcolonial place and spatial experience within such thoroughly global sites. But my comparative analysis of these writers also develops a distinctive way of understanding the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation. I will make two sets of critical comparisons here, one pairing the work of Evaristo and Heng, the other considering Smith and the Singapore nostalgists. The two sets of writers respectively evince what one might term extroverted and introverted postcolonial perspectives on the relationship of place to globalisation and the postcolonial. Building on the comparative insights above, I locate the complexity of the postcolonial spatial experience in global cities within the interplay between an introverted, conflictual view of postcolonial place on the one hand, and an extroverted utopics of postcolonial place on the other.

Considered together, the work of Evaristo and Heng presents a literary prospectus on the global possibilities and implications of an extroverted view of postcolonial place in the global city. They portray their cities in the broadest conceptual terms, taking the globe as the outer limit of their spatiocultural parameters. Focusing on their representations of their cities' airports as a hinge around which to uncover how postcolonial place is reconceived in their work suggests a liberating access to the global geographies that make up the local. Insofar as a global city's airport serves as a site that facilitates the global flows of people and capital associated with such urban centres, it might be regarded as a spatial metonym for the global city

itself. Heng's "Sonnet to an Arrival" usefully historicises what would otherwise be an ahistorical, neoliberal "non-place".⁹² She recuperates one historical and cultural dimension of Singapore's airport by invoking the Greek myth of Icarus and through her recourse to the traditional sonnet form. These Western archetypes allude to Singapore's roots as a Western construction, and signal Heng's and the nostalgists' shared endorsement of the city's colonial spatiality. Unlike the nostalgists, however, she bears comparatively little animus toward the capitalist associations of the airport, choosing instead to emphasise how the cultural history underpinning this globalised place needs to be laid bare alongside its neoliberal narrative.

Heng's culturalist historicisation of a Singaporean global site, however, is limited by its narrow attention to its Western significations. Evaristo's invocation of Heathrow as a spatial metonym, both for London as a global city and for the symbolic association of postcolonial London with its globally-dispersed historical geographies, represents a more substantive and liberatingly globalised view. The final lines of *Lara*, that foreground Heathrow as the point of departure and return for Lara's transnational traversals of her geographical roots, also cast the airport as an embodiment of her globalised future. By extension, London is the site which enables Evaristo's perspectival manoeuvre of reconceptualising Lara's postcolonial spatial roots as her claim to the myriad possibilities of global space. Evoking Harvey's notion of time-space compression, Heathrow becomes at once a synecdoche for (postcolonial) London and for the world that is available both within and from the city. It is Evaristo, then, who more effectively identifies the progressive potential of the material spaces of the global city for postcolonials, even in the face of social pressures not faced by Singapore's postcolonial subjects. Heng, however, is

⁹² See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

distinctive among the writers discussed in this chapter in her attention to the most recent modalities of global spatiality involving electronic or virtual reality. By discursively melding postcolonial Singapore's sense of place with the networked space of flows described by Castells, particularly in "Singing Urban" and "City-girl's Tribute", she offers perhaps the most radical view of the postcolonial inhabitation of global space.

The spatial utopianism inherent in Evaristo and Heng's visions of postcolonial-cum-global place in the global city, however, is markedly absent in Smith's novel and the work of the Singapore nostalgists. By drawing attention to potential urban pathologies of globalisation, these latter writers confront the survival of postcolonial space within global cities, and temper the extroverted global idealism of the former. In Smith's London, the problematic is rooted in the social repudiation of the postcolonial presence by localised resistance to its unwelcome globalising influence, as well as the reluctance of some London postcolonials to embrace the postimperial city as their own. The unfulfilled liberatory promise of postcolonial London's globality yields to a conflation of this globality with the conflict over social space that is a result of the postcolonial presence. The nature of this globality is resolutely shaped by the postcoloniality of Smith's city. Singapore's nostalgists, on the other hand, see postcolonial place simply as a valued local legacy to be preserved against the urban manifestations of global capital. In this sense they can be said to introduce a new paradigm within debates about globalisation and postcoloniality, one that is both radical in the context of established postcolonial thought and conservative in its sentiments. This is in stark contrast to *White Teeth*, which exudes a yearning to transcend postcolonial tensions even as it concedes that these tensions are resilient and enduring. These writers, then, establish more introverted views of postcolonial

place within postcolonial global cities and focus on the internal problematics as much as the global possibilities of place.

The comparative analysis of representations of place in postcolonial London and Singapore opens up a discursive space for considering the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation in global cities in terms of the tension between the problematics of place and spatial utopianism. While global-city writers do not necessarily have a monopoly on this, it is arguably global cities that most meaningfully inspire utopian and geographically extroverted work on urban space insofar as their material spaces embody these characteristics. It is difficult, after all, to associate Kinshasa (or even Coventry) with a utopian global imaginary. But even the spatial predicaments wrought by globalisation are less evident in non-global cities, which have not been directly troubled so much as marginalised by global forces.⁹³ London and Singapore writers, in contrast, flag up the pronounced negative and positive spatial aspects of globalisation and postcoloniality in global cities, and suggest that places in these contexts are as much about their sobering internal dynamics as about their globally dispersed links and networks. They testify to the postcolonial paradigm's purchase within Northern space. While this is at times a manifestation of the South in the North through migration (as in Smith's novel), it is more frequently an instance of postcolonial subjects shedding the logic of uneven development and subalternity inherent in much of established postcolonial theory, and inhabiting a new kind of space. This is explored in the work of Evaristo and the Singapore writers as an accretive space of colonial history, postcolonial urban

⁹³ Brenda Yeoh observes that the term "fourth-world cities" has been used to label those cities excluded from global capitalist flows. While only cities like Kinshasa might answer to this name, global cities distinguish themselves from "fourth-world" as well as less-globalised urban centres within the North. See Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "Global/Globalizing Cities", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1999), pp. 607-616 (p. 608).

predicaments and pleasures, and a utopian view of a globalised future within global cities.

Within this shared conceptual framework, however, the London and Singapore texts offer important diverging insights. Even between global cities that share dominant capitalist spatial features, the politics of postcolonial relations can often be markedly different. Postcoloniality in London is decidedly still a minority subject position; its spatiality continues, as Smith quite effectively reminds us, to be produced by ex-colonial subjects. The uneven effects of the postcolonial presence within representations of the Western, postimperial global city unsurprisingly rehearses the discordance and assymetry of the colonial encounter. One measure of the purchase of the postcolonial on London's literary space is evident in how influential it remains in defining the globality, not merely of postcolonial London, but of the city at large, in both sobering and affirmatory ways. For the Singapore nostalgists, however, the spatial problematic of the postcolonial involves the threat of the global in its neoliberal guise. The postcolonial represents a troubling spatial element of the city only because globalisation threatens to destroy it. Britain's urban legacy in Singapore, then, is part of the spatial normativity of the city. The continuity of the colonial encounter upon Singapore space, rather than rehearsing conflictual and assymetrical relationships, reflects the internal coherence of imperial urbanism's presence. This coherence is sustained in Heng's poetry, but woven into a rapprochement between postcolonial and global capitalist space. What this chapter ultimately achieves, then, is an understanding of the degree to which the postcolonial-cum-global politics of place in Western and non-Western global cities both dovetail and diverge, in a cautionary as well as utopian fashion.

CHAPTER 3: GLOBAL CITIES, POSTCOLONIALITY AND THE NATION

It has been widely observed that Western empire was in a fundamental sense a far-flung projection of nation-state influence. Ashcroft et al., for example, define European imperialism as “an extension into the wider world of the ideology of a ‘national’ formation based on the unifying signifiers of language and race.”¹ This observation is echoed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for whom Western empire “was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries.”² Masao Miyoshi, however, inverts this understanding somewhat by suggesting that “the gradual ascendancy of the nation-state around 1800 in the West was a function of colonialism.”³ He links colonialism with the metropolitan bourgeoisie’s increasing demand for markets: such class interests were concealed, he argues, behind the ideological and civilisational veil of colonialist discourse.⁴ “In the very idea of the nation-state,” he writes, “the colonialists found a politicoeconomical as well as moral-mythical foundation on which to build their policy and apology” (p. 732). Miyoshi’s view chimes with Timothy Brennan’s assertion that the concept of the nation in imperial Europe “flourished in the soil of foreign conquest”; much like Miyoshi, Brennan links the rise of the Western nation-state to the emergence of colonial markets.⁵ This modern conception of the nation-state also informed anti-colonial movements everywhere. While anti-colonial nationalist movements have sometimes been characterised as a “derivative discourse” that models itself after the Western nation-state form, more subtle critics suggest that

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 153.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* [2000] (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), xii.

³ Masao Miyoshi, “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1993), pp. 726-751 (p. 731).

⁴ See Miyoshi, pp. 731-2.

⁵ Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form”, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 44-70 (p. 59).

the former both borrows and transforms the Western notion of the nation-state. Partha Chatterjee, for example, whose influential study popularised the term “derivative discourse” in the context of (post)colonial nationalism, ironically argues in the same work for a more complex view of anti-colonial nationalism that acknowledges both its similarities and differences from the Western model.⁶ The general upshot of all this, however, is a sense that the history of colonial encounters and their aftermath has in many ways been shaped in relation to the concept of the nation-state.

Recent theoretical discourses on the link between postcoloniality and globalisation have addressed the nation-state as a central concern. Many theorists argue that globalisation has rendered the idea of the postcolonial obsolete, as my account in the Introduction makes abundantly clear; one major consequence of this has been the widely shared sense that the nation-state has, in tandem with the postcolonial, become increasingly irrelevant with globalisation’s advance. Others take a more circumspect view, arguing that the nation-state and global forces intersect in complex ways.⁷ By comparing literary treatments of the nation concept in postcolonial London and Singapore, I want to consider how a global-cities perspective on the idea of the nation under globalisation for postcolonials transforms these existing theoretical positions. How far and in what respects do the London and Singapore writers under consideration in this chapter suggest an alternative paradigm for understanding these issues?

The writers I address below are in general agreement on their shared opposition to the unreconstructed diasporic nativisms and reterritorialised transnational fundamentalisms they locate in contemporary postcolonial London and Singapore. Both Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003) and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*

⁶ See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* [1986] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁷ I examine these theories in some detail below.

(2000) present these subject positions as dysfunctional modes of inhabiting postcolonial London. Suchen Christine Lim's portrait of Singapore in *Fistful of Colours* (1993), on the other hand, recognises such identities to be firmly entrenched within mainstream Singapore society but subjects them to an exhaustive repudiation. To a lesser extent, and somewhat equivocally, Catherine Lim in *Following the Wrong God Home* (2001) shares this perspective on Singapore. The London and Singapore writers diverge in what they endorse as desirable strategies for engaging with the intersecting issues of nation and globalisation. Ali and Smith advocate the need for postcolonial Londoners to focus on locality, on the everyday realities of London, and for national identification; they sustain, in other words, an attention to postcolonial integration and the postcolonial involvement in British national introspection. The Singapore writers, in contrast, champion an extroverted view in delineating national boundaries. Suchen Lim endorses a more outward-looking and global cultural and ethnic conception of the nation. Catherine Lim does the same, albeit in a muted fashion; in her novel, Singapore's official fixation with both global capitalism and conservative Asian values resolves itself into a kind of ideological standoff, while the Western presence is represented as a salutary counterpoint to Asian conservatism. All these elements come together in a coherent fashion in Edwin Thumboo's recent poetry: his celebratory vision of the nation encompasses in a non-conflictual way both global capitalist modernity and cultural and ethnic globality, in the process resolving the problematics of nation and globalisation as they are played out in Suchen Lim and Catherine Lim's work. My examination of representations of London and Singapore below thus reflects an unevenness in how globalisation is both rejected and embraced in postcolonial negotiations with the nation across the most globalised contexts.

In the next section of this chapter I examine a range of definitions of the concepts of nation and nation-state in order to facilitate the literary discussions that follow. I go on to describe specific theories of how the impact of globalisation on postcoloniality influences the conceptual purchase of national cultures and nation-states; my discussion of London and Singapore writing below is intended to yield comparative insights that transform these theories and offer alternative ways of thinking through the relationship between nation, postcoloniality and globalisation. These insights are explored in the final section of the chapter.

Nation, Postcoloniality, Globalisation

In the Introduction I acknowledged to some degree how the idea of the nation and the role of the nation-state in contemporary world relations have been interrogated and contested within the postcoloniality/globalisation debate. This chapter takes up the concepts of nation and nation-state as its primary focus, and considers their contemporary conceptual purchase from a global-cities perspective. To this end, I offer in this section a detailed account of the major pronouncements on the nation-state within the theoretical discourse on postcoloniality and globalisation. But I will first provide a brief outline of a range of existing definitions of the concepts of nation and nation-state: while there is considerable disagreement among theorists on how to define these concepts, a sense of their conceptual possibilities is crucial for understanding the ways in which they have been critiqued and contested. Rather than insisting on any narrow definitions, I want to sustain a broad and flexible theoretical frame that can bear the weight of the fraught interplay of these concepts within debates on postcoloniality and globalisation and within the postcolonial literary texts of the two global cities under scrutiny here.

Edward Said's definition of nationalism suggests some of the fundamental elements of the concept of the nation. Nationalism, he writes, is "an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage".⁸ Implicit in this understanding is a conceptual view of the nation as the intersection of a shared territory and an historic culture. This view forms the basis of most theoretical formulations of the nation concept. It leaves out, however, the way in which "nation" has been taken up as an inclusive term for both nation and nation-state. Brennan comments on how this slippage has been exploited by nationalists keen to justify the nation as a political formation with deep historical roots:

As for the 'nation', it is both historically determined and general. As a term, it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the '*natio*' – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging. The distinction is often obscured by nationalists who seek to place their own country in an 'immemorial past' where its arbitrariness cannot be questioned. (Brennan, p. 45)

This nationalist tendency to conflate nation with nation-state will impinge quite significantly upon my discussion of postcolonial London and Singapore literature below. For now, it remains necessary to examine some of the notable ways in which the two terms have been distinguished, not least to enable a substantive consideration of what is both lost and achieved in conflating them.

Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an "imagined community" is widely cited within postcolonial studies and beyond. His basic definition of the nation is "an imagined political community", one that is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". It is "imagined" in the sense that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of

⁸ Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile", in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 173-86 (p. 176).

them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁹ It is imagined as “limited” because all nations have “finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.” The element of “community” inherent in this imagined construct works to generate a sense of the nation “as a deep, horizontal comradeship” in the face of “the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each” (p. 7).

In its basic arguments Anderson’s theory of the nation usefully identifies the tendency of the concept of nation to elide specific differences in favour of an often indeterminate commonality. For Anthony D. Smith, arguably the foremost scholar of nation and nationalism, the nation must instead be understood in narrower terms of specificity. His definitions of nation, state and ethnic community have a schematic clarity that eludes real-world invocations of the idea of the nation and nation-state. Nonetheless his work provides clear points of departure from which to examine real-world national complexities. He defines the nation as ““a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members’.”¹⁰ Subtly distinguished from the nation is his notion of the ethnic community, or *ethnie*, which is ““a named human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture, and a measure of solidarity, at least among the elites’” (Smith, p.13). Much like the postcolonial concept of diaspora, then, the concept of ethnic community acknowledges the possibility of cultural and historical links between globally-dispersed groups of people. In contrast, the state for Anderson is a primarily political

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev.ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

¹⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2001), p. 13.

formation, “a set of autonomous institutions, differentiated from other institutions, possessing a legitimate monopoly of coercion and extraction in a given territory” (p. 12).

Real-world recourse to these terms often conflates their meanings or results in complex imbrications; the concept of diaspora, for example, cannot usefully be divorced from the idea of the nation.¹¹ Smith’s schema thus provides a framework that requires adaptation to specific contexts. To his credit, he warns against strict adherence to abstract definitions and what he calls “ideal-types”, suggesting that the distinction between nation and *ethnie* must in practice be handled carefully. He also concedes that even though his ideal-type definition of the nation implies a single ethnic national community, there exist polyethnic nations, in which different *ethnies* have been brought or forced together and have forged a common history.¹² In practice most nations are polyethnic, he observes, making the “nation-state”, where the state and nation are coextensive, extremely rare. Polyethnic states that attempt to forge a national identity or culture are better termed state-nations, which “aspire to nationhood and seek to turn themselves into unified (but not homogeneous) nations through measures of accommodation and integration” (p. 17). It must be observed that in popular discourse, the notion of the nation-state is broadly similar to what Smith prefers to call state-nations; in my discussions of postcolonial London and Singapore literature below, I will use the more familiar term nation-state in the sense in which Smith defines state-nations, especially since both contexts involve polyethnic communities within a postcolonial-cum-global framework.

¹¹ Simon Gikandi argues that the national “is indeed one of the enabling conditions of the trope of migration in the first place.” See Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2001), pp. 627-658 (p. 640).

¹² See Smith, p. 15.

The foregoing outline of major definitions of the nation and its related concepts will serve as a framework for the literary analyses below. I want now to address in some detail the different critical positions on the nation and nation-state generated by debates on the link between globalisation and the postcolonial. Much of what has been written on the matter centres on the role of global capitalism in contesting nation-state power, although to a lesser extent cultural concerns have also been ventilated; in this there are obvious parallels with the discourse on the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship. Perhaps the dominant argument has been for the decline of nation-state influence in the face of global capitalism. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri capture quite succinctly the lineaments of this perspective: “The primary factors of production and exchange – money, technology, people, and goods – move with increasing ease across national boundaries; hence the nation-state has less and less power to regulate these flows and impose its authority over the economy” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xi). It is not just capital, then, that is said to move unfettered across nation-state boundaries; little escapes the globalising logic of the market. Aijaz Ahmad proffers one logical conclusion to Hardt and Negri’s assertions, suggesting that advanced capitalist nations cannot resolve conflicts between each other through force, because under global capitalism they are interdependent.¹³ In this sense, then, the ability of advanced nations under global capitalism to fully assert their sovereignty has been vitiated to some degree.

A more specific form of Hardt and Negri’s argument, put forward by Masao Miyoshi, takes up the role of transnational corporations in diminishing nation-state influence over global capitalism. Miyoshi first emphasises the globally-unfettered nature of transnational corporations, declaring that “transnational corporatism is by

¹³ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 313.

definition unprovincial and global, that is, supposedly free from insular and idiosyncratic constrictions” (Miyoshi, “A Borderless World?”, p. 742). The upshot of this is that these corporations “are unencumbered with nationalist baggage” (p. 749). Instead of exercising their influence over global capitalism within the context of the nation-state, the power of transnational corporations is, Miyoshi further implies, mediated through global cities:

The bourgeois capitals in the industrialized world are now as powerful, or even far more powerful, than before. But the logic they employ, the clients they serve, the tools available to them, the sites they occupy, in short, their very identities, have all changed. They no longer wholly depend on the nation-state of their origin for protection and facilitation. (p. 732)

Global cities like London and Singapore, then, are by dint of this implicit logic the new power centres of the global economy and largely independent of nation-state sovereign power. The postcolonial literary representations examined below, however, suggest different possibilities for understanding the link between postcolonial global cities and their nation-states. In the case of Singapore, the global city and nation-state are coterminous; the Singapore writers I examine here suggest an extroverted notion of the nation that engages the global in its various guises. For the postcolonial London writers the globalising elements of diasporic nationalism take the form of deterritorialised nativisms and transnational fundamentalisms, which are unfavourably represented in contrast to a salutary engagement with London-based national conceptions.

The decline of nation-state influence over global capital is said to have its analogue in the realm of culture. In arguing for the displacement of postcoloniality by globalisation, Hardt and Negri identify the growing inability of nation-states to oversee economic and cultural exchanges as a symptom of the globalising logic of

Empire.¹⁴ The transition to Empire, they argue, is marked by cultural hybridisation and admixture: “The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow” (xiii). With his characteristic focus on transnational corporatism, Miyoshi highlights globalisation’s consumerist guise and its putative tendency to create a certain cultural homogeneity that manifests itself in what he terms “the cultural products of the transnational class”. National specificities “are merely variants of one ‘universal’ – as in a giant theme park or shopping mall” (Miyoshi, p. 747). Beyond the differences in their respective positions, both Miyoshi and Hardt and Negri assert a link between global capitalist dominance and global cultural dominance; the nation-state, it seems, is becoming a cultural irrelevance.

These arguments notwithstanding, the concepts of the nation and nation-state are still bound up in debates about globalisation and postcoloniality. While Miyoshi for example is at pains to stress the increasing impotence of nation-states in regulating global capital and cultural activity, he identifies what he terms a “patriotic scam” that is perpetrated by global capitalists for class gain. This functions through the exploitation of an “illusion of national unity” that masks how ostensibly national agendas such as trade protectionism and its appeal to “residual patriotic sentiment[s]” (p. 745) in reality serve only narrow capitalist interests. Ahmad extends this view to the realm of culture, arguing that the middle class tends to represent its own cultural practices as constituting “a unified national culture” (Ahmad, p. 8). Furthermore, while Ahmad sees class conflicts as transnational in nature, they should in his view be addressed in the context of the nation-state, “in so far as the already existing

¹⁴ See Hardt and Negri, xii.

structures of the nation-state are a fundamental reality of the very terrain on which actual class conflicts take place” (p. 318).

A more balanced perspective is offered by Ania Loomba, who concedes that global flows of capital, labour, technology and culture represent a curtailment of nation-state sovereignty but do not invalidate the nation-state’s involvement in contemporary imperialism. “Instead of counterposing the new global order against nations and nationalist ideologies,” she writes, “it is better to see them as both forming new alliances, and also engaging in new conflicts.”¹⁵ This element of conflict is at the heart of Simon Gikandi’s major essay on postcoloniality and globalisation. Gikandi, as we saw in the Introduction, sees a fundamental disjuncture between the shared discursive claims of postcolonial and globalisation theory on the one hand, and postcolonial realities on the other. Central to his view is the conviction that the increasing insignificance of the nation-state within theories of globalisation based on culture and the imaginary is not corroborated by the “scant evidence that the same processes are at work in the politics of everyday life, where the rhetoric of globalization is constantly undermined by the resurgence of older forms of nationalism, patriotism, and fundamentalism” (Gikandi, p. 640). Postcolonial globalisation, for him, is not always about hybridity or the cosmopolitan; it often involves the exacerbation of fundamentalist sentiments based around narrow ideas of nation, religion and culture.¹⁶

This is precisely what emerges in the London narratives of Monica Ali and Zadie Smith, and, to a lesser extent, the portrayal of Singapore society in Suchen Christine Lim’s novel. In what follows, Gikandi’s cautionary distinction usefully serves to highlight the xenophobic and nativist strands within globalisation. Both sets

¹⁵ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 224.

¹⁶ See Gikandi, p. 644.

of texts I consider below are critical of such fundamentalisms, as they are of less extremist yet still reactionary nationalist sentiments. This shared denunciation of narrow views of culture and nation, however, does not translate to a shared view of how the nation must be negotiated in the context of globalisation by postcolonials. These writers endorse markedly divergent strategies tailored to their own perspectives on the contextual specificity of the postcolonial global city in question. I turn now to London and Singapore; the insights that emerge from what follows will be examined comparatively to offer a global-cities perspective on the fraught link between postcoloniality, globalisation and the nation.

London: Postcolonial Diaspora, National Identity and Fundamentalist Globalism

In a recent essay on the nation-state, anti-racism and black British literature, Dave Gunning contends that the Britishness of black British cultures is bound up, somewhat contradictorily, with the element of social resistance to the hegemonic ideology of the nation. Black British anti-racist strategies, he affirms, “are always specifically articulated within the political, cultural and juridical structures that make up the national ideological landscape at any given time.” Insofar as this anti-racism must necessarily negotiate a specifically British brand of racism, Gunning implies, any “black culture articulated within these hegemonic fetters is British precisely through the terms of its opposition.”¹⁷ I draw attention to these claims because my examination of how the postcolonial, the nation and globalisation intersect in postcolonial London writing both corroborates and confounds them. While the specifically British landscape against which postcolonial or black British subjects assert their belonging must be considered fully, the texts examined below also divulge

¹⁷ Dave Gunning, “Anti-Racism, the Nation-State and Contemporary Black British Literature”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2004), pp. 29-43 (p. 35).

the effects of globalisation in its shaping of postcolonial diasporic nationhood and its attendant pathologies. Postcolonial London writing's engagement with the nation, after all, extends beyond issues such as racism and anti-racism.

That London embodies both a national and a globalised site of postcolonial cultural politics has been widely registered. Paul Gilroy observes in his essay on postcolonial London

that the historic discovery of a host of black patriots, reliable, worthy subjects participating as fully as anyone else in the nation's acts of mourning Princess Diana despite the exclusion and discrimination that persistently delimit their lives, was a surprise to many influential people!¹⁸

Gilroy cites this observation as evidence of how far Britishness has to go in reconfiguring itself adequately to accommodate the postcolonial presence. In comments published in the same year as Gilroy's essay, Hanif Kureishi offers a more optimistic and expansive view of London as providing a space for national belonging for postcolonial British people. The city fulfills, for Kureishi, the need for a sense of nationalism through, ironically, its globality:

Everybody wants their own nationalism, I suppose. You want to join in. But you can't find a gap to go through. And then suddenly you see London and you think that can belong to us, it doesn't belong to the English, it's international.¹⁹

London, then, is bound up in the cultural politics of both nation and globalisation for postcolonial Britain. The city's postcolonial ambivalence, between conceptions of the national and transnational, between Gilroy's and Kureishi's differing perspectives, has been given expression in recent postcolonial London writing.

London's ambivalent siting within the British national self-conception receives due recognition in John McLeod's study of postcolonial London writing. As

¹⁸ Paul Gilroy, "A London sumting dis . . .", *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1999), pp. 57-69 (p. 59).

¹⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert, "London in Hanif Kureishi's Films: Hanif Kureishi in interview with Bart Moore-Gilbert", *Kunapipi*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1999), pp. 5-14 (p. 9).

the seat of national government and state authority, the city serves “almost as a synecdoche for the nation”. The postwar influx of immigrants from the colonies gravitated toward the city from which the colonial project of nation-state expansion was administered; it is at least somewhat ironic then that the colonial project has been partly responsible for the cultural globalisation through immigration of London. The city thus takes on a “transcultural facticity” that enables “new communities and forms of culture indebted to its history of ‘peopling’ which, in turn, come to pose a considerable challenge to the pastoral articulation of English national culture as representative.”²⁰ McLeod’s recognition of London’s contradictions is reflected in many recent postcolonial London texts. My concern in this section is with a small number of texts that explore the postcolonial London engagement with the concepts of nation and globalisation. While a concern with postcolonial diasporic identity and national belonging is commonplace within the literature, I focus here on texts which confront the tensions between a divided sense of nation for postcolonial Londoners and its complication by globalising forces.

My discussion centres on Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, which explores diverging responses to postcolonial diasporic conceptions of the nation both between and within different generations of postcolonial Londoners. By way of critical counterpoint, I examine Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* alongside Ali’s novel. I argue that these texts often characterise the London encounter between postcolonial conceptions of the nation and globalisation as producing pathological responses rooted in global fundamentalism. Ali and Smith take issue with diasporic nativist expressions of national identity that have not been refracted through metropolitan realities and the demands of the newer society. Fundamentalist expressions of nationalism and

²⁰ John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 18.

transnationalism, which involve peculiarly parochial engagements with global networks, receive particularly scathing or satiric treatment in their novels. These reactionary strategies result in highly dysfunctional modes of inhabiting London. While neither novelist advocates the disavowal of originary roots, it is significant that the most successfully adjusted diasporic subjects in their narratives refuse to be primarily defined by any imaginary homeland or residual cultural essence. Rather, they embrace their locality, London, as their national space, while still being free to draw on their other cultural inheritances.

Crucial to the writing under consideration in this section – indeed to much of postcolonial London and British literature more generally – is the concept of diaspora. As I have already hinted at above, representations of postcolonial London’s negotiation of nation and globalisation are almost inevitably bound up with the diasporic predicament. It seems apposite here to recall the much-criticised tendency within postcolonial theory to take the migrant or diasporic experience as a synecdoche for the postcolonial condition. The diasporic or migrant paradigm in postcolonial analysis must of course be distinguished from the national; in arguing this, Ania Loomba asserts that “different kinds of dislocations cannot result in similarly split subjectivities” (Loomba, p. 151). But perhaps more importantly, the two need to be understood in relation to each other; Simon Gikandi accurately observes that the privileging of the migrant as a representative figure of postcoloniality has led to the national paradigm being overshadowed, “although it is indeed one of the enabling conditions of the trope of migration in the first place” (Gikandi, p. 640). Something akin to this exhortation is implicit in Ella Shohat’s description of the “ambiguous spatio-temporality” of the postcolonial.²¹ In what follows, the “ambiguous spatio-

²¹ Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’”, *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), pp. 99-113 (p. 102).

temporality” of postcolonial London writing’s variegated explorations of nation and globalisation will emerge.

Considering two definitions of diaspora uncovers how the duality of the condition embraces the idea of the nation as a subjective anchor. For Robin Cohen, the emphasis lies in the past, in the place of “origin”:

[. . .] all diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that “the old country” – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions. That claim may be strong or weak, or boldly or meekly articulated in a given circumstance or historical period, but a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background.²²

Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg’s explicitly dualistic conception of diaspora, however, accords equal prominence to both geographies of the diasporic experience:

“Diaspora” refers to the doubled relationship or dual loyalty that migrants, exiles, and refugees have to places – their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with “back home.” Diasporic populations frequently occupy no singular cultural space but are enmeshed in circuits of social, economic, and cultural ties encompassing both the mother country and the country of settlement [. . .]²³

The emphasis here on the circuits of ties between both geographies of diaspora is an important facet of postcolonial London writing. How postcolonial Londoners are subjectively positioned in relation to these circuits by the writers I consider below is central to my basic argument; the contradictions and pathologies of the nation/globalisation dynamic these writers ascribe to postcolonial London emerge, I suggest, from certain dysfunctions within such circulations.

I want to begin my analysis of postcolonial London writing in relation to globalisation and the nation by briefly examining a poem by Fred D’Aguiar, which

²² Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), ix.

²³ Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, “Introduction: Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity”, in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, eds. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 1-25 (p. 14).

bespeaks the limits of London's status as global city. The poem, "Home", is written from the perspective of the poet arriving at Heathrow Airport, and enacts the reluctant admission of a black British Londoner onto British soil. It serves as a postcolonial counterpoint to the neoliberal narrative of London as global city *par excellence*; more specifically, part of the conceptual boundary of global London is written here as coterminous with the postcolonial. Where Heathrow is often installed as a prominent symbolic space of London's global capitalist reach, a space of welcome for foreign capital and capitalists, it serves for D'Aguiar as a filter for both the city and the nation (in its conservative conception) against often legitimate postcolonial claims to British national belonging.

D'Aguiar's "Home", part of his collection *British Subjects* (1993), is perhaps the volume's most overt treatment of the problematic of postcolonial British nationhood. The double meaning of the collection's title and its ironies underpin the poet's defiant assertion of his British citizenship:

These days whenever I stay away too long,
anything I happen to clap eyes on,
(that red telephone box) somehow makes me
miss here more than anything I can name.

My heart performs a jazzy drum solo
when the crow's feet on the 747
scrape down at Heathrow. H.M. Customs . . .
I resign to the usual inquisition,

telling me with Surrey loam caked
on the tongue, home is always elsewhere.
I take it like an English middleweight
with a questionable chin, knowing

my passport photo's too open-faced,
haircut wrong (an afro) for the decade;
the stamp, British Citizen not bold enough
for my liking and too much for theirs.²⁴

²⁴ Fred D'Aguiar, *British Subjects* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 1993), p. 14.

A central irony of D'Aguiar's feelings of national affiliation emerges in his heightened sense of London/Britain as home precisely when he is removed from it. The positive emotions of homecoming are suspended upon touchdown at Heathrow; confronted immediately with "H.M. Customs", the first dimension of homecoming involves a questioning of the veracity of that claim to home or belonging. D'Aguiar's self-imagining as "an English middleweight / with a questionable chin" declares his citizenship, only to undercut that claim by acknowledging his deviance from normative ascriptions of certain ethnic identificatory features to Englishness. He appears to concur with Paul Gilroy's succinct diagnosis of the nationalist dimensions of British racism: "'Race'", the latter writes in his classic study *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), "is bounded on all sides by the sea."²⁵ But D'Aguiar defies this normative criterion of belonging by foregrounding the incontestable fact of the official black presence within the national formation: "the stamp, British Citizen not bold enough / for my liking and too much for theirs".

"Home" addresses a different kind of globalisation from the sort implicit in the neoliberal function of Heathrow as a site that ensures the smooth entry of global capitalism and global capitalists into London. The latter definition of Heathrow sees it, to adopt Marc Augé's terminology, as a non-place or a space of supermodernity, the characteristic space of globalised capitalist flows. "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity," Augé writes, "then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place."²⁶ Within this formulation, Heathrow can quite easily be conceived of as a non-place. But the claims to citizenship and national belonging made by postcolonials

²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* [1987] (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 46.

²⁶ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 77-78.

arriving in London represent a different kind of globalisation, a different category of global network. The customs officer's own roots in Britain, the "Surrey loam caked / on the tongue", lays claim to the very soil of the national imaginary;²⁷ D'Aguiar's putatively weaker claim thus concludes that "home is always elsewhere". But the poet insinuates a certain degree of deliberate othering by the customs officer, whose linguistic claim to British soil also announces the postcolonial citizen as having foreign roots and therefore representing an unwelcome facet of the global. Heathrow's role as site of contestation over national identity means that for D'Aguiar (and the customs officer), it swaps its status as non-place for a politicised one involving questions of citizenship and belonging. It is precisely the globalising challenge of the postcolonial diaspora, both to London and Britain and to their own sense of national identity, that the texts examined below confront; it is a different kind of global city that bears the weight of my consideration of how postcolonials deal with the question of nation.

I turn now to Ali's *Brick Lane* and Smith's *White Teeth*, and read them together as texts that recast postcoloniality and nationality in London as linked concerns implicated in the cultural politics of globalisation. Nazneen, Ali's protagonist, is a Bengali woman brought to London by her husband Chanu; she leads a cloistered life in the Bengali enclave of Tower Hamlets away from mainstream London and British society. Ali portrays her as a detached observer, almost devoid of any kind of agency or direct involvement in London life until she begins an affair with a charismatic British-born Bangladeshi man, Karim, who leads the local Muslim fundamentalist organisation. Various factions and individuals within the Bangladeshi

²⁷ A similar reading of D'Aguiar's poem has been made by Sarah Lawson Welsh in her essay "(Un)belonging Citizens, Unmapped Territory: Black Immigration and British Identity in the Post-1945 Period", in *Not On Any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Stuart Murray (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 43-66 (pp. 49-50).

community around Nazneen can be distinguished according to their respective positions in relation to the fraught question of national identity and culture. For Nazneen herself it is through her British-born daughters that she arrives at a vicarious sense of belonging to Britain, although in many respects it remains a foreign mystery to her. Chanu, whose English literacy and broader engagement with London society ought to yield a greater potential affiliation with Britishness, finally concedes defeat in his attempts to succeed in an unaccommodating London and returns home to Bangladesh. In a parallel plot strand, a fundamentalist Muslim organisation emerges within their community as a response to racism and exclusion in London. The group invokes a working ethos that fuses ethnic and religious parochialism with strategies of globalisation. Ali's juxtaposing of the fundamentalists on the one hand, and Nazneen and her daughters on the other suggests an approval of local negotiations of national belonging for diasporic postcolonials over radical diasporic affiliations with globally conceived yet tribalist nationalisms. Much the same can be discerned in Smith's *White Teeth*, which deals with fundamentalist diasporic activity in a satirical rather than serious register. Generational differences within London's postcolonial communities are also explored by Smith, with the British-born generation in her novel accorded the more authoritative voice. In both novels, the local, grounded negotiation of questions of national belonging receives favourable treatment in contrast to globalised nationalist sentiments.

The link between nation and globalisation in postcolonial London as it is explored in these two novels resolves itself into two broad categories. One strand considers the globalisation inherent in the migrant or diasporic experience, and confronts the complexities of split national affiliations and loyalties across linked geographies. The other, examined primarily in *Brick Lane*, addresses a kind of

globalisation invoked by fundamentalist postcolonial elements in response to local tensions, specifically in the form of religiously informed pan-nationalisms or transnational tribalisms. Reading Smith and Ali's London narratives together in terms of how these two broad forms of postcolonial globalisation negotiate issues of the nation suggests that postcolonial London writers acknowledge the importance of engaging with the nation within a local London context, rather than hijacking postcolonial London cultural politics through a dysfunctional globalised response to local ethnicised tensions.

I begin by considering the representation of globalisation across different generations of the postcolonial diaspora in London. Both Chanu in *Brick Lane* and Samad in *White Teeth* can be seen as failed first-generation migrants for whom the promise of London remains unfulfilled. They embody the subjective problematic of cultural irresolution that attends the migrant experience: both Chanu and Samad peddle parochial ethnic narratives of national belonging and Islamic roots to their children, while failing to live up to their own exhortations (imbibing alcohol while preaching adherence to Islam, for example). Chanu's long-standing, if misplaced, pride in his schooling in "high" English culture is eroded over time by the realities of exclusion and racism and replaced both by a bitterness toward London as a place of broken promises and a yearning for "home". He sustains split affiliations between the metropolitan ambitions of the migrant and the migrant's predictable animus toward metropolitan racism; both the local white racist organisation, the Lion Hearts, and overt expressions of conservative Islam on the part of Bangladeshi Londoners earn his ire:

If he had a Lion Hearts leaflet in his hand, he wanted his daughters covered. He would not be cowed by these Muslim-hating peasants.

If he saw some girls go by in hijab he became agitated at this display of peasant ignorance. Then the girls went out in their skirts.²⁸

Notwithstanding this distaste for fundamentalism of different kinds, Chanu retains a nativist version of nationalist identification, forcing his London-born daughter Shahana to memorise the poetry of Tagore on the grounds that the latter is “the true father of her nation” (p. 180). He laments Shahana’s ignorance of “her nation”, and imputes an Occidentalist perspective on Bangladesh to his daughter: “All she knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her” (p. 185). Chanu regrets Shahana’s lack of his own narrowly circumscribed diasporic-global optic, one that conceives his family members as global dispersions from the originary national source of Bangladesh. For her part, Shahana’s resistance to her interpellation by her father as Bangladeshi is replete with irony, as in this narratorial disclosure: “Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back home” (p. 180). Her legitimate “home”, of course, is London, a glaring fact lost on Chanu; the British-born generation of the family rejects the national narrative of diasporic postcoloniality, while rightly declaring that “*I didn’t ask to be born here*” (p. 181).

While it is tempting to suggest in light of the above that Shahana embodies, at least obliquely, the need identified by Gunning for black or postcolonial British subjects to engage with the local ground of British society, Shahana herself develops this British focus by asserting her British identity as the modality in which she inhabits the global. Her retort in response to Chanu’s self-aggrandising (and dubious) claims to computer literacy is notably delivered in English, in defiance of his insistence on speaking Bengali at home: “‘We go on the Internet at school,’ said Shahana, in English” (p. 200). For Sara Upstone, “Shahana’s declaration at once

²⁸ Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* [2003] (London: Black Swan, 2004), p. 265.

emphasizes her global culture, her British identity in language, and her commitment to the future.”²⁹ Upstone’s analysis identifies Shahana’s resistance to the claims of originary national identification through the prominent omission of anything related to Bangladesh or Bengali culture. Rather, Shahana’s subjective point of departure, the ground zero of her identity, is Britain; while Ali leaves Shahana’s global explorations unspecified, her cultural anchorage is rooted in London. In a pointed scene, Chanu, in response to a question about where they are from, declares on behalf of the family that they come from Bangladesh. His daughter’s own weary answer locates an important diasporic problematic between generations of the same postcolonial family: “Shahana rolled her eyes. ‘I’m from London’” (p. 296). Significantly, this happens during a family “holiday” to central London, undertaken as a respite from Chanu’s insular life in Tower Hamlets. The sights they see – the national emblem of Buckingham Palace and St James’s Park – represent a traditional image of the capital that is a world away from the Bangladeshi enclave just a few miles to the east. London in *Brick Lane*, then, foregrounds the challenge of postcolonial globalisation to the normative national self-understanding of white Britain, while suggesting that this challenge is a work in progress across different generations of postcolonial Londoners.

Similar familial disjunctures are woven into Smith’s *White Teeth*, which employs both character and narratorial commentary as complementary ways of exploring the subjective dissonance generated by the diasporic condition within postcolonial London families. In one of Smith’s frequent narratorial interjections, the concerns of the white racist nationalist are given short shrift in the face of the fears of the immigrant: “But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*,

²⁹ Sara Upstone, “‘Same Old, Same Old’: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2007), pp. 336-349 (p. 338).

compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, *disappearance*.”³⁰ The fears of the racist – that immigration will transform established meanings of the nation – are profoundly ironic, given Samad’s fears that his essentialist notion of Bengali national identity is under threat of erasure by the same process. Alsana, his wife, takes a more realistic view of the effects of migrancy on their children: “‘Let go, Samad Miah. Let the boy go. He is second generation – he was born here – naturally he will do things differently’” (p. 289). In an uncanny echo, Dr Azad’s wife in *Brick Lane* makes much the same point to Chanu: “‘Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like Westerners. Fact: that’s no bad thing’” (Ali, *Brick Lane*, p. 113).

The globalising element in diaspora manifests here most tellingly in the idea of hybridisation, which Samad implicitly rejects in favour of a nativist essentialism: “[...] don’t speak to me of second generation! One generation! Indivisible! Eternal!” (p. 289) This is in spite of his frequent drinks at O’Connell’s, a thoroughly hybridised pub run by Muslims. Unable to hold onto his originary national roots, yet unwilling to fully embrace the new national identity on offer in London, Samad embodies the migrant pathologies of cultural hybridity:

‘These days, it feels to me like you make a devil’s pact when you walk into this country. You hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started . . . but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? [...] But you have made a devil’s pact . . . it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere.’ (p. 407)

For Samad’s son Millat in contrast, prior to his brush with fundamentalism, national identity is not a vexing question. Through Millat and Irie Jones, Smith mocks normative modes of British multiculturalism that see postcolonial migrants as not fully a part of Britain. In a scene that thoroughly satirises liberal multicultural notions,

³⁰ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* [2000] (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 327.

the well-meaning inquiries of the liberal intellectual Joyce Chalfen delineates the stereotypical positioning of postcolonials at the margins of the nation:

‘Well,’ said Joyce [...] ‘you look very exotic. Where are you from, if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Willesden,’ said Irie and Millat simultaneously.

‘Yes, yes, of course, but where *originally*?’

‘Oh,’ said Millat, putting on what he called a *bud-bud-ding-ding* accent. ‘You are meaning where from am I *originally*.’

Joyce looked confused. ‘Yes, *originally*.’

‘Whitechapel,’ said Millat, pulling out a fag. ‘Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus.’ (p. 319)

The piercing irony here is, of course, that the Chalfens are third-generation Jewish immigrants,³¹ and ought to have as much (or as little) formal claim to a British identity as Irie and Millat. This shared diasporic condition, Smith implies, must be downplayed for Irie and Millat as much as it has been for the Chalfens; their subjective position, in Upstone’s words, “cannot be defined by any diaspora, by a mythical ‘homeland’, or by white racism, but must instead be offered its own unique mode of belonging” (Upstone, p. 340). Such a unique mode of belonging must allow for London to serve as the originary space of nationhood that transcends immigrant history. For Irie, a mixed-race girl with a white father and black mother, the nation is in fact something to be overcome. She yearns for a clean slate, for a refusal of the vagaries of postcolonial history. She reconceives the notion of a homeland, of a national origin, as *tabula rasa*: “The beginningest of beginnings. Like the first morning of Eden and the day after apocalypse. A blank page” (p. 402). But while Smith admits of the necessity of regarding London as the homeland of postcolonials like Irie and Millat, she recognises the futility of trying to shed one’s historical baggage: “Because this is the other thing about immigrants (‘fugees, émigrés,

³¹ See p. 328.

travellers): they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow” (p. 466).

The postcolonial politics of national belonging and diasporic globalisation examined above involve quotidian encounters with London that are conflicted but inextricably tied to the life of the city itself. But the fundamentalist strand in the relationship between nation and globalisation in these postcolonial London novels is constructed around disjunctures between British national space and globalised notions of religious and ethnic nationalism. Karim, Nazneen’s charismatic lover in *Brick Lane*, appears at first to be a committed British Muslim: committed both to his Islamic identity and British citizenship. His leadership of the Bengal Tigers, a local Bangladeshi Islamic fundamentalist organisation, is somewhat at odds with his initial national identification with Britain. When Nazneen co-opts him as a fellow Bangladeshi by invoking Bangladesh as “our country”, he insists, referring to Britain, that “[t]his is my country” (p. 212). His declaration of British citizenship is a defiant stance against the racism and abuse suffered by his father in Britain over the years.³² The Bengal Tigers therefore serve as a statement of resistance against local London racism, but one that derives much of its political energy from an uncertain nativist geography. Alistair Cormack rightly observes that the group “represents a conflation of nationalist and fundamentalist certainties”,³³ but fails to register its leader’s agonised ambivalence toward his dual nationhood, an ambivalence that develops in the direction of Bangladeshi-cum-Islamic nativism in the later part of the novel.

Karim’s simultaneous commitment to the country of his birth and his faith is affirmed in his explicit strategy for the Bengal Tigers: “What are we for? We are for

³² See pp. 232-33.

³³ Alistair Cormack, “Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2006), pp. 695-721 (p. 706).

Muslim rights and culture. We're into protecting our local ummah and supporting the global ummah'" (p. 241). His citizenship, then, is refracted through his religious affiliations, as is his global vision: he exhorts the group to "[t]hink global but act local" (p. 287), echoing the familiar rhetoric of global environmentalism. His recourse to various Islamic websites facilitates this strategy, the global reach of which reflects the global appeal of Islam.³⁴ But his commitment remains rooted in his London community. Another influential member of the Tigers, the Questioner, is a stock extremist character notable mainly for his abrasiveness and dedication to the cause of the global ummah (or community of believers): he is described as having "the dangerous face of an enthusiast" (p. 241). Consistently eliding the immediate social conflicts of Tower Hamlets in favour of transnational involvement in far-flung Islamic struggles,³⁵ he reacts to the American response to 9/11 in Afghanistan by calling for participation in the latter's defence: "'We are fit young men. There are no chains tying us to these walls. With a little planning, a little effort, we can cross continents'" (p. 415). The obvious antagonism between Karim and the Questioner reads like an attempt by Ali to explore different gradations of fundamentalism and nationalism: while Karim is gradually revealed to be a frustrated figure whose ambivalence between two national identities and his religion bespeaks the pitfalls of postcolonial diasporic globalisation and the recourse to fundamentalism it sometimes provokes, Ali's portrayal of the Questioner as an extremist parody is an overt rejection of the cultural politics of global jihad.

The concept of the nation has a vexed relationship with the politics of both Karim and the Questioner. A thoroughly deterritorialised perspective informs the

³⁴ See pp. 347-8. The existence of a significant presence on the internet of fundamentalist Islam echoes something of Benjamin Barber's assertion that fundamentalism requires the globalising mechanism and communications technologies of "McWorld". See Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* [1995] (London: Corgi, 2003), pp. 155-6.

³⁵ See pp. 281-5.

Questioner's fundamentalism: he wishes to pursue his extremist agenda across the globe to wherever Muslims appear to be embattled. In this sense he lacks any engagement with the national idea. Even his namelessness, his reduction to caricature, parallels his lack of engagement with any specific national space; he fulfills an instrumental role within a deterritorialised global space. His refusal to couch his religious politics in terms of either Britain or Bangladesh appears to corroborate S. Sayyid's argument that the global ummah "is not the nation writ large", because the nation "is a bounded entity" that "is not open to everyone."³⁶ The ummah, Sayyid suggests, has no such limits, given its universalism and lack of a homeland with which to anchor its claim to national status. By this logic, neither can the ummah be a diaspora, since "diaspora refers to a nation in exile" (p. 38).

His argument, however, relies on a conflation of the concepts of nation and nation-state. It is possible to read the national within the Questioner's ostensibly globalised politics by invoking the notion of pan-nationalism, a Francophone concept derived from the discourse of Negritude. Pan-nationalism enables "another meaning" of the nation, involving "a sense of shared culture and subjectivity and spiritual essence that stretches across the divisions of nations as political entities" (Loomba, p. 176). This elides any involvement with the nation-state proper. But the black member of the Tigers, the aptly-named Multicultural Liaison Officer, observes that the Qur'an requests all Muslims to "work towards one, unified Islamic state across the world" (p. 416); the globalising and national impulses within religious fundamentalism, it appears, have a common ideological origin. This is satirised by Smith in *White Teeth*, where the local Islamic fundamentalist group, KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), attempt to replace one form of national identity with

³⁶ S. Sayyid, "Beyond Westphalia: Nations and Diasporas – the Case of the Muslim *Umma*", in *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, 'Transruptions'*, ed. Barnor Hesse (London and New York: Zed Books, 2000), pp. 33-50 (p. 36).

another. The group's founder is a migrant whose years in Britain have been spent in cloistered isolation from British society; his religious nationalism does not compete with Britishness within a specifically national context, but seems to be a free-floating, universal idea of an Islamic nation intended to disrupt an established British culture.³⁷ Karim's commitment to the ummah at both national and global levels represents a more subtle, yet more confused politics, which shifts vaguely between London and an idealised Bangladesh which he has yet to set foot in. Where the Questioner professes an unmediated globalised fundamentalism, Karim retains a dual affiliation to Britain and Bangladesh.

If the Muslim fundamentalists of Ali's Tower Hamlets yoke together local and global politics, it bears mentioning that their demonisation by the area's white racists also takes on a simultaneously local and global dimension. The Lion Hearts promote their "March Against the Mullahs" through a leaflet campaign that paints the Muslim community as a worldwide scourge:

All over the country, our children are being taught that Islam is a great religion. But the truth is clear. Islam burns with hatred. It gives birth to evil mass murders abroad. In our own towns, it spawns vicious rioters. (p. 406)

Implicit in these related formulations is the idea, echoed throughout the novel, that fundamentalisms arise primarily in the presence of an ideological or cultural adversary. Fundamentalism in Tower Hamlets is clearly a response to the quotidian experience of racism and xenophobia, an attempt to assert a firm identity;³⁸ the Lion Hearts, existing as a determinate group whose ideological animus is openly directed at the Asian community, serve as a conveniently accessible and representative opponent against which to direct fundamentalist anger. The mutual opposition between

³⁷ See Smith, *White Teeth*, pp. 468-70.

³⁸ Jane Hiddleston makes this very observation in her essay on Ali's novel. See Hiddleston, "Shapes and Shadows: (Un)veiling the Immigrant in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2005), pp. 57-72 (p. 58).

fundamentalists and racists is reinforced when Karim organises the “March Against the March Against the Mullahs”. Enthusiasm within the Bengal Tigers diminishes noticeably in the absence of the activities of the Lion Hearts, while many of the Bangladeshi participants of the March end up fighting with each other when they fail to locate any white antagonists against which to pit themselves.³⁹ Confronted with a racist leaflet denouncing British multiculturalism, even the hitherto unreligious Chanu explodes in an outrage that incites a reading of the Qu’ran for the first time in years.⁴⁰

In the face of this nationalist exclusion, Karim’s defiant claims to Britishness yield to a more fervent embrace of his Islamic, Bangladeshi identity. It begins with a change in his dressing, from jeans and trainers to panjabi-pyjama and skullcap.⁴¹ He explains his attraction to Nazneen by referring to her as “the real thing” (p. 385), a genuine “native” Bangladeshi woman. Nazneen recognises his doubly deracinated subject position; having never been to Bangladesh, “Karim was born a foreigner” (p. 448). In the end, Ali leaves little doubt that he has left London for Bangladesh, with more than a hint that he has adopted a fundamentalist nativism in reaction to the racist exclusions of London and Britain.⁴² Upstone’s reading of Karim’s transformation suggests that it arises not from a failure or refusal by the British-born postcolonial diasporic subject to integrate with his country of birth, but from “the rejection of those citizens as British by the state” (Upstone, p. 344). This sympathetic interpretation, however, is undercut by the relative success of other London-born Bangladeshis (notably Shahana, despite Chanu’s best efforts) in integrating fully with the British nation-state. Françoise Kral strikes closer to home; by suggesting that Karim “fails to

³⁹ See p. 472.

⁴⁰ See p. 252.

⁴¹ See p. 376.

⁴² See pp. 485-6.

find his place in England” she shifts the onus of integration onto postcolonial Londoners themselves. In Kral’s view,

the aim of Karim’s quest throughout the novel is not so much to act locally as to find a reason for living and to make up for the absence of a home country. The final chapters chronicle his gradual return to what he considers to be his roots.⁴³

In place of a national identification with Britain, then, Karim yields to a fundamentalist nativism that represents a regressive globalism, a parochial search for roots across borders that ignores the national identity he was born into. His is a version of what Arjun Appadurai has labelled “trojan nationalism”, which “contain[s] transnational, subnational links and, more generally, nonnational identities and aspirations” that “are so often the product of forced as well as voluntary diasporas” and “of dialogues with hostile as well as hospitable states”, such that it must be seen in relation to “the anguish of displacement” and “the nostalgia of exile”.⁴⁴ Karim’s commitment to Tower Hamlets’s Bangladeshi community is simultaneously subnational and transnational, as well as being rooted in ethnic and religious elements that are not strictly of a national character. The increasingly fundamentalist nature of his politics emerges from the hostility he receives from the country of his birth and the subsequently more attractive prospect of an abstract nationalist and religious commitment to the ancestral nation-state he visits for the first time at the end of the novel. His is a nationalism at once global and parochial, embodying the diasporic postcolonial idea of the nation as conflicted and pathological.

Brick Lane’s denouement endorses a future-oriented postcolonial engagement with London that sees the quotidian experience of the city as involving the

⁴³ Françoise Kral, “Shaky Ground and New Territorialities in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2007), pp. 65-76 (p. 74).

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 165.

confrontation of questions of national belonging. London is presented as a synecdoche for the open postcolonial possibilities of British national identity. The apparently illusory freedom Nazneen previously identifies with ice-skating gives way, at the close of the narrative, to a full understanding of the kind of freedom it promises: one that is made available within the contextual boundaries of the nation. While the Bengal Tigers descend into the farce of internal conflict in the absence of white racists to confront, and Chanu concedes defeat in his long (and misguided) efforts to succeed in British society by returning home to Bangladesh, Nazneen, her daughters and her relatively progressive friend Razia all look forward to forging a life as Bangladeshi Londoners within the conceptual boundaries of British nationality. Nazneen arrives at this rapprochement with Britain by recognising that she is tied to the country by her British-born daughters. Their futures are their own to forge: “‘Staying or going, it’s up to us three’” (p. 480). The authority with which the girls organise the ice-skating excursion for their mother reflects an ease with their native London that was previously suppressed by their parochial migrant father. Their newfound agency, Ali suggests, emerges from a commitment to British national identity; Razia is allowed the final words that close the novel and give succinct expression to a central theme: “‘This is England,’ she said. ‘You can do whatever you like’” (p. 492).

White Teeth’s ending also looks ahead to the future, specifically to the eve of the millennium, when the already hybridised and globalised London space of O’Connell’s opens up radically by admitting women for the first time. It is an ending that is, like *Brick Lane*, tinged with hope for postcolonial Londoners – the hope that London can sustain its multicultural promise by demonstrating how the conceptual, cultural and ethnic boundaries of the nation can be fruitfully enlarged. But Millat, Samad and others continue to be presented as failed examples of the postcolonial

London experience, insofar as they fail to reconcile their Britishness with their roots and their ethnic difference. What Nazneen, Razia, Shahana and Bibi achieve, however, is a refusal to indulge in idealised (mis)conceptions of either the postcolonial migrant promise of London, the indelible importance of roots in one's homeland, or the redefinition of Western nation space by a fundamentalist postcoloniality. They commit themselves instead to a realistic engagement with a London that offers them the potential for personal growth as simultaneously postcolonial, economic, gendered and British subjects. "Rather than both generations identifying with a migrant identity split between location of belonging and location of residence," Upstone similarly observes, "both migrant and British-born characters instead follow the alternative model of coterminous residence and belonging to be identified with the British-born subject" (p. 343).

Ali and Smith both enact a postcolonial diasporic city in which fundamentalist or nativist forms of globality represent flawed strategies for working out questions of national belonging. They concede that the diasporic nature of postcolonial London inevitably continues to shape subjective experience, but ultimately concur that a commitment to locality, specifically through a Bangladeshi-tinged British identity, offers the greatest promise for postcolonials in search of national anchorage. Their novels thus resonate with Avtar Brah's notion of home for diasporic subjects as both a place that denies any genuine return and a place that involves quotidian lived experience:

Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality [and] the historically specific everyday of social relations.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 192.

The commitment to locality, to one's immediate social arena, is the key element for both writers in terms of how they perceive the involvement of postcolonial Londoners with the nation. In this sense the nation(-state) has a significance and immediacy for postcolonial Londoners that contest existing theories of the contemporary relationship between nation-state, postcoloniality and globalisation. Both the pathologies and successes of postcolonial nationhood in these novels, in their own ways, demand alternative theories that go beyond political economy as their primary determinant. And while both texts corroborate Gikandi's general view that global processes often generate fundamentalist sentiments, they go beyond his work in specifying possible correctives to such problems in a given context. But it is through the comparison with the postcolonial Singapore writers that this chapter will provide the most fundamental transformation of these existing theories. I turn now to an examination of the Singapore writing, before considering what insights this chapter as a whole might yield.

Postcolonial Singapore: Nation-State, Global City

As a major global city and financial centre Singapore seems to embody the characteristics of neoliberal globalisation that, in the work of Hardt and Negri, Miyoshi and (to a certain extent) Ahmad serve to underpin claims that the nation-state's influence is receding in the face of imperialist global capitalism.⁴⁶ Directly and intensely keyed into the world economy, the city belongs to a number of what Saskia Sassen has called "command and control" centres of global capitalism.⁴⁷ Singapore is distinctive among global cities, however, because it is also at the same time a nation-

⁴⁶ See my account of their views on this matter earlier in this chapter.

⁴⁷ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

state. The degree to which nation-state agendas and aspirations to prominence within the global city hierarchy converge in Singapore, I would suggest, is the source of much of the tension between state, nation and globalisation in the country's politics of postcolonial nation-building. Political expedience lies behind the policing of political and cultural borders on the one hand, and the opening up of Singapore society and economy in order to achieve global city status on the other. Given such tensions, globalisation is at once peril and promise for Singapore's nation-building project, for national success is deemed to be dependent on success within global capitalism, while the state has a long-standing commitment to social stability and defending "Asian" culture from the putative corruption of Western influence. In recent years this balance has shifted subtly in favour of the global, as the city-state positions itself as a "Renaissance City" and cultural cosmopolis of choice for the world's elite.⁴⁸ The discourses of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, as I discuss elsewhere in this thesis, have become hegemonic within state policies of national development.

The literary texts I examine in this section suggest a number of things. In Suchen Lim's *Fistful of Colours* (1993) the author undertakes a thoroughgoing repudiation of parochial, unreconstructed expressions of diasporic nativism that yearn not for physical return but rather for an unyielding anchorage in an essentialised diasporic culture. She endorses instead an extroverted and expanded concept of the nation that is multicultural and multiethnic, a globalised concept that admits Singapore's Western legacy into its purview. Catherine Lim's *Following the Wrong God Home* (2001) problematises the focus on global capitalist modernity in the Singaporean project of nation-building, a focus that she uses to undercut the state's championing of Asian Values, that other major facet of the official national agenda.

⁴⁸ See Selvaraj Velayutham, *Responding to Globalization: Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007) for a detailed account of the various phases in Singapore's social and nation-building policies.

Her novel also implicitly defends the view that the Western cultural presence can be seen as compatible with conceptions of the nation. In two recent poems from Edwin Thumboo's latest volume, *Still Travelling* (2008), however, the potential threat to national culture posed by global capitalist modernity is domesticated and incorporated into his national vision. He effects a rapprochement between an ethnic and cultural globalisation on the one hand, and capitalist globalisation on the other. By doing so he reconstructs Singapore as a multidiasporic nation that encompasses the former colonising West in a deep historical perspective. Singapore's inescapable entanglement with global capitalism is woven into this construction as an integral aspect of the national formation; what emerges in the poetry is a celebration of the multidimensionally global outlook of the nation. As with much of Singapore literature (and cultural production in general), these texts represent very direct and explicit interrogations of the discourses and policies of the Singapore state. For this reason I will briefly discuss some of the major features of Singapore's nation-building efforts, before turning to the texts' attempts to complicate and intervene in these issues.

For Singapore's leadership during the early independence period the primary imperative was to forge a nation and stable society from the city's disparate ethnicities. It accomplished this by adopting what has come to be known as the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other) model of social management,⁴⁹ where one's ethnicity supplies the specific modality through which Singaporeans ostensibly embrace an overarching Singaporean identity. Language policy is closely related to this model, with English as the national *lingua franca* and one's "mother tongue" (reductively understood to be Mandarin, Malay and Tamil respectively) as integral to the ethnic

⁴⁹ See Sharon Siddique, "Singaporean Identity", in *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, eds. Kernal Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 563-77.

dimension of national identity.⁵⁰ The absence of a shared sense of the past necessitated this. Accepting for the moment Anthony Smith's schematic definitions of the nation and the *ethnie* as a community with shared myths, ancestry, culture and history, it might be argued that Singapore is, strictly speaking, not a nation, given its various constituent diasporas from the major ancient civilisations of China, India and Malaya (not to mention the plethora of other ethnicities that form its minority communities).

It is from this theoretical perspective that C.J.W.-L. Wee asserts "that Singapore functions as a type of transnational formation using the organisational form of the nation-state, a formation that draws its intellectual and cultural inspiration from parts of the British West and Anglo-American ideas about being modern." He claims, provocatively, that Singapore is a state that is not a nation,⁵¹ on account of its diverse and deterritorialised (because diasporic) ethnicities.⁵² The state's aim was "to make *industrial and capitalist modernity* the metanarrative which would frame Singapore's national identity"; the "national", then, "was not to be jettisoned but instead to be renovated so that Singapore's racial and cultural difference could be contained and, if possible, to some extent homogenised and therefore deterritorialised for the leap into modernity" (p. 34). This, we will see, is part of Catherine Lim's imaginative construction of Singapore, although it jars with her recognition that the complex cultural sphere of Singapore cannot be so neatly confined. But at the same time, especially during the period that spanned the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse of "Asian Values" emerged in East Asia, with Singapore a prominent proponent. This set of putatively Asian cultural characteristics, broadly modelled on Confucianism, was

⁵⁰ See Beng-Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* [1995] (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 110.

⁵¹ C.J.W.-L. Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 33.

⁵² See Wee, p. 34.

said to be superior to Western values (as well as accounting for East Asia's capitalist success).⁵³ Catherine Lim's novel addresses the resilience of this idea in its version of Singapore. The "Asian Values" discourse dovetailed with Singapore's national ontology of capitalist modernity. Notwithstanding the state's official policies, ethnically parochial identities and cultural conservatism have been ever-present, representing some of the central themes in Singapore literature.⁵⁴ They are certainly central to the two novels examined in this section. But common to all the Singapore writers considered here is their approval of an enlarged and extroverted idea of the nation (although Catherine Lim does romanticise a certain brand of primordialist culture).

Suchen Lim's *Fistful of Colours* (1993) attempts, through her allegorical concept of painting, to represent the complexity of Singapore's history and multiethnic national character. Suwen, the protagonist, is a teacher and budding artist who is grappling with a History-Art project, an attempt to capture her Chinese family's history (and thus a slice of national history) through painting. But other characters also represent the Malay, Indian and Western elements of Singapore's multiethnic ontology; their stories, alongside Suwen's, make up Lim's literary canvas of Singaporean life. Lim's novel is itself an attempt to "paint" Singapore society as the titular "fistful of colours", not only by bringing together diverse ethnic voices and portraits, but by constantly shifting between the narrative present of the 1990s and various episodes in Singapore's past as recalled by Suwen, her relatives and her friends. Suwen's artistic vision of the nation, however, is troubled by the parochialism and conservative nativism that she observes within different ethnic communities. In this sense the novel is a metafictional instance of a writer painting the global diversity

⁵³ For a fuller account of the Asian Values discourse, see my discussion of it in Chapter One.

⁵⁴ See my discussion of Hwee Hwee Tan's fiction in Chapter One.

of her nation while using her character's similar artistic efforts to hold up a distorting mirror to that image of national diversity. Against both narrow ethnic expressions of identity and inflexible state discourses on multiethnic national identity, Lim gestures toward a Singapore that potentially accommodates the global within the national, while retaining a commitment to the major ethnic communities recognised by these state discourses. By doing so, she captures a Singaporean social identity that reflects its status as a global-city-nation-state.

The novel plays off different perspectives on national identity against each other. Among these, ethnic parochialism receives the most unequivocal criticism. Unsurprisingly, given Suwen's Chinese heritage and her centrality to the narrative consciousness, Chinese primordialist nativism is a prominent target for authorial excoriation. Contemporary Singaporeans in the novel frequently effect an elision between conceptualisations of the nation and Chinese identity. One letter-writer to the local paper, responding to Suwen's controversial publicly displayed painting, denounces her as one of many "geh angmohs" (pseudo-Westerners) lacking any facility with the Chinese language: "They do not want to speak Chinese. They cannot even read the Chinese signs in public places. Some even claim to dream in English. Such people have forgotten their Chinese ancestors and their five-thousand-year-old history and civilisation!" The letter-writer serves to caricature nativist sentiments in a young nation constructed from various immigrant communities; pointedly, he signs off as "Son of China". By declaring that "[o]ur nation is swamped with numerous geh angmohs", he elides the distinction between China and Singapore: from his narrow perspective, Singapore appears to be an ethnic extension of Chinese nation-state territory.⁵⁵ Like the conservative Bangladeshi elements in Ali's *Brick Lane* who wish

⁵⁵ Suchen Christine Lim, *Fistful of Colours* [1993] (Singapore: SNP Editions, 2003), p. 18.

to shape Tower Hamlets in the image of an ethnically homogeneous Bangladesh, “Son of China” ignores multicultural local realities in favour of a myopically diasporic and deterritorialised nationalism.

The politics of language is central to cultural conservatism in Singapore, as it is to the country’s globalising logic. English, as a strategic tool for national solidarity, comes to be regarded here as a foreign presence, as something external to a reductive definition of the nation. Some of Suwen’s colleagues at school peddle precisely such a conflation of language, race and nation, as in this example:

“A yellow banana,” Suwen was saying, “is an Asian, yellow on the outside but white inside. A WOG. That’s how some of the Chinese-ed think of us. D’you know what Madam Tan told me one day? She’d been listening to Sue Tay talking to Jan. Then after that, she whispered to me in Mandarin: only in Singapore, you have two Chinese speaking to each other in English and not Chinese. Very shameful, she said.” (p. 188)

Within this national schema, ethnic inheritances are eternal, much as Samad in *White Teeth* insists. Any kind of deviation from this purity, even an effectively bilingual hybridity, registers as foreign to Singapore national culture; as Philip Holden observes, “Chineseness in Singapore is frequently normative”.⁵⁶ Suwen debunks this kind of thinking by pointing out that the notion of cultural inheritance for Chinese Singaporeans like her mother is based on little more than “the myth that they were the inheritors of an illustrious five-thousand-year-old civilisation. Never mind that their forebears had been the dregs of society” (p. 33). Lim herself offers a more salutary take on English, understanding it as “an important inter-community language”.⁵⁷ This dovetails with the novel’s underlying approbation of Singapore’s multiethnic character, but also aligns it, at least partially, with state policies on nation-building.

⁵⁶ Philip Holden, “Writing Conspiracy: Race and Rights in Two Singapore Novels”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2006), pp. 58-70 (p. 65).

⁵⁷ Ronald D. Klein, “Suchen Christine Lim”, *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 4: Interviews*, ed. Ronald D. Klein (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2001), pp. 198-217 (p. 213).

In respect of Singapore's official multiracial, multiethnic conception of the nation bound together by the English language, *Fistful of Colours* initially appears approving. Singaporeans, in Suwen's imaginative tapestry, represent a "new Asia" in which different cultures have evolved a peaceful coexistence:

How could she explain it to Mark? This multitude and diversity of her island? Nica, Robert, Zul, Jan and herself were the strands of different histories and cultures woven into this modern fabric of many hues and textures by a loom which was moving too quickly for anyone to have more than a glimpse of its emerging shifting patterns, Chinese and yet not Chinese; Indian and yet not Indian . . . yet, here they were, the new Asians, and Mark was the foreigner among them. (pp. 124-5)

This ostensibly admirable and malleable multiracialism does not always, however, stand up to scrutiny. Nica, a half-Chinese, half-Tamil friend and artistic mentor to Suwen, is a confident, cosmopolitan woman with an amoral approach to art and to life. Her seduction of Mark, a Scottish teacher for whom Suwen has undeclared feelings, turns out to be nothing more than an attempt to prepare him for her nude sketch. Tamara S. Wagner reads her as "exploitative, ruthless, and deliberately amnesiac in her sculpting of the past",⁵⁸ as well as "a scavenger of emotions and bodies" (305). Despite this, Nica serves to articulate Lim's obvious repugnance at ethnic parochialism. Her own parents' marriage degenerates into a racialised standoff, with competing culturalist and linguistic demands placed upon her as a child; her response is to disavow these claims on her subjectivity: "I wanted to be free. Free like a spirit floating above the Indians and the Chinese. I am neither. Neither my mother's nor my father's daughter. Just me. Nica'" (p. 70). The state's model of ethnic coexistence in Singapore enshrines the major groups as integral elements in the

⁵⁸ Tamara S. Wagner, *Occidentalism in Novels of Malaysia and Singapore, 1819-2004: Colonial and Postcolonial Financial Straits and Literary Style* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p. 303.

national tapestry, but appears unable to accommodate interracial hybrids like Nica.⁵⁹ Even the initial promise of the interracial union of Jan and Zul appears to founder on racial and religious divides. Jan, daughter of Chinese Christian parents, transgresses the boundaries of the conflation of race, nation and culture by marrying Zul, a Malay Muslim; the interfamilial pressures that predictably emerge sour the relationship and undercut any invocation of multiracial utopianism. Suwen's happy picture of Singapore's diversity also obliquely affirms the definition of the West as "Other" (as it is in the CMIO model), rather than seeing the Western presence as intrinsic to the national imaginary.

Lim's own leanings as regards the ideal national character are revealed in the novel as an extroverted, global conception of the nation that chimes with Singapore's self-imaging as a global city. While there is no single major character who is portrayed as unequivocally articulating Lim's views – Suwen, in particular, is thoroughly conflicted and wracked with self-doubt – certain voices in the novel are conscripted into acting as authorial mouthpieces. The author's preference for diegetic narration manifests in terms of certain sympathetically presented views. Nica's grand-aunt, Dr Menon, a pre-war resident of Singapore and a former anti-British Indian nationalist, perceives various kinds of salutary transformations in contemporary Singapore. Visiting from India, she contrasts her experience of colonial Singapore, which was racially divided and saw little interracial exchange, with postcolonial Singapore's hybrid potential; significantly, what I read as Lim's most unequivocally positive conception of Singapore's national makeup is delivered through a figure who is both insider and outsider:

⁵⁹ This has been acknowledged in recent sociopolitical scholarship on Singapore. See Velayutham, pp. 31-2.

“During my younger days, it would have been unthinkable for a Malay to marry a Chinese, or a Chinese to marry a Malay. He would be ostracised by his community. So I was very pleasantly surprised this morning when Nica took me to the Cricket Club for lunch. I was amazed by the changes in your society. Nica introduced me to two lovely Chinese women. Mrs Fernando, wife of a Eurasian judge, and Mrs Sandosham, wife of an Indian lawyer. Then Nica said to me, look over there, Auntie, Mrs Mah and Mrs Tay. I looked, and she said, no, no, Auntie. Not the Chinese women. Over there, the other side, the two Caucasians talking to the Indian lady by the window. And she introduced the Indian lady as Mrs Natalie Tan, and the Caucasians as Mrs Mah and Mrs Tay. Imagine this old lady’s surprise and amazement!” (p. 260).

Three aspects of Dr Menon’s account stand out. Firstly, and most overtly, Lim extols cultural and biological hybridity as an ordinary fact of life through the achievement of interracial union in this representation of a slice of the national community. In stark contrast to the parochial ethnic exclusions that continue to blight the national collective, the deliberate concentration of examples of interracial marriages in a single site bespeaks the possibility of peaceful hybridity. Lim inverts Robert Young’s cautionary critique of hybridity as a biological concept rooted in colonial discourses of racism: for her, hybridity promises a transcendence of race as the dominant marker of national identity.⁶⁰ In certain ways this passage has a counterpart in Zadie Smith’s well-known description of London as a multiethnic playground:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O’Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. (Smith, *White Teeth*, p. 326)

As in Smith’s postcolonial London, *Fistful of Colours*’s ethnically diverse “last names” have in fact already collided; what results is not a wreck, but an apparently

⁶⁰ See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995)

untroubled social mixture. The nation is recast here as an irreducibly hybrid formation.

A second notable feature of Lim's hybrid Singapore is its implicit class affiliation. The spouses of lawyers and judges that populate the scene are clearly privileged individuals. Given the numerous instances of racism and ethnic parochialism perpetrated by teachers and other inhabitants of the novel's Singapore heartland, the easy interracial unions that Lim sketches within the rarefied echelons of society read like an unspoken suggestion that the cosmopolitan circles that frequent exclusive establishments like the Cricket Club lead the way in hybridising the idea of the nation. Lim in some ways testifies to the transcendence of the colonial legacy, given the disappearance of Western family names through the marital union of Chinese men and Western women in Singapore. But this is undercut by the third element I discern in the passage: namely, Lim's attempt to install the West as internal to Singapore's national ontology. In her sly introduction of the binding historical element of British colonialism by framing the evidence of Singapore's global provenance within the elite confines of the Cricket Club, a bastion of (post)colonial privilege and a still-extant marker of the British legacy, Lim bears testament to the claims of Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, who have strenuously argued that the West is integral to Singapore's national ontology.⁶¹ The scene alludes to the (post)imperial West as the originary crucible of the globalised city-state-nation.

Fistful of Colours rejects the recourse to specific diasporic identities in conceptions of the nation. In this the novel shares common ground with the London narratives of Zadie Smith and Monica Ali. Where these latter texts largely endorse a postcolonial commitment to the nation through the local rather than global, Lim's

⁶¹ See Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, "The Singapore Way of Multiculturalism: Western Concepts/Asian Cultures", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995), 65-89.

novel arguably favours globalising the scope of the postcolonial nation. The novel's frequent revisiting of Singapore's colonial history and its early immigrant communities, in tandem with its foregrounding of multiethnic coexistence and intermixture in the resultant contemporary form of the nation, develops an understanding of the nation as an historically accretive and geographically extroverted formation. While Lim often resorts to diegetic representations of perspectives, her overarching narrative strategy of rendering Singapore mimetically as a protean "fistful of colours" coheres as an implicit authorial voice that eclipses the narrow, unreconstructed primordialisms peddled by figures like Suwen's mother, some of her fellow teachers and the self-righteous letter writer. Ultimately, the novel insinuates a reconstructed notion of the nation as postcolonial global city.

If *Fistful of Colours* advances a culturalist and ethnic way of globalising the concept of the nation, while eschewing any engagement with the pragmatic economic concerns that characterise stereotypical images of Singapore, Catherine Lim's *Following the Wrong God Home* (2001) delivers a critique of the plutocratic, capitalist nation-building she perceives in the city-state.⁶² Spanning the 1980s and 1990s, the novel documents the tortuous and protracted affair between Yin Ling, a Chinese Singaporean woman of modest background and literary bent married to an overachieving, wealthy and politically ambitious Chinese Singaporean man, and Ben Gallagher, an American visiting lecturer who fires her poetic imagination. Cast by most Singaporeans in the narrative as emblematic of Western corruption, a judgement lent understandable credence by his role in the failure of Yin Ling's marriage, Ben

⁶² Catherine Lim is a well-known critic of the Singaporean government. In 1994, she claimed in a newspaper article that there was an "affective divide" between the government and Singaporeans, a claim that drew a stern reprimand from the government; the episode has come to be known as the Catherine Lim Affair. For a condensed account, see Sally Lui Sha-Lee, "The Problematic East/West Dichotomy: Representation of Singaporean Identity in Catherine Lim's *Following the Wrong God Home*", *Language and Literature*, Vol. 28 (2003), pp. 109-125 (p. 121n).

serves in fact to deconstruct reified notions of Eastern virtue and Western decadence.⁶³ A central element of the plot involves Ah Heng Cheh, an old servant Yin Ling is devoted to, and her dying wish to find a home for her nameless Chinese god figurine. Catherine Lim inverts cultural clichés by having Ben dedicate himself to aiding this quest and portraying Vincent, Yin Ling’s husband, and other Singaporeans as obstacles to this curious take on traditional religious practice.

When the god’s apparent choice of home turns out to be a neglected bit of land owned by Ah Heng Cheh that is also wanted by the government for a hugely-profitable American-Singaporean petrochemical development, the tensions between old parochial traditions, the state-renovated national discourse of Asian Culture and the coeval national narrative of global capitalist modernity culminate in a dramatic standoff. Attempts to evict the old woman are stymied by interventions by Yin Ling and Ben, with the government authorities, led by Vincent, having to tread a precarious path between economic pragmatism and the national Asian values it has been instrumental in promoting:

Everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of the old servant whose obduracy, it was said in the newspaper reports, had resulted in urgent top-level consultations, in phone calls and faxes flying between Singapore and the United States: how could they persuade the obstinate old woman to sell her land without incurring the anger of the humanitarian societies? Also, everyone wanted to know what MTC would do. Would he, as he had with troublemakers in the past, wait for an opportune moment and come in with knuckledusters? But would even he use the knuckleduster on a helpless old woman, especially when his DPM, who was also the Minister of Education, had just introduced the teaching of core Confucian values, primarily filial piety and respect for the old, in the schools?⁶⁴

The imperative of global capitalism is confounded here by the need to fulfill the ethical demands of “national” values; in the case of America, democracy and human rights, and for Singapore, the “Asian” value of filial piety. By bringing the

⁶³ See Lui, pp. 117-8.

⁶⁴ Catherine Lim, *Following the Wrong God Home* [2001] (London: Orion, 2002), pp. 309-10.

twin national concerns of economic globalisation and Asian values into conflict with each other, Lim openly declares her penchant for social critique. Her reference to MTC, “the Founder of Modern Singapore [...] known only by the awesome initials” (p. 5) is a clear allusion to Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s authoritarian ex-Prime Minister (who is indeed often referred to as LKY) and chief architect of postcolonial Singapore. She declines (or is unable) to resolve the ethical conundrum she has posed, although it is clear from the passage that conservative values and cultural specificities are ironically a tricky obstacle the government has created for itself in its efforts to promote capitalist modernity as the primary national agenda.

A rapprochement between the kind of cultural and ethnic globalisation of the nation lauded in Suchen Lim’s *Fistful of Colours* and the national agenda of economic globalisation problematised in Catherine Lim’s novel is achieved in the recent poetry of Edwin Thumboo. Often labelled the unofficial poet laureate of Singapore, he has been described by Rajeev Patke as “the *pater familias* of English poetry in Singapore”.⁶⁵ Along with Robert Yeo, Thumboo has spent much of his poetic career addressing national concerns, many of which were born of the trauma of enforced postcolonial nationhood and the subsequent demands of nation-building, while lamenting the passage of history and the disappearance of old landscapes in the city’s drive toward modernity. In his latest volume, *Still Travelling* (2008), he considers the historical expansion of the nation through ethnic globalisation alongside its contemporary global economic articulations. Two poems, “Still Travelling” and “Double Helix”, are particularly approving of the nation’s multifarious global associations.

⁶⁵ Rajeev Patke, “Preface”, in Edwin Thumboo, *Still Travelling* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2008), pp. 8-12 (p. 8).

Thumboo's oeuvre supplies numerous examples of his commitment to understanding contemporary Singapore in its historical development from British colony to new nation. His new poem, "Still Travelling", sustains these concerns but casts its eye toward the future. Singapore's multiethnic collective, born of postcolonial diasporas, is openly declared as something bound by colonial history:

We are
New and multiracial; go meet our longings.
Others inherit, we assemble. Put in migrations;
Forebear's bloody sweat that prospered rulers.

They took, and left finely judged remainders. (pp. 82-83)

In casting Singapore as an assemblage of migrant groups, rather than a continuation of the deep, primordial inheritance and shared ancestry that Anthony Smith posits as a pure definition of the nation, Thumboo highlights Singapore's predicament as a state that does not fit strict conceptions of the nation.⁶⁶ He therefore challenges Singapore's contemporary writers to write a national narrative that is both representative of the nation's ethnic diversity and its common purpose:

So, roll out the drums; pick your commission.
Recharge the canon, doubly with our voices;
The recent one; some older have done their work.
Distil our narrative; insert metaphor and icon.
Speak that all may see us. Our needs are similar,
Masuri, Yoon Wah, Kannabiran, Alvin, Lynette
And others of our tribe. (p. 83)

Invoking a litany of Singapore's writers of varying levels of prominence and achievement, and who write in different languages across several generations and different ethnic groups,⁶⁷ Thumboo binds the global history of the island city into a single "tribe". The invention of a unitary tribal identity,⁶⁸ a concept central to nation-

⁶⁶ See my discussion of C.J.W.-L. Wee earlier in this chapter.

⁶⁷ The writers are S.N. Masuri, Wong Yoon Wah, Kannabiran Rama, Alvin Pang and Lynette Lim (a secondary school student mentored by Thumboo). See Thumboo's "Glossary", pp. 99-100.

⁶⁸ In their influential book *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argue that what passes for cultural tradition is often in fact "invented". See Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The*

building, is stereotypically Singaporean in its pragmatism and contrivance, but also necessary in the absence of a coherent historical tradition on which to draw; its inherent advantage is the degree to which it is a protean, almost globalised tribalism, to coin a somewhat self-contradictory neologism.

In its global scope the nation as envisaged in “Still Travelling” resonates with Suchen Lim’s vision of the ethnically global nation. The sense of biological diversity underpinning a national collective is developed in “Double Helix”, which alludes to a bridge being built (at the time of publication) across Singapore’s downtown waterfront. The design of the bridge is based on the double-helix structure of DNA, the building blocks of human life; Thumboo takes the bridge as a point of departure from which to comment on the multiple primordial cultures bound up in the city’s history, deliberately infusing his verse with ambiguity and indeterminacy as he writes at once of the bridge, a common human genome and the grand accretion of human history as manifested in the nation-state:

Spun in curving steel, you stride
Millennia, carrying the sum of human history;
Arch back into beginnings, to loop ahead,
Powering ancestral visions, urban dreams.
Strung blue and red, your ruling molecules
Encode our destiny from ancient caves
To river-places: the Huang Ho, Indus, Nile.
And great cities that attempt the stars. (p. 64)

As a metaphor for global humanity Thumboo’s invocation of genetics echoes Paul Gilroy’s use of the human cell to assert a planetary universalism and thus transcend racialised discourses.⁶⁹ Gilroy’s theory does not affirm homogeneity, but rather attempts to displace the restrictive category of race in order to facilitate the notion of the mixing of different cultures. Similarly, Thumboo’s DNA metaphor captures the

Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The “invention of tradition”, however, is particularly explicit in, and apposite to, Singapore.

⁶⁹ See Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

broad sweep of world history, culminating in the congress of ancient civilisational bloodlines in Singapore. As the primary referent of “great cities that attempt the stars”, the city-state-nation is cast as a synecdoche of global civilisation.

Thumboo then juxtaposes the global civilisational character of the city-nation with an attendant futurist vision of its entanglement with capitalist modernity and its instrumental demands: “So flying cars, people with propellers; some compute. / Spread over a City in a Garden, Hands of the Nation / Transform circuits of a micro chip into a maze” (p. 64). Rather than contesting the potentially dehumanising deculturation of Singaporean technocracy, Thumboo yokes this project of instrumental modernity to his holistic view of the nation. Progress over the bridge reads as progress toward cultural and economic rapprochement in the nation’s globalisation:

So walk this Double Helix, point to point.
Recall its Science but see its Art speak life
Surrounding life, feeding on four waters, as skies
Unfold our destiny, as clouds bring benedictions
For us, for all. (p. 64)

As a multivalent trope for technological and economic globality and a planetary culture, the bridge serves to condense the poet’s ambitious vision for the global city-nation. Looking out to sea, it ushers in the “four waters” of the world’s oceans, alluding to a deep historical sense of globalisation even as the contemporary expressions of those global processes conflate nation and world in looking toward future horizons for Singapore. For Thumboo, Singapore’s national construction is a result of global centripetal forces that converge in the contemporary moment: “Share this time and space, aptly re-drawn / In seven colours to make a modern homeland” (p. 64).

The Singapore writers considered above collectively enable a view of the postcolonial Singaporean nation as an extroverted globalised formation. This view, however, is asserted against existing tendencies in Singapore to define the nation in a strict binary of conservative cultural conceptions and global capitalist articulations. What the Singapore writers achieve, then, is a transcendence of the coexistence of parochialism and neoliberal globalisation in favour of a multidimensionally global understanding of the nation. Their animus toward parochialism and unreconstructed diasporic nativist sentiments places them firmly alongside the London writers, but the Singapore writers embrace the global while the former regard the local as the proper arena for engaging with questions of nation. In the last section of this chapter, I want to examine these insights and arrive at certain conclusions about how the comparison between postcolonial London and Singapore writers transforms existing theories about postcoloniality and globalisation, in particular those that attend to questions of the nation-state.

London and Singapore: The Nation-State and the Postcolonial Global City

If globalisation is said to be eroding the influence of the nation-state, then the global cities through which global forces are most intensely channeled might be regarded as the most significant emblems of national impotence. Within this presumptive framework London and Singapore appear to be exemplary instances of global capitalism's resistance to national authority; these cities seem to corroborate to some degree theorists like Miyoshi, Ahmad and Hardt and Negri, whose writings diagnose the increasing obsolescence of the nation-state's influence over both capital and culture. By examining how postcolonial London and Singapore writers have explored the nation / globalisation dynamic in contemporary literature, however, the

generalised certitude of existing theories begins to fragment. Both London and Singapore bear different relationships to the notion of the postcolonial; a similar claim might be made for how the concept of the nation applies to either city. London's postcolonial subjects are "late arrivals" from the former colonies whose status as part of the nation is highly contested. The city itself, partly due to the postcolonial presence, bears an ambivalent relationship to the national identity. Postcolonial Singaporeans, on the other hand, mostly belong to diasporic communities brought together by British colonialism; in the city's contemporary form they are insiders, given the lack of a precolonial and colonial national historical identity, although some Singaporean subjects in the literature do assert ethnically exclusionary nationalisms. But its global city status means that Singapore might be seen as a global nation, a view largely shared by the Singapore writers I examined above.

Insofar as the postcolonial writers of both cities considered in this chapter take issue with unreconstructed diasporic expressions of native culture, which in more extreme cases manifest themselves as fundamentalisms, one might argue that they repudiate certain transnational yet reactionary strands of cultural nationalism. They are seen, in other words, to repudiate a certain kind of postcolonial globalisation rooted in diaspora. Rather than disavow or effectively transcend the legacy of the (post)colonial, however, these writers suggest that recourse to nativist diasporic cultures without refracting them through the contemporary realities of the new society results in different kinds of social regression. For the postcolonials of the Londons conjured up by Ali and Smith, social and subjective frustration generates either violence or admissions of failure. In Suchen Lim's Singapore parochial and chauvinistic assertions of Chinese culture belie the city's considerable multicultural national promise. These forms of deterritorialised (and reterritorialised) cultural

nationalisms making themselves heard across the (literary) global city network confound the claims of theorists like Hardt and Negri that cultural globalisation has “merged and blended” the world’s national cultures. The two cities’ writers testify to the continued purchase of retrograde (trans)nationalisms within the imaginative reality of global cities.

This shared critique does not, however, result in a common strategy for addressing the linked challenges of nation and globalisation. The varied negotiations with the nation endorsed by London and Singapore writers are in their own ways forward-looking. But they also diverge dramatically: Ali and Smith approve of a postcolonial focus on locality as the most viable way at present for negotiating the cultural politics of the nation, while the Singapore writers advocate expanding the idea of the nation by embracing both its internal hybridity and global presences, including the West as part of its historical legacy. Given the limited geographical scope of Singapore as an island city-state, recourse to a grander, globalised notion of the national economy and community has its obvious appeal. One productive question linking London and Singapore emerges from the fact that the Singapore writers’ multifaceted representation of the nation might usefully be contrasted with the narrow focus on the cultural and subjective in the London fictions. Why does economic globalisation appear to be a significant concern for some of the Singapore writers in their representations of nation-building, while being conspicuously absent in the London novels?

The answer, I suggest, is closely linked to the focus on locality in the London writing, given that, as evidenced by Ali and Smith, postcolonial Londoners’ sense of belonging subjectively to Britain is a conflicted (and contested) one and represents the primary sphere of their sociopolitical engagement with the city. Postcolonial

Singaporeans appear in Suchen Lim and Thumboo's work as being a normative presence in their city while welcoming and embodying the outside world; postcolonial Londoners in the London novels continue to be positioned by normative British culture as outsiders seeking a foothold on the internal identity of Britain through their inhabitation of the city. This discrepancy between the postcolonial politics of nation and globalisation in London and Singapore writing suggests that the global-city perspective lays bare retrograde forms of globalisation while calibrating different responses to the nation according to divergent postcolonial imperatives. In the process, the global city network becomes conceptually differentiated according to the social specificities of postcolonial national politics. The hopeful and empowered globalisation of Singapore mapped out in Edwin Thumboo's poetry suggests that the city-state's residual parochialisms do not curtail the possibility of recasting the nation as a global city-state. The conflicted subject positions of figures like Samad, Millat, Chanu and Karim in the London novels, on the other hand, imply that a rapprochement with British nationality within the locality of London's complex urban space is possible in the absence of appeals to a nativist form of globality.

I want to close the chapter by considering in broader terms how my global-cities perspective has enabled alternative ways of understanding the relationship between the nation, the postcolonial and the global. Global cities, as they are written in these London and Singapore texts, do not reflect the supersession of the postcolonial nation-state by globalisation. What is common to these postcolonial writers of the Western and non-Western global city is a rejection of retrograde forms of nationalist globalism. In this rejection they embody the progressiveness of the global city milieu. Their work does not imply a wholesale abandonment of the idea of the nation, but rather a commitment to confronting contemporary nation-based

challenges through various combinations of the local and the global. In the divergences between the two sets of writers, on the other hand, the global-city perspective reveals the unevenness of postcolonial negotiations with the nation. Global cities are represented by these London and Singapore writers as postcolonial sites upon which flawed nationalist globalisms are confronted and rejected, but are also written as spaces which lay bare the differentiated possibilities of globalisation for geographically dispersed postcolonial national projects. They might thus be said to reveal the uneven recourse to both repudiations and endorsements of globalisation for addressing the contemporary idea of the nation.

CHAPTER 4: POSTCOLONIAL COSMOPOLITANISMS

The culture of global cities, in both the popular understanding and global cities scholarship, is cosmopolitan culture. Broadly understood as an openly liberal attitude to global cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism appears to flourish where global flows are particularly concentrated. As the most intensive sites of cultural, media, financial and consumerist flows, global cities are arguably the most conducive contexts for cosmopolitanisms to emerge or develop in. Comments by the leading global cities researchers Paul Knox and John Friedmann that I quote in my Introduction suggest as much. Cosmopolitanism, it is asserted, is nothing other than the culture of neoliberal globalisation, which is given its most influential and explicit expression across the global city network. It is used in common parlance to refer to the cultural practices and dispositions of a privileged capitalist elite, involving jetsetting lifestyles and the habitual sampling of different cultures and locales. From this perspective there is little that is “postcolonial” involved in cosmopolitanism within global cities, at least in the sense of asymmetrical power relations between the West and its Others; rather, cosmopolitanism in the major urban nodes of the world is a signifier of both capitalist hegemony and a postmodern cultural sophistication. But recent theoretical explorations of the concept have introduced variants on this popular understanding that draw attention to non-elite, demotic and even embattled forms of cosmopolitanism. Most commonly referred to by the term vernacular cosmopolitanism, these attitudes to cultural difference celebrate the existence of other cultures while retaining a commitment to one’s own cultural distinctiveness. Vernacular cosmopolitanisms often also involve a struggle for cultural survival against more powerful and unaccommodating cultures. The minoritarian

cosmopolitanisms of diasporic postcolonials in the West, we will see, has been taken up as a prime example of such struggles.

Considering postcolonial cosmopolitanisms in global cities brings a cultural complexity to understanding globalisation and its relationship with postcoloniality that is absent from existing debates. Globalcentric neo-Marxists like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirik, for example, argue that because global capitalism's influence is precisely that – global – the most important contemporary power relations are now the conflicts that manifest themselves everywhere along class lines. Such arguments are predicated on class and wealth, ignoring geographic and territorial considerations. While there certainly are important asymmetries between the rural poor and the rural aristocracy or middle class, for example, such comparisons do little to account for the relative lack of global cultural and human flows within non-urban contexts. The intensity and concentration of such flows in global cities in particular, I suggest, must be foregrounded in order to understand how globalisation for postcolonials can be complicated by the politics of global cultural difference that are played out prominently within such cities. The existence of this kind of politics means that class, while important, offers an insufficient perspective with which to understand power relations within highly globalised urban centres. Existing theories also regard globalisation, whether in tandem with postcolonial regimes of power or otherwise, as something to be contested. Neo-Marxist theorists concur with critics like Robert Young and Bill Ashcroft in that all assume globalisation to be an hegemonic force that needs to be resisted. My comparative analysis here of cosmopolitanisms in postcolonial London and Singapore literature suggests, however, that globalisation can actually, within global cities, be a positive tool for postcolonials dealing with varied local agendas.

In examining literary explorations of cosmopolitanism in postcolonial London and Singapore, I identify some important ways in which postcolonial writers in globalised urban centres have appropriated globalisation concepts in their work. Compared to the relatively disempowered postcolonial communities in less developed and less globalised locales, postcolonials in the global city network inhabit the most globalised nodes within existing circuits of globalisation and therefore have potential access to the full measure of global cultural diversity and capitalist markets. In this sense it is to the postcolonial writing of the global city that we might look for a sense of how postcolonial subjects can make use of the fruits of globalisation rather than fulfill the more stereotypical role of its victims. Established theories of the link between globalisation and postcoloniality regard the former largely as an hegemonic force. By focusing on cosmopolitanism in postcolonial global-city writing, however, I consider the imaginative possibilities it offers to writers in their explorations of the postcolonial exploitation of globalisation.

The postcolonial London texts examined below address both the subjective and social struggles of postcolonial Londoners through a cosmopolitan appeal to the city's globality. Focusing on Atima Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* (1999) and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996), the London section of this chapter identifies a refusal to characterise London as a British city; instead, these representations emphasise a postcolonial insistence on the city's status as a global cosmopolis. Western space becomes reconceptualised as globalised space. These writers argue that globalisation might offer a positive cultural solution to the postcolonial diasporic problematic of social identity and cultural belonging through a vernacular cosmopolitanism both of survival and multicultural celebration, although Adebayo does warn against narrowly conceived postcolonial appeals to globalisation. A

specific cultural dimension of globalisation, then, is taken up by these writers as a way of addressing local postcolonial dilemmas. The postcolonial Singapore texts under consideration in this chapter, on the other hand, capture the distinctiveness of cosmopolitanism as a specific public and governmental discourse that has emerged in Singapore society in recent years as a counterpart to its local conceptual opposite, the heartland. As a concomitant of Singapore's self-conscious identity as a global city, cosmopolitanism has become a discursive tool in the state management of neoliberal globalisation; in other words, it is a market-driven concept intimately tied to Singapore's engagement with global capitalism. It shapes the city-state's mixed welcome of foreigners, based on their economic role and class positioning. But it also reflects a neocolonial residue, such that cosmopolitanism in Singapore is at least partly ethnicised in favour of the West. Perhaps most intriguingly, cosmopolitanism and its exclusions in Singapore writing suggest an emergent imperial role for the city and its citizens in relation to transient subaltern labour from the Asian economic peripheries. Cosmopolitanism in Singapore can thus be seen as a complex and ambivalent involvement with globalisation that positions the city-state as a seat of imperial power in Asia that is nonetheless still in the grasp of neocolonial notions of Western superiority. Through the lens provided by cosmopolitanism, we see Singapore as it is portrayed by these writers as a society simultaneously in the grip of colonial and imperialist notions.

How might these observations serve to challenge or modify existing theories on the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation? In general terms, these theories have neglected to consider the ways in which globalisation might be mobilised by postcolonial subjects and societies to confront local challenges. Globalisation has instead been regarded as a source of oppressive power, largely on

account of the tendency to understand it narrowly as global capitalism, either in a globally diffuse guise or emanating from power centres in the West.¹ By adopting a broader understanding of globalisation as a cultural as well as political and economic phenomenon, and bringing this broader perspective to bear on postcolonial cosmopolitanisms in global-city writing, this chapter reconceives globalisation as potential promise rather than peril for postcolonial subjects in these urban centres. The way these two cities' writers have envisaged globalisation's promise for postcolonials, however, is marked by significant variation. While the cultural dimension of globalisation promises a certain kind of subjective liberation for London's postcolonials even in the face of continuing social marginalisation, Singapore's involvement with the global is at once materially empowering, culturally subordinating, and potentially productive of a neo-imperial relationship with its Asian counterparts. This comparison of cosmopolitan survival in postcolonial London writing with the cosmopolitan privilege in postcolonial Singapore writing, then, identifies a contradiction of inclusivity and cultural liberation in postcolonial global-city literature.

A genuinely open disposition toward cultural difference in postcolonial London is seen in the novels to be necessary for contesting the city's ethnic exclusions, while the Singapore texts present a city-state informed by exclusionary attitudes that mediate its successful encounter with neocolonial globalisation. On this evidence, postcoloniality continues to shape social experience in these global cities, but largely in different spheres of life. Ex-colonial communities in London still experience racialised neocolonial marginalisation, while Singapore society appears still to be beholden to a significant degree to Western influences and standards. My

¹ See detailed accounts of these theories in the Introduction.

comparative examination of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms in selected London and Singapore texts suggests that the cosmopolitan imperatives of postcolonials in the Western and non-Western global city diverge in terms of how these are related to exclusionary practices. For the diasporic postcolonials in the London texts, the city is experienced as a space in which they are often quite clearly made to feel a marginalised minority by a normative postimperial culture, or at the least a space in which their displacement from their “roots” is palpably felt. Their response, then, is to recast the city as a global cosmopolis, either in defiance of an unwelcoming normative community or as an attempt to re-root themselves within globality. For the postcolonial Singaporean writers, Singaporeans are the dominant normative majority whose successful exploitation of neoliberal globalisation has allowed them to engage in a “managed” market cosmopolitanism that offers different degrees of welcome to foreigners based on their perceived usefulness to the national economic agenda. This selectivity manifests itself both in Singapore’s neoimperial dominance in respect of subaltern labour from less-developed Asian neighbours and in its continued deference to Western capitalist influences in the city-state. My comparison of literary explorations of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms in these two global cities thus registers how postcolonial writers harness globalisation in their work, both in salutary ways and to profitable but unsavoury effect, depending on the specific dynamic at play between global and postcolonial elements.

What follows is an account of cosmopolitanism that will be used to theoretically contextualise my examination of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms in the Singapore and London sections below. I conclude the chapter with a section exploring in further detail how considering cosmopolitanism in postcolonial London and

Singapore writing might produce alternatives to existing theoretical work on the link between postcoloniality and globalisation.

Mapping Cosmopolitanism

In his intriguingly-titled essay “Cosmopolitan Patriots” (1997), Kwame Anthony Appiah posits the ostensibly contradictory notion of a rooted cosmopolitanism. His ideal cosmopolitanism strikes a balance between absolute heterogeneity and a set of regulatory norms:

A liberal cosmopolitanism of the sort I am defending might put its point like this: we value the variety of human forms of social and cultural life; we do not want everybody to become part of a homogeneous global culture; and we know that this means that there will be local differences (both within and between states) in moral climate as well. As long as these differences meet certain general ethical constraints – as long, in particular, as political institutions respect basic human rights – we are happy to let them be.²

Appiah’s formulation is particularly worthy of remark because it seems to yoke two influential definitions of the cosmopolitan together. In contemporary critical discourse, cosmopolitanism has taken on two primary significations. One emerges from social and political theory, invoking cosmopolitanism as a political and ethical ideal for regulating global relations. In this normative guise the concept represents, for Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “a unifying vision for urban democracy and governance in a globalising world”.³ Pheng Cheah’s recent overview account of cosmopolitan theory traces its development “from an intellectual ethos” to a global political consciousness that allows for institutions of global regulation.⁴ For David Held, cosmopolitanism involves a vision of global justice and democracy; in line with the normative element

² Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1997), pp. 617-639 (p. 621).

³ Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 12 (2004), pp. 2431-2445 (p. 2431).

⁴ Pheng Cheah, “Cosmopolitanism”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, Nos. 2-3 (2006), pp. 486-496 (p. 486).

foregrounded in Appiah's essay, he suggests that "cosmopolitanism can be taken as those basic values that set down standards or boundaries that no agent, whether a representative of a government, state, or civil association, should be able to cross."⁵ A standardising ethos, it appears, characterises definitions of cosmopolitanism within social theory.

A more culturalist conception of cosmopolitanism, one that eschews universalist norms of global solidarity, understands it as a mode of subjectivity for inhabiting the contemporary globalised world, one that engages positively with the existence of cultural difference. Bruce Robbins observes that recent shifts in definitions of the cosmopolitan have been toward a broader, more inclusive scope:

Understood as a fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole, cosmopolitanism has often seemed to claim universality by virtue of its independence, its detachment from the bonds, commitments, and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bound lives. It has seemed to be a luxuriously free-floating view from above. But many voices now insist [...] that the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged – indeed, often coerced.⁶

It will be this particularistic sense of engagement with global cultural difference, the various modes in which that difference has been confronted and negotiated (what Robbins labels "actually existing cosmopolitanism") that I want to focus on in this chapter. The gulf between the older notion of the cosmopolitan ideal of universal human values and the particularistic modality of subjectivity around which more culturalist theories of cosmopolitanism revolve is striking: one definition based on commonality and homogeneity, the other on difference. While the two need not necessarily be understood antithetically, they do largely appear, in their contemporary

⁵ David Held, "Cosmopolitanism: Taming Globalization", in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, 2nd ed., eds. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 514-529 (p. 514). See also Held's *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

⁶ Bruce Robbins, "Introduction Part I: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism", in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1-19 (p. 1).

forms, to emanate from distinctive sources, the former from social theory, the latter from the broad field of cultural studies. I will focus on the culturalist dimension, although where appropriate I will acknowledge and engage with the idea of cosmopolitanism as a global political formation and an ideal global community. It needs emphasising, however, that in this chapter I deal primarily with certain complexities of cosmopolitan subjectivity in postcolonial London and Singapore writing, with local or individual felt experience rather than the broad concerns of global politics. The concept of cosmopolitanism as a set of global norms focuses on the nation-state as that political formation which it attempts to transcend, but while the category of the nation will impinge upon my discussion in this chapter, my primary concern here is to examine modes of engaging with cultural difference rather than deal with the relationship between the nation-state and the global; a highly specific and contextualised consideration of the latter from a postcolonial perspective can be found in the previous chapter. I will therefore develop here a taxonomy of cosmopolitanism that specifically facilitates the mapping of cosmopolitan cultural engagements in the representations of London and Singapore that are examined below.

Ulf Hannerz's pioneering essay is an apt point of departure for my taxonomic account of cosmopolitanism, offering a narrowly circumscribed definition of the concept to which others have responded with more nuanced theorisations. Addressing cosmopolitanism as "a perspective", "a state of mind" or "a mode of managing meaning",⁷ he imposes a strict criterion for defining the genuine cosmopolitan figure, involving a particular "stance toward diversity itself" (p. 239). Foregrounding the role of difference in his definition, he suggests that cosmopolitanism demands "a

⁷ Ulf Hannerz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture", in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1990), pp. 237-251 (p. 238).

willingness to engage with the Other”, being “an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. To become acquainted with more cultures is to turn into an *aficionado*, to view them as art works” (p. 239). His sense of the cosmopolitan is thus predicated on understanding it as being something more than merely the global mobility that capitalist elites might boast of. Indeed, he argues that “tourists, exiles, and expatriates” (p. 241) do not necessarily qualify as real cosmopolitans. Many tourists and business travellers move for the purpose of what Hannerz, citing Paul Theroux, calls “home plus” – for example, “Spain is home plus sunshine” or “travel is ideally home plus more and better business” (p. 241). This kind of global mobility, for Hannerz, has little to do with an active engagement with different cultures and systems of meaning; genuine cosmopolitans mark themselves out through their desire “to immerse themselves in other cultures” (p. 241). Unlike tourists, significantly, their interest is in being a cultural participant rather than a spectator.⁸ According to this logic, then, exiles and labour migrants do not generally qualify as cosmopolitans, because their movement has been compelled by material or political circumstances rather than the cultural connoisseurship of the true cosmopolitan.⁹ At the other end of the spectrum, Hannerz addresses “locals” as the diametrical opposite of cosmopolitans, people for whom the existence of cultural diversity may not be important beyond the survival of their own distinctive culture. Nonetheless he argues that they share with cosmopolitans a vested interest in the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness, insofar as cosmopolitans require the existence of distinctive local cultures in order to affirm their commitment to the Other. The upshot of this, Hannerz declares, is “that there can be no cosmopolitans without locals” (p. 250).

⁸ See pp. 241-2.

⁹ See pp. 242-3.

The apparent conceptual dependence of cosmopolitanism on local cultures in Hannerz's theory notwithstanding, he does appear to privilege the cosmopolitan over more parochial interests. John Tomlinson has identified elitist connotations in Hannerz's account of cosmopolitanism. In particular, he is suspicious of what he deems the latter's implicit denigration of localised cultures.¹⁰ The problem may stem partly from Hannerz's recourse to an ideal type of cultural disposition in his analysis. Certainly, high-end tourists and business travellers are commonly and intuitively regarded as cosmopolitan by general observers, despite Hannerz's reluctance to acknowledge them as such. Indeed, what we might call neoliberal cosmopolitanism has received theoretical treatment as a discrete category of its own. The local has also been examined in its articulation with cosmopolitanism; perhaps the most prominent development in recent years has been the critical attention afforded to rooted cosmopolitanisms of the kind outlined by Appiah. Cosmopolitans, to my mind, do not necessarily need to affirm an absolute commitment to celebrating and engaging with all given cultures; the ability to do so, and to be selective in the exercise of that ability, represents a more realistic and useful criteria for recognising "actually existing cosmopolitanisms". In stressing that contemporary cosmopolitanism is not a form of deculturation by globalisation, Stuart Hall helpfully condenses the point:

It is not that we are without culture but we are drawing on the traces and residues of many cultural systems, of many ethical systems – and that is precisely what cosmopolitanism means. It means the ability to stand outside of having one's life written and scripted by any one community, whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture – whatever it might be – and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings.¹¹

Where Hannerz's definition reduces cosmopolitanism almost to mere aestheticism, Hall gestures here toward its strategic potential for negotiating the complexities of

¹⁰ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 189.

¹¹ Stuart Hall, "Political Belonging in a World of Multiple Identities", in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, eds. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 25-31 (p. 26).

contemporary existence. In line with this, I want to suggest that cosmopolitanism is a protean condition or phenomenon, and that different theoretical formulations are necessary for explicating its various dispersions in my comparison of postcolonial London and Singapore in this chapter.

The default definition of cosmopolitanism has often centred on the figure of the capitalist elite, an apparently rootless and globally mobile subject. Often vilified, such cosmopolitans are characterised by empowerment and privilege. For Robbins, “the word cosmopolitan immediately evokes the image of a privileged person: someone who can claim to be a ‘citizen of the world’ by virtue of independent means, high-tech tastes, and globe-trotting mobility.”¹² Yeoh explicitly ascribes this privilege to the transnational capitalist class, “whose globe-trotting lifestyles, connoisseur tastes and disembedded social networks present a revolt against the nation-state” (p. 2432). Homi K. Bhabha, prominently accused by critics like Aijaz Ahmad of complicity with the forces of global capitalism,¹³ has ironically drawn attention to neoliberal cosmopolitanism’s dependence on the exploitation of local economies:

There is a kind of global cosmopolitanism, widely influential now, that configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages. It is a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition. Such a concept of global ‘development’ has faith in the virtually boundless powers of technological innovation and global communications. [...] Global cosmopolitans of this ilk frequently inhabit ‘imagined communities’ that consist of silicon valleys and software campuses; although, increasingly, they have to face up to the carceral world of call-centres, and the sweat-shops of outsourcing. A global cosmopolitanism of this sort readily celebrates a world of plural cultures and peoples located at the periphery, so long as they produce healthy profit margins within metropolitan societies.¹⁴

¹² Bruce Robbins, “Comparative Cosmopolitanism”, *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), pp. 169-186 (p. 171).

¹³ See the Introduction.

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism”, new preface to *The Location of Culture* [1994] (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), ix-xxv (xiv).

Bhabha is rightly cognisant of neoliberal cosmopolitanism's involvement with marginalised labour. The asymmetry here between the globally mobile elite and locally confined cultures, however, does not reflect the mobility of marginalised peoples. Zygmunt Bauman's evocative description of the distinction between "tourists" and "vagabonds", or the cosmopolitan capitalist elite and the subaltern labour classes, recognises that globalisation's fruits are unevenly distributed and compel many to move for survival. Focusing on mobility as a central experience of globalisation, Bauman distinguishes between the empowered choices available to "tourists" in their traversal of the globe and the enforced movements of the helpless "vagabonds" in the face of global material forces. "The tourists", he writes, "move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive* – the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*."¹⁵ His analysis, then, acknowledges that global movements do not always come in the form of elite cosmopolitan travel. This disjuncture between elite forms of cosmopolitanism and enforced global mobility has particular relevance for my textual examination of Singapore cosmopolitanism below. But the notion of cosmopolitanism itself has been expanded to capture its non-elitist as well as elitist significations, the former of which I describe below. While such non-elite forms of cosmopolitanism have been theorised under a number of labels, I generally follow Pnina Werbner's lead in using "vernacular cosmopolitanism" as a broad term for rooted or embattled kinds of cosmopolitan subjectivity and mobility.¹⁶

Appiah's essay on cosmopolitan patriots attempts to expound what might best be described as a hopeful cosmopolitanism of the vernacular. Citing his father's version of rooted cosmopolitanism, he suggests that "there was no point in roots if

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 92-3.

¹⁶ See Pnina Werbner, "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, Nos. 2-3 (2006), pp. 496-498.

you couldn't take them with you". His ideal, then, is "a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (Appiah, p. 618). Eschewing the archetypal experiences of coerced migrancy and exile, he argues that the diasporic condition is to be celebrated if it results from decisions freely taken.¹⁷ Rather than considering cosmopolitanism as an elitist ideology or a subjective mode of the marginalised, Appiah lauds its potential as a universal but diverse condition. Referencing the post-Windrush generation of migrants in Britain, Hall proposes a cosmopolitanism that similarly reconciles cultural specificity and the normative needs of a multicultural society:

We are in that open space that requires a kind of vernacular cosmopolitanism, that is to say a cosmopolitanism that is aware of the limitations of any one culture or any one identity and that is radically aware of its insufficiency in governing a wider society, but which nevertheless is not prepared to rescind its claim to the traces of difference, which make its life important. (Hall, p. 30)

What Appiah and Hall have in common here is a view of vernacular or rooted cosmopolitanism that affirms the potential agency of specific cultures within a multicultural framework. Their cosmopolitan visions, in other words, choose not to confront the potentially grim reality of coerced cosmopolitanisms and the conditions and strategies invoked by subaltern and postcolonial subjects to negotiate the cultural disorientations wrought by migration and the cultural hegemony both of the West and of global forces.

This is a task that has been taken up by Bhabha in a number of essays.¹⁸ The term "vernacular cosmopolitanism" is perhaps most closely associated with his recent

¹⁷ See Appiah, p. 618.

¹⁸ Bhabha's work on vernacular cosmopolitanism has thus far been uneven and slight, adumbrated rather than comprehensively theorised. Nonetheless his attempts to specify the concept are valuable insofar as they foreground the often embattled nature of cosmopolitanism. His forthcoming book *A Measure of Dwelling* purports to develop a full theory of vernacular cosmopolitanism.

work, which in Werbner's assessment has attempted to elaborate the concept as a response to the inadequacy of elite notions of cosmopolitanism for explicating the experience of migrants and refugees.¹⁹ The focus of his work on the concept is on cosmopolitanism as a "minoritarian perspective" on global progress (Bhabha, "Looking Back", xvi) and on "cosmopolitan community envisaged in a *marginality*".²⁰ It is this focus on the marginal and minoritarian in the global sense that supplies the postcolonial dimension to his exploration of vernacular cosmopolitanism and distinguishes the latter from universalist, normative formulations of cosmopolitanism that have as their precursor the cosmopolitan ideal of Eurocentric Enlightenment thought.²¹ "The postcolonial", he writes, "endorses a vernacular cosmopolitanism that has to translate between cultures and across them in order to survive, not in order to assert the sovereignty of a civilized class, or the spiritual autonomy of a revered ideal."²² The minoritarian and the marginal, then, inhabit a cosmopolitanism of necessity, rather than one of choice and privilege.

In "The Vernacular Cosmopolitan" (2000), an unusually clear and coherent essay by Bhabha's standards, he develops the concept with particular reference to postcolonial migrants in Britain. While this represents an especially apt critical perspective for reading postcolonial London, it does not preclude the potential resonance of Bhabha's theory for other postcolonial cultural contexts. Nonetheless, it is the postcolonial diasporic experience that forms the fundamental backdrop to his theory. He argues that the ability of immigrants and minorities in Britain to be part of

¹⁹ See Werbner, p. 497.

²⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", in *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 39-52 (p. 42).

²¹ On the Enlightenment roots of universalist cosmopolitan thought, see Cheah, "Cosmopolitanism", and Gerard Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2006), pp. 25-47.

²² Homi Bhabha and John Comaroff, "Speaking of Postcoloniality in the Continuous Present: A Conversation", in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 15-46 (p. 24).

a “shared sense of civic virtue while maintaining their cultural differences” constitutes a “double life” which he labels “vernacular cosmopolitanism”; such subjects are “vernacular cosmopolitans”.²³ But rather than referring to the ability to be at once part of the West and an originary non-West, Bhabha suggests that the postcolonial vernacular cosmopolitan in Britain is both postcolonial and British, with that Britishness understood as already bound up with the internal postcolonial presence. This is not a subjective position without an element of conflict, however; the postcolonial diasporic condition enforces certain requirements that bespeak a neocolonial social hierarchy within this postcolonial West:

It is this double life of British minorities that makes them ‘vernacular cosmopolitans’, translating between cultures, renegotiating traditions from a position where ‘locality’ insists on its own terms, while entering into larger national and societal conversations. This is not a cosmopolitanism of the élite variety inspired by universalist patterns of humanistic thought that run gloriously across cultures, establishing an enlightened unity. Vernacular cosmopolitans are compelled to make a tryst with cultural translation as an act of survival. Their specific and local histories, often threatened and repressed, are inserted ‘between the lines’ of dominant cultural practices. (p. 139)

Once more distancing vernacular cosmopolitanism from Eurocentric norms of cosmopolitan culture, Bhabha emphasises its struggle to lay claim to a social space that showcases its distinctiveness even as it attempts to assert itself as internal to the postimperial metropolis. The “survival” in question, in other words, involves the need to affirm a distinctive identity alongside inclusion within a postimperial milieu that is not always accommodating of such dual claims. Vernacular cosmopolitanism as it is theorised by Bhabha – with its marginal and minoritarian focus – is specifically relevant in this chapter to the postcolonial London context; my examination of postcolonial London below, however, will unveil a more globalised understanding of the city that rewrites the cultural definition of London through its globality.

²³ Homi Bhabha, “The Vernacular Cosmopolitan”, in *Voices of the Crossing: the Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2000), pp. 133-142 (p. 139).

What I have examined in this section serves as a map of important existing theories of cosmopolitanism within which to situate my discussion of representations of Singapore and London postcolonial cosmopolitanism. None of the existing theories can, or are intended to, fully explain the localised particularities that are laid bare in what follows. Rather, existing concepts will be used as broad points of reference in order to capture the distinctiveness of both contexts in question. Neither is it my intention to develop new theories of cosmopolitanism through analyses of postcolonial London and Singapore literature; this chapter aims instead to offer new insights into the relationship between globalisation and postcoloniality through the lens provided by comparing postcolonial cosmopolitanisms between distinctive global cities.

London: Postcolonials in the Western Cosmopolis

London's claim to be the most cosmopolitan city in the world has been asserted by numerous commentators, who point to its genuinely global mix of ethnicities as evidence of its preeminence as perhaps the foremost global city. And in many ways contemporary London does exemplify the universalist vision of cosmopolitan society. A special supplement to *The Guardian* (21.01.05) entitled "London: The World In One City" suggests that London can lay claim to being the most culturally and ethnically diverse city in history. In his essay on London and immigration, Panikos Panayi echoes this sentiment:

At the start of the twenty-first century, London has become the global multicultural city par excellence. In the former heart of the British Empire, less than half a century after its demise, a city has emerged that would not exist without the contribution of immigrants and their offspring. They have become part of the geographical, social, economic, cultural, sporting, culinary

and political landscape of the only true global city in the British Isles. London without its ethnic minorities would be London without blood.²⁴

Much of this cosmopolitan character and diversity is attributable to the city's postcolonial diasporas, a fact alluded to in Panayi's foregrounding of the breakup of the British Empire. Post-war immigration from the (ex-)colonies, heralded most famously by the disembarking West Indian passengers of the S.S. Windrush in 1948, has been significantly responsible for what Sukhdev Sandhu, in his study of black and Asian London writing, describes as "the omnipresence of 'colour'"²⁵ in contemporary London. But London's claim to being a cosmopolis, an idealised global microcosm, has consistently been undercut by an ongoing history of racism and ethnic and religious tensions. The city's plethora of postcolonial diasporas may be responsible for much of its colour and diversity, but they have crucially also been reminded time and again of their difference by those who would set themselves up as embodiments of London's normative culture. Panayi's comment that "London without its ethnic minorities would be London without blood" is ironic in this light, given that the conservative or outright racist rejection of non-white immigrants has often been based on the perceived contamination of a racially pure national entity; indeed, blood has literally been spilt in the name of this belief.

While the multicultural nature of London is widely acknowledged in postcolonial London writing, this does not in itself equate to a positive cosmopolitan view of the city. Neither does it imply that London's postcolonials are all cosmopolitans struggling to come to terms with an unwelcoming white majority. In Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995), notably, the Asian Muslim fundamentalists of Riaz's religious group are generally uncompromising in their animus toward the West

²⁴ Panikos Panayi, "Cosmopolis: London's Ethnic Minorities", in *London from Punk to Blair*, eds. Joe Kerr and Andrew Gibson (London: Reaktion, 2003), pp. 67-71 (p. 71).

²⁵ Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), xix.

and assertion of their non-Western identities. Even the protagonist Shahid is less a cosmopolitan than a troubled figure, grappling with difference and diversity not in an attempt to accept all cultures equally, but rather to decide, at least provisionally, what specific cultures appeal to him. In the end he appears to conclude that Asian Islamic fundamentalism is incompatible with a Western-style liberalism, and jettisons the former in provisional favour of the latter. Kureishi also challenges the liberal democratic optimism associated with the events of 1989, such as that in Fukuyama's "end of history" argument that announces the apparent global victory of liberal democracy and capitalism as a kind of universal cosmopolitan vision;²⁶ by making the fall of Communism a contextual backdrop to the perpetuation and escalation of cultural, religious and racial conflict in his postcolonial London of 1989, Kureishi accurately anticipates the exacerbation of a different kind of global ideological standoff.²⁷ Subsequent texts like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), which are examined elsewhere in this thesis, have corroborated this sense that London's claim to being an exemplary cosmopolis might actually be premature, given the postcolonial and religious tensions that they explore.²⁸

I want to focus here instead on two writers, Atima Srivastava and Diran Adebayo, who do portray postcolonial Londoners as cosmopolitans of a kind. Their novels present different portraits of diasporic postcolonial Londoners and their engagements with the cultural diversity of London, including the fact of their own difference from a powerful and conservative notion of normative Englishness. In

²⁶ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

²⁷ A significant body of work has appeared since 1989 that echoes this basic observation, although it is marked by important variations and nuances that have generated much controversy and disagreement. Arguably the two most well-known texts of this kind are Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* [1995] (London: Corgi, 2003), and Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

²⁸ A similar argument is made by Sara Upstone in her essay on these two novels. See Sara Upstone, "'Same Old, Same Old': Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2007), pp. 336-349.

Looking for Maya (1999) Srivastava explores the cosmopolitanism of an Asian Londoner in a city that appears to have largely (although not completely) transcended explicit racial and ethnic conflict. The urbane, educated young crowd who populate her novel are multiracial, but betray none of the tensions that are often perceived or represented between London's white and non-white communities; they are all Londoners whose varying claims to the city are of a positive cosmopolitan variety. Srivastava's protagonist, Mira, is a "wannabe" urban sophisticate, at home in London's multicultural sphere, and a frequent international tourist. This relatively elite form of cosmopolitan movement does not preclude a strong sense of home and rootedness, but her diasporic identity means that that rootedness is itself split and ambivalent. Her need to effect a negotiation between her Indian roots, her cultural ownership of London, and her access to the cultural diversity of the globe (much of which she accesses through London's global character) is a specific instance of how the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship can be complicated through a focus on the shifting experience of diaspora and cultural adaptation. This involves a perspective, in other words, that delves beneath the broad generalisations inherent in the macropolitical and global economic claims of many existing theorisations of postcoloniality and globalisation, and focuses instead on the cultural dimensions of these two conceptual categories.

Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996), in contrast, is in significant ways a more "typical" postcolonial or Black London text. Its prominent treatment of police brutality against black people, for example, places it within a tradition of Black British writing that includes the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Beryl Gilroy, Fred

D'Aguiar and Courttia Newland.²⁹ The novel's foregrounding of a long-standing racial and ethnic dimension to the postcolonial experience of London works to qualify the almost playful cultural code-switching that Dele, the London-born protagonist of Nigerian descent, engages in. His newfound awareness of Black British cultural politics sits uneasily alongside his refusal to submit to narrow, ethnic communal expectations. In the end, Dele asserts something of a vernacular cosmopolitanism, espousing a commitment to localised black political awareness alongside a continuing engagement with a selective multiculturalism enabled by London's globalised character. One significant aspect of the text lies in how it represents a rejection of a globally conceived Black resistance politics as overly-generalising and sometimes exploitative of individual black experience. Dele refuses the Procrustean nature of this kind of transnational resistance in favour of an open cosmopolitanism that dovetails with his own cultural agenda as an educated, streetwise black Londoner.

Both novels in their own ways present a vernacular cosmopolitanism that attempts to attach postcolonial diasporic identities to a larger globalised London identity but without, however, disavowing their historical roots. The central argument of this section, then, is that these representations of postcolonial London demonstrate how a particular version of vernacular cosmopolitanism can be used to effect postcolonial integration with the West, not by internally reconceptualising Britishness through the absorption of the postcolonial presence, but by appealing to the inclusive globality of London that provides a cultural space for identities that are both rooted in ex-colonial cultures and part of a global cultural milieu. The longstanding postcolonial problematic for London's postcolonials, of diasporic displacement and

²⁹ See Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002); Beryl Gilroy, *Boy-Sandwich* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989); Fred D'Aguiar, *British Subjects* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993); Courttia Newland, *The Scholar: A West Side Story* (London: Abacus, 1998).

contested belonging, has moved beyond the insistence on the integral status of postcolonial cultures within British culture, as was the case in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) or Stuart Hall's influential essay "New Ethnicities", for example.³⁰ Neither is the well-known lament – crystallised in the title of Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987)³¹ – about the exclusion of postcolonial cultures from dominant notions of Britishness any longer, in these texts, of the first importance; the argument has moved beyond the contested ground of British identity and has now gone global. Rather than an inward-looking cultural politics that attempts to transform Britishness from within, Adebayo and Srivastava suggest outward-looking, culturally extroverted strategies that recast London as a global centre and therefore as fully accommodating of postcolonial difference without the hierarchical structures that render postcolonial cultures marginal or minoritarian. The two novelists examined here – particularly Adebayo – certainly do not assume that their versions of vernacular cosmopolitanism alone can transcend the postcolonial conflicts that continue to plague London; but they convincingly recognise globalisation as a phenomenon that holds the promise of a non-conflictual, "ordinary" postcolonial-cum-global London. Their novels carve out a particular Western space – London in its global city guise – and reconceive of that piece of the West as an embodiment of the global. In doing so they adapt Bhabha's theory of a vernacular cosmopolitanism of cultural survival, translation and transformation by transposing it onto the city itself. Rather than redefine or expand Britishness through its internal postcolonial elements, these texts conceptually merge

³⁰ See Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* [1956] (Harlow: Longman, 1985); Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990); and Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindberg (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 163-72.

³¹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* [1987] (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

London with the global arena that it so aptly embodies and therefore ascribe an equal ownership of the city to all cultures that inhabit it and claim it for their own.

Srivastava's novel *Looking For Maya* describes the London experience of Mira, a young British-Asian, London-raised woman recently graduated from university. Looking to enjoy the possibilities of the British capital when her white boyfriend Luke leaves for India for several months, she begins a painful love-hate affair with an older British-Indian man, Amrit, whose sophistication and cosmopolitan experience are sources of fascination for Mira. The plot revolves around this relationship and its bitter end, but in the process the novel reveals a postcolonial London experience that is both openly cosmopolitan and anchored to a sense of cultural roots. Long-standing "postcolonial" problems such as racism and social exclusion are noticeably absent from Srivastava's London, but Mira's migrant identity impacts on her aspirations to a genuinely cosmopolitan connoisseurship of the kind championed by Hannerz. While she attempts to live out the openly cosmopolitan possibilities of the global city of London, the novel in my reading reveals the tenacious hold of the postcolonial diasporic condition upon Mira's identity. The subjective conjunction of being at once a migrant Indian, a British-Asian and a global citizen, in other words, complicates the nature of her cosmopolitan claims. What Srivastava offers is a way of understanding the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation that downplays the significance of economic or social power relations in favour of foregrounding the specific cultural problematic of diasporic postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism. Her novel represents an attempt to move beyond the paradigm of power and domination that marks much of the discourse on the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship in favour of a focus on the complications of simultaneously cosmopolitan and postcolonial diasporic subjectivity. Rather than

interrogating either the power relations that prevail between the West and its others or the power of global capital, then, the novel explores globalised subjectivity through the imbrication of the postcolonial and the West in the postimperial global city.

Srivastava opens the novel with Mira's celebration of London as a multicultural cosmopolis. The portrait here of the city is notable for the absence, in the heart of the English capital, of anything recognisably "English" in the traditional sense of the word:

There was another café opposite on Greek Street, where people in sunglasses were sitting sipping coffees, but Bar Italia was still the original café in Soho. [...] Maison Bertaux, the old French *pâtisserie* was a hundred yards away, the black hairdressers with old-fashioned chrome chairs and durex machine, the Pakistani newsagent that sold European papers, the Polish lunch bar full of old men in cravats. I'd told Luke all about the corners of London, full of different cultures, introduced him proudly to places that he had only heard about as he was growing up by the sea.³²

On an immediate level the scene suggests that contemporary English culture is a multi-culture, a mix of still recognisably discrete ethnicities. For Mira, in fact, the city is host to the world; she discerns "[t]he little countries inside the capital", the Gujarati, Cypriot, Nigerian, Spanish, Jewish and Irish presence (p. 19). Londoners, in such an environment, might be defined as cosmopolitans given their need, and ability, to negotiate the cultural plurality of the city. Mira's sense of being a cosmopolitan aficionado is in stark contrast to her white boyfriend Luke's provincial (if privileged) background. That a postcolonial migrant possesses a cultural ownership over the English capital that eludes the public-schooled, middle-class Luke reflects a city defined in important ways by its multiple ethnicities. It is an observation echoed by Kevin Robins, who sees London as something of an anomaly within the British context. For him London exists as "that great provocation to the clarity and coherence

³² Atima Srivastava, *Looking for Maya* [1999] (London: Quartet Books, 2000), p. 1.

of British national culture.”³³ He understands London to be perceived by the rest of Britain as anomalous in relation to the “national culture”, hence the resentment it receives from some quarters.³⁴ Mira exemplifies the idea that those who grasp London’s global cultural mix can claim a kind of authority and authenticity in their ownership of the city that remains closed to those who define themselves in narrowly ethnic terms.

The ability simultaneously to recognise London as an ethnic microcosm of the globe and assert one’s own subjective circumscription of the city, indeed to define its subjective boundaries and meaning for oneself, is central to the postcolonial milieu of contemporary London envisaged by Srivastava. An instructive contrast is available via a comparison with Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* (1975), his sequel to *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). In this later novel, the West Indian immigrant Moses has become the owner and landlord of a derelict house, in the running of which he is assisted by “my man Friday, a white immigrant name Bob from somewhere in the Midlands, who came to seek his fortunes in London. [...] He was a willing worker, eager to learn the ways of the Black man.”³⁵ Inverting the classic postcolonial experience of London by West Indian immigrants, Moses has become the London insider lording it over a white provincial servant. But normal service is resumed by the end of the novel: through a series of painfully comic setbacks, Moses is displaced from his “penthouse” and relegated once more to the status of basement-dweller, his place taken by Bob. While Selvon ruthlessly satirises the postcolonial Londoner’s dream of middle-class achievement, Mira demonstrates a genuine, if still immature, cultural ownership of 1990s London, an authority in defining its subjective meaning

³³ Kevin Robins, “Endnote: To London: The City Beyond the Nation”, in *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality, and Identity*, eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 473-93 (p. 473).

³⁴ See pp. 486-7.

³⁵ Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* [1975] (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 4.

and scope that Luke, as a white outsider, serves merely to reinforce: “‘How come we never cross the river?’ Luke had asked. ‘What river?’ I’d said. There was only North London and Soho. All the rest, the West and the East and the South, was all propaganda” (p. 19). She revels in “knowing I was living in my beautiful city” (p. 2). Her place in London is later further affirmed when she successfully publishes her novel and launches it in a Soho restaurant.

Mira’s cultural stake in London is asserted in the context of the marked absence of conflictual, racialised social relations that have long been the hallmark of the postcolonial’s experience of the city.³⁶ Srivastava’s portrait of the city is notable for capturing the ordinariness of the postcolonial presence. Mira in fact mocks the idea that postcoloniality and racial politics might have any relevance to her:

I had taken a Literature option in my final year called Post Colonial Literature and studied Naipaul and Rushdie and Desai, been given lots of A3 photocopied articles on Race Deconstruction, which I’d used to line my underwear drawers with. (p. 21)

This sly putdown of the postcolonial perspective accords with the lack of ethnic tensions in Srivastava’s London. Mira in fact explicitly disavows the relevance of “Race” to her life as part of London society.³⁷ But this does not preclude the existence of a deep-seated concern with the nature of postcolonial diasporic identity. Amrit, as the closest approximation in the novel to an elitist, rootless cosmopolitan, is disparaging about what he sees as the fixation of postcolonial diasporic writers on cultural roots and the migrant experience: “‘Mangoes and coconuts and grandmothers,’ mocked Amrit. ‘The Great Immigrant novel.’” (p. 28). Mira, on the other hand, openly embodies a vernacular cosmopolitanism that celebrates and engages with the coexistence of the globe’s cultures in London, but remains grounded

³⁶ Adebayo’s novel, in contrast, bears witness to the continuing relevance of postcolonial conflict in contemporary London.

³⁷ See p. 80.

in her Indian roots and memories. While her longstanding efforts to break free from the cultural insularity represented by her parents suggest a disillusionment with originary narratives and a preference for a globalised perspective, it is significant that her own attempt at writing a novel does precisely what Amrit casually dismisses. Her writing is a form of nostalgia, a recovery of a cultural memory of India, and an ironic stand against Amrit's jibe at the nativist concerns of immigrant writing:

I smiled wryly when I found myself writing about the first Alphonso mangoes in Crawford Market; cool green coconuts cracked open by men with sharp knives; my grandmother falling asleep in the cinema hall and insisting she hadn't lost the plot. The Great Immigrant novel, Amrit had mocked. (p. 64)

I want now to delve deeper into Mira's cosmopolitan ethos and its relationship with her diasporic status by examining the contrasts Srivastava weaves between Mira on the one hand, and her parents and Amrit respectively on the other, in terms of their disposition toward the intersection of cultural globalisation and the postcolonial diaspora in London. These comparisons, it will be seen, divulge the coexistence of both rooted and cosmopolitan perspectives in her identity, a vernacular cosmopolitanism complicated by virtue of its split-rootedness. The major dimension of cultural anchorage for Mira is her Indian heritage and memory, embodied most palpably in the novel by her close relationship with her parents. As a child growing up in India, for example, she recites from memory the epic Ramayana taught to her by her father, an ability she apparently retains.³⁸ Her novel excavates her Indian roots. But a significant gulf exists between her cosmopolitan celebration of London's global multiculturalism and the way her migrant parents inhabit a transnational diasporic network:

They had moved from their small town to big cities but always lived frugally, enjoying their own community of two, never making any real friends in this

³⁸ See p. 78.

country, inviting all the old ones to come and complete and redraw the circle of Delhi-Bombay-London. (p. 10)

Mira's parents' commitment to this insular form of transnational networking has none of the characteristics of a truly cosmopolitan outlook of the kind lauded by Hannerz and others. Their specific disposition toward London's multicultural milieu is to disregard it. The roots of Mira's cosmopolitan curiosity lie in the fact that her parents "had never made any concessions to England" (p. 92), an omission that explains why, as a child, she "thrilled to those times when I had been a guest at the celebration of other cultures" (pp. 92-93). Neither can their brand of transnational networking qualify as a rooted or vernacular cosmopolitanism. While they are certainly "attached to a home of one's own" (Appiah, p. 618) – namely India – they stop short of simultaneously celebrating and embracing the protean nature of London culture.

Srivastava's initial portrayal of Mira is of a Londoner who celebrates the city's globality without privileging her Indian roots or the legacy of colonial history. These latter issues, however, soon impinge upon the novel's concerns. Mira's ambivalence toward the idea of a race memory – with its implication of racial essentialism – hints at the complexities marking her attempt to reconcile her roots and her willing immersion in London's global cultural plenitude.³⁹ A broadly analogous ambivalence is bound up in her personal assessment of postcolonial migrancy: "Where once we had lived amongst clerks and managers and schoolteachers speculating about Foreign, in London we welcomed gods [Indian guests] who constantly talked of India" (p. 89). She recognises, then, an unresolved relationship between home and migration; the postcolonial horizon remains tethered to the enduring influence of one's origins. The powerful idea of home embodied by her parents is obliquely linked to Mira's yearning for London's global milieu:

³⁹ See p. 41.

There was nothing stronger than the umbilical cord of the past, nothing more potent than the rope of familiarity, nothing as sure as home. This relentless marination led to the coating of your character with strength and vigour and gravity. Without the endless layers – of family, tradition, acts of good faith – you became a drifter, a person in search of himself in an alien land. This was the unwritten constitution of my parents, yet I was constantly on the lookout for getting swamped by an alien culture. (p. 89)

One discerns, then, Mira's view of cosmopolitanism as a kind of intrepid cultural travel, a way of supplementing cultural origins with global possibilities, with those roots a form of anchorage for one's global traversals.

Ironically, Amrit's cosmopolitan sophistication and experience – the main sources of his allure for Mira – are particularly fascinating to her because she discerns their shared cultural origins, and what she describes as “an odd kinship with him” (p. 9). His effortless mix of the cosmopolitan and the Indian takes on an aspirational quality for her.⁴⁰ The intuitive understanding he has of her ethnic background highlights her own cultural distinctiveness: “He knew in the way, I realized with a sudden shock, Luke or Ralph would never know” (p. 10). In contrast, her relationship with Luke is based on the allure of difference: “What Luke and I had was our differences [...] We were constantly in touch with the differences; it fascinated us, this lack of sameness” (p. 17). Where her family represents the familiarity of roots and a palpable cultural difference exists between herself and white British people, Amrit's special quality for Mira lies precisely in the way he confounds her expectations of Indianness – reified by the example of her insular diasporic family and their circle – while still displaying an innate grasp of Indian culture.

In many ways Amrit is what Mira, in a gently mocking way, suggests he is: a Cambridge-educated “Wog”, or “western[-]oriented gentleman” (p. 139). But his cultivated, posh English bearing ultimately needs to be seen in the context of his

⁴⁰ See pp. 6-13.

bitterly curtailed love for, and illicit marriage to, the Maya of the novel's title, during his pre-England youth in India. His muted disillusionment with that past surfaces as cynicism, perhaps most redolent in his condescending dismissals of nativist Indian writing. Amrit's conversation with an Asian taxi driver in London, however, one inadvertently overheard by Mira, involves an attempt on his part to invoke a kind of shared ordinariness and migrant solidarity with the taxi driver that is at odds with his usual detached and sophisticated urbanity.⁴¹ It bespeaks a painful estrangement from his Indian roots that underpins his ostensibly rootless, cynical metropolitan persona. Mira's successful weaving of the rooted and the cosmopolitan into a single complex subjectivity, then, is precisely what Amrit fails to achieve.

Srivastava presents Mira's vernacular cosmopolitanism sympathetically, as a positive negotiation of a globalised London. The city, however, must itself be seen as exerting a shaping influence on her cultural disposition. More specifically, while her Indian roots are explicitly invoked in the novel as the vernacular anchorage for her exploration of global possibilities, London can also be read as constituting part of her native makeup as well as being the globalised arena in which she indulges her cosmopolitan yearnings. During a holiday in Spain, for example, she deliberately avoids Madrid on account of its similarity to London. The concept of home, of native space, for Mira is split between India and London. Having deep cultural and psychic roots in both places sees her shifting between two major cultural geographies as part of her quotidian existence. There is something of Srivastava herself in this; to the question of how she addresses "the 'dilemma' of negotiating different cultural spaces", the author denies that it is an inescapable predicament: "I honestly believe that not all writers are caught in the kind of dilemma of cultural conflict that certain

⁴¹ See p. 215.

postcolonial critics keep referring to. [...] being both there and here isn't necessarily a state of contradiction."⁴² Even Mira's parents, visiting London after their repatriation to India, "felt like tourists in London now, tourists with roots" (p. 207). For Mira a different variation on this dual mode of London identity is applicable, having roots in both India and London but also sampling and engaging openly with global diversity by virtue of her cosmopolitan attitude to living in a genuinely world city.

Srivastava's London is notable for how little it appears to conform to the traditional image of a Western or European city, at least in ethnic terms. By painting London's globally multicultural population as ordinary and unremarkable, she identifies the possibility of postcolonial Londoners inhabiting the Western global city on the same terms as white Britons and indeed all other ethnicities. Globally multicultural rather than primarily Western can, she suggests, be London's normative mode of being. The city allows, in her fictional portrait, for postcolonial identities that are both rooted and cosmopolitan, with London serving as the seat of some of her roots as well as the global milieu. Mira's identity, one might say, is partly rooted in globality. Her enjoyment of London's cultural possibilities, so different from her parents' refusal to embrace the city's non-Indian offerings, is couched in terms of its globality rather than its Western character. Amrit's inability to naturalise his hybridity, in contrast, makes him the precise caricature of the "western[-]oriented gentleman", who is vexed by his failure to effect a comfortable rapprochement between his Eastern and Western selves. *Looking for Maya*, unlike Adebayo's text, is characterised by an almost complete absence of concern over postcolonial or global power relations. It hints instead at the potential empowerment of postcolonial subjects in rewriting the cultural meaning of London, such that its conditions of postcoloniality

⁴² Mala Pandurang, "Young, Gifted and Brown: An Interview with Atima Srivastava", *Wasafiri*, No. 33 (2001), pp. 3-5 (pp. 3-4).

and globality become imbricated in a form regarded as ordinary, unremarkable and uncontested: in other words, an unembattled vernacular cosmopolitanism. The primary predicament for postcolonial Londoners in Srivastava's conception of the city is that of diasporic displacement, rather than racism, class conflict or material deprivation. Srivastava does not corroborate Simon Gikandi's suggestion that the narrative of globalisation is excessively optimistic in relation to the postcolonial subjects who want, above all, access to Western modernity.⁴³ For her it is not Western modernity but London reconceived as a global metropolis of equal alterities that promises a way out of neocolonial social structures. Neither is class particularly significant in the novel, except in the question of how diasporic displacement can also afflict middle-class postcolonials. In the former imperial centre, it is globalisation in its most salutary form that is invoked by localised postcolonial elements as a way to discursively transform the city's identity, and therefore to transcend its neocolonial structures. Through the notion of the global, then, Srivastava points the way toward a postcolonial diasporic condition that asserts itself as a non-conflictual, normal and unexceptional part of life in the global city.

Where Srivastava uses London as a cosmopolitan metropolis in which to focus on the postcolonial's subjective experience of diaspora and globalisation, Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* places his postcolonial Londoners within a globalised urban space in which a normative white culture comes into sometimes rancorous contact with the ex-colonial presence. The protagonist Dele, a young black native Londoner in his final year at Oxford, frequently sneaks back to London against his father's wishes in order to immerse himself in its demotic black cultures. An important dimension of the novel is the contrast between Dele's experience as a student at Oxford, with its

⁴³ See my discussion of Gikandi in the Introduction.

privilege and liberal white politics of postcolonial guilt and patronage, and his experience of his native London, which is at once a site that cultivates a diverse set of urban black cultures drawn from various global diasporas and a site of racialised and neocolonial social conflict that is exploited by a globally assertive but narrowly conceived essentialist black politics. Drawn into a brief flirtation with the latter when his ill sister falls victim to racist police brutality, he finally disavows globalised notions of black identity politics in favour of a non-oppositional vernacular cosmopolitanism based on the black cultures of a globalised London.

Adebayo charts Dele's development from a relatively untroubled, apolitical black Londoner, through his Oxford experience of being the fashionably suffering postcolonial other, to a political awakening in the face of racist violence on the streets of the British capital. The title of the opening chapter, "Nothing Can Contain Me", signals from the outset that Dele's cultural perspective is one based on an open stance toward cultural plurality, difference and multiple identities. His engagements with London's black cultures are not of the elite variety, but of a demotic kind that shift between the city's postcolonial black communities. Before his encounter with neocolonial racist conflict in London, he espouses a somewhat naïve and utopian cosmopolitan outlook that disregards restrictive nativist notions of roots: "I swear, if I had a puff for every time black folk drone on about "roots this" and "roots that". I'm more worried about my branches, you know. It's the branches that bear fruit and tilt for the sky."⁴⁴ As "a Londoner yet to set foot in his home country" (p. 29), Dele's lack of enthusiasm for the claims of nativist ideas on his identity flags up a common problematic for second-generation postcolonial diasporic subjects. The most powerful voice of nativism early in the novel is Dele's conservatively Nigerian father, who

⁴⁴ Diran Adebayo, *Some Kind of Black* (London: Virago, 1996), p. 9.

asserts the purchase of an African essence upon his identity and castigates him for betraying that essence in favour of an undefined mimicry by denouncing him as “some Follow-Follow boy” (p. 5). Dele’s shifting subjectivity, however, is less about aping the West or the black urban cultures that he inhabits than about a cultural code-switching necessitated by the globalised milieu around him. Kadija George Sesay, for instance, observes that Dele switches linguistic codes to suit shifting cultural expectations, from the respectful, proper discourse in the presence of his strict and conservative Nigerian father to the British-Caribbean patois of his friends.⁴⁵ His “branches”, the cosmopolitan possibilities of contemporary London and Oxford, are cultivated through his philosophy for cultural adaptation: “Different strokes for different folks” (p. 53). He is, in other words, something of the genuine cosmopolitan given his interest in participating in, rather than merely observing, different cultures. While he rarely moves outside his native London and the university life at Oxford, Dele is compelled to shift and translate between cultures by virtue of the protean nature of his London-cum-Oxford environment.

Dele is not blind to how his black origins can, within the liberal and politically correct circles of Oxford, be harnessed to develop a minority-based celebrity. His Oxford persona is an alternative to his London urban identity; he plays up his putative status as embattled black individual struggling against a racist society, although this, crucially, is mere play-acting. While cultivating the company and attention of a white liberal Oxford crowd earns him the status of “the undisputed number one negro” (p. 19) on campus, he remains relatively indifferent to the various black organisations at Oxford, a stance which earns him a degree of scorn among some of his fellow black

⁴⁵ Kadija George Sesay, “Transformations Within the Black British Novel”, in *Black British Writing*, eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 99-108 (pp. 103-4).

students.⁴⁶ He begins to realise, however, that his black roleplaying during his time at university “largely resembled a series of grotesque cameos” (p. 163), involving a neocolonial relationship of power in which his celebrity status is bound up with his usefulness as a minority figure through whom white postcolonial liberal guilt might be salved.

Neither his Oxford experience nor his father’s nativist exhortations succeed in destabilising Dele’s demotic cosmopolitan London identity. The beating administered by racist London police to Dele, his friend Concrete and his sister Dapo (which results in the latter’s coma), however, is more successful in this respect. They are quite starkly and brutally interpellated as black by their assailants, particularly through pointed and wholly unambiguous epithets like “you black cunts” (p. 76). With entirely different agendas in mind, the black political organisations that scramble to exploit his sister’s plight also attempt to circumscribe his identity under the broad label “black”. Adebayo suggestively titles the chapter following the assault, in which he introduces the various groups keen on politicising the event, “Welcome to the Fold”; Dele becomes exposed for the first time to a racial politics that is at once globalised and fractured. He grows into the realisation that his cultural sampling and London-wrought cosmopolitan perspective must contend with the unavoidable issue of ethnic roots. A debate about mixed-race relationships at a meeting of a black outreach project, for instance, draws a wearied response from Dele: “Boy! Wherever I go in this town I just can’t beat this rap” (p. 197). His response reflects his concern with the cultural horizons and possibilities of black Londoners like himself, rather than with narrow exclusionary notions of ethnic identity.

⁴⁶ See p. 30.

The heavily ethnicised nature of black politics in the novel is clearly signalled in the names of the major groups that attempt to leverage on Dapo's assault for political gain, such as "Blacks Fight Back" and "The Yardcore Agency". Adebayo goes to some lengths in the novel to portray the various black factions as divided, riven by petty squabbles. Despite this, much of their politics is animated by a common discourse based around the idea of a global black culture, one that essentialises black culture as defined in opposition to white or Western culture. At the meeting of the hastily convened Dapo Defence Campaign, Horace Overton, an eminent African-American professor, invokes an originary narrative rooted in Africa for all black people. African and Caribbean people, he argues, need to assert their own culture without mimicking the West; ironically, he calls for an Africanisation of Europe, which merely replicates and reverses the civilising ideology of European empire.⁴⁷ His rhetoric reifies the distinction between Europe and Africa as civilisational entities, positing a simplified version of what Samuel Huntington has famously described as a global "clash of civilisations".⁴⁸ More suggestive is a novel that Sol, the head of The Yardcore Agency, lends Dele. It urges a transnational black militant attack on Western interests around the world:

Its big idea was that a third force, a black diasporic coalition, would undermine the West; that the large settled immigrant communities, such as those that originated in Lagos and Kingston, would knit together in the urban centres of the new world and infect the state and its infrastructure from so many directions – from gunman crime to white-collar fraud – before linking together to effect new types of crime, that the hull of the ship would be fatally holed. (pp. 166-7)

This extreme vision appears significantly at odds with Dele's privileging of "branches" rather than "roots", positing a global black community linked by pure notions of race. In this sense it is, along with Overton's diatribe against Europe, an

⁴⁷ See pp. 89-90.

⁴⁸ See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

oddly insular transnational politics. Where Paul Gilroy's theory of *The Black Atlantic* (1993) foregrounds the heterogeneity of transnational flows of black people and cultures, and sees black culture as internal to Western modernity, these visions assume a homogeneous global black culture defined by its difference from its putative Western other.⁴⁹

This homogeneous essence lies at the heart of the politicising of Dapo's situation by black groups. Their discursive strategy of slipping from the specificity of her predicament to the notion of a common global black experience sits uneasily with Dele, for whom Dapo's condition has a brute reality and personal immediacy that transcend any political symbolism.⁵⁰ The primary stance he takes is against the use of his sister's plight as a symbol around which to rally support for a broader black politics of resistance against racism. In any case, Adebayo demonstrates quite openly that the putative solidarity and common culture of the global black community is little more than a myth. The success of The Yardcore Agency in procuring the services of Easy Roller, a prominent black American rap star, for a benefit event for Dapo is particularly instructive. Dele, very much an aficionado of black urban music – arguably the most globalised expression of black culture – finds little evidence of Easy's commitment to black politics or black transnational solidarity. Easy's basic ignorance of non-American reality, and in particular his mistaken belief that Europe is a single country, suggests that the African-American popular culture he represents is not one that necessarily contributes to a transnational, diasporic black identity of the kind envisioned by Gilroy. Dele recognises that Easy's racial origins are no guarantee of his genuine empathy and solidarity with the embattled black London subject.

⁴⁹ See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁵⁰ See p. 88.

London's black politics is presented by Adebayo in unflattering contrast to Dele's quotidian cosmopolitanism. He recognises that black Londoners need to focus on the complexities and shifting nature of black culture, rather than fixate on race as something essentialised and static. At the outreach meeting, "[w]hat struck him was that there was no serious talk of culture, just of colour" (p. 198). Although there is a debate about the desirability of interracial relationships, the terms of the debate itself "seemed to rest on the premise that communities were automatic gifts, not something that had to be imagined and then made flesh. Did these people think that because they were all black they were guaranteed anything in advance?" (p. 199) His focus, then, is on the cultural horizons and possibilities of black Londoners, not on asserting any kind of authoritative cultural reification.

That black British cultures and identities need to be seen as contingent and socially constructed has been widely affirmed. Stuart Hall, perhaps the most influential voice in this respect, has called for a view of ethnicity as something constructed within history, politics and culture, rather than as a term for fixed natural categories. Emphasising the centrality of the diasporic experience to black British identities, he argues, with reference to black British film, that originary notions of culture are necessarily refracted through present realities:

In the case of the young black British films and filmmakers under discussion, the diaspora experience is certainly profoundly fed and nourished by, for example, the emergence of Third World cinema; by the African experience; the connection with Afro-Caribbean experience; and the deep inheritance of complex systems of representation and aesthetic traditions from Asian and African culture. But, in spite of these rich cultural "roots", the new cultural politics is operating on new and quite distinct ground – specifically, contestation over what it means to be "British". The relation of this cultural politics to the past, to its different "roots", is profound, but complex. It cannot be simple or unmediated. [...] There can, therefore, be no simple "return" or "recovery" of the ancestral past which is not reexperienced through the categories of the present.⁵¹

⁵¹ Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", p. 170.

Dele's conviction that black cultural "roots" are most useful as a subjective point of departure accords with Hall's view of black identity as mediated and constructed insofar as rigid and impervious notions of cultural "essence" are disavowed by both in favour of the possibility of transformation. Dele, however, goes further by decoupling *roots* from *routes*.⁵² He understands the black-organised benefit for Dapo as representing a kind of common cultural anchorage for black people that does not preclude a cosmopolitan disposition. The black experience of London is of a city that "was sometimes hostile, ignorant or indifferent, but you could come here and maybe grab a good dose of the oxygen that you needed to survive". But this anchorage is merely one of many possibilities:

It struck him that you could inhale the air from these occasions in this city without having to take up its body and soul as well. [...] He could rely on events like these for the joy of them and nothing more. But the joy should be the start of it. (p. 228)

Adebayo thus acknowledges the need for black cultural survival that Bhabha places at the heart of his theory of vernacular cosmopolitanism. But for Dele the embattled quality of black Londoners' experience does not necessarily define the primary modality of their metropolitan postcoloniality; he does not call for the black community to close ranks against a sometimes inhospitable city. Rather, he advocates a version of the vernacular cosmopolitanism endorsed by Appiah and Hall: as a native black Londoner, his roots are in the black diaspora, but these roots serve merely as one constant element in a complex globalised subjectivity whose horizons are defined by multiple cultural engagements with global difference. Refusing to allow his sister's plight to colour his open stance toward different cultural affiliations, he outlines

⁵² I borrow this distinction from Paul Gilroy, who argues that we should attend to the transnational movements and trajectories of black identities rather than static concepts of timeless origins. See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

London's potential cosmopolitanism through a portrait of his London youth that attempts to keep the city's tribal tendencies under erasure:

He didn't know why it was, maybe the cheek-by-jowl housing policy. But growing up where he did, there were Asians, Africans, Caribs, Jews, pure Greeks up Palmers Green, Cypriots down Stokey, Orthodox Jews in Stamford Hill and Reformed down Crouch End, Irish most everywhere, and a guy could do most things with most people. (p. 104)

Dele's description of an easy cosmopolitanism, almost nebulous in its casualness, accords with that of Sheldon Pollock et al., who regard it as something that rightly eludes clear definition. For them cosmopolitanism's "conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do."⁵³ In a similar spirit, Dele adumbrates rather than specifies his cosmopolitan leanings.

In his essay on Adebayo's novel and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), Koye Oyedeji argues that the label Black British is not merely inadequate; its constituent terms are also incompatible.⁵⁴ The earlier postcolonial politics in Britain that called for a redefining of Britishness in order to accommodate black cultures within its conceptual purview is now, he suggests, outdated.⁵⁵ "It is time", he writes, "to look to other things for a sense of belonging" (p. 366). Adebayo and Evaristo offer, for Oyedeji, a way of understanding black cultures in Britain as having moved beyond the conceptual restraints of the postcolonial paradigm in the era of globalisation.⁵⁶ While agreeing that the term Black British represents an excessive circumscription of the

⁵³ Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Cosmopolitanisms", in *Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

⁵⁴ Koye Oyedeji, "Prelude to a Brand New Purchase on Black Political Identity: A Reading of Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black*", in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 346-374 (pp. 347-8).

⁵⁵ See Oyedeji, p. 347.

⁵⁶ See Oyedeji, p. 371.

subjective possibilities for black people in Britain, I would argue that the postcolonial diasporic legacy in Britain continues to be one of many relevant constituent elements bound up in the global possibilities for black London subjectivity. This much is clear from Adebayo's novel. Rather than jettisoning the postcolonial significations of his black identity, Dele suggests that these might form the point of departure for the global articulations of his identity. Britishness appears to be under erasure in the text; Dele instead identifies with London and its demotic globality. Black, he seems to aver, is a globalised (and globalising) concept. The West, in the specific form of the postimperial global city, is recast as a global space in order to accommodate black identity – not as a minority within a hierarchical framework of “cultural diversity”, to adopt Homi Bhabha's critical phrase⁵⁷ – but as an equal stakeholder in the global cultural collective that is London. In this recasting of London, Adebayo posits one way of realising Bhabha's vernacular cosmopolitan concern over the cultural survival of metropolitan minorities: through transformation and translation, not merely of cultures themselves, but of the identity of a postimperial city.

Adebayo eschews transnational black resistance to neocolonial forces in favour of a localised globality. Rather than broad strategies woven around the idea of the global South or a global black community, he foregrounds the specific potential quality of London as a positive cosmopolis. This is a potential that has not yet fully materialised, if the events of the novel are anything to go by. Nonetheless Adebayo flags up the global city as the arena in which the appropriation of the global holds particular promise for the transcendence of neocolonial power. While Dele continues to concern himself with black issues, it involves not black political resistance *per se* but carving out an ordinary space for black people within London's everyday

⁵⁷ Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space”, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-221 (p. 208).

globality. The local, in Adebayo's novel, embraces rather than contests the global in its cosmopolitan potential. It is a more measured optimism than that underpinning the global in Srivastava's novel, but neither does it confirm Gikandi's materialist understanding of the postcolonial world's desire for Western modernity. Within the postimperial capital of Western modernity itself, it is cultural globality that satisfies the postcolonial's requirements of belonging and quotidian ordinariness. Adebayo's postcolonial London thus embodies an inversion of Bill Ashcroft's theory of interpolation, or the local appropriation of the global in order to contest global hegemony, insofar as his postcolonial London protagonist embraces the global as a strategy for addressing localised conflicts and effecting cultural survival.

Vernacular cosmopolitan strategies can be adapted, both Adebayo and Srivastava suggest, not to insinuate the postcolonial into notions of Britishness or Englishness, but to recast the city of London as an openly global space rather than a Western capital. In so doing they recognise the overlapping British, postcolonial and other ethnicities inhabiting the city as having an equal claim to it. The two writers develop Bhabha's strategy of vernacular cosmopolitanism – based on cultural survival through translation and transformation – by harnessing a commitment to cultural roots to the broader cultural milieu of the globe, a milieu encompassed within London. Their approach is distinctive because it involves the conceptual transformation and translation, not of postcolonial culture(s) *per se*, but of London itself. Whether the theme is racist exclusion, as seen in Adebayo's novel, or the diasporic displacement and reterritorialisation experienced in Srivastava's London, an appeal to the globality of London appears to be a favoured strategy of these writers in working through postcolonial dilemmas of various kinds. In their own ways, the two writers confront the perceived need of postcolonial Londoners to secure a place of equality and

ordinariness at the complex gathering of cultures that is embodied by the city. Questions about cultural belonging are answered by discursively ascribing to London a cosmopolitan character through which all cultures are made equally welcome. As Kureishi has similarly declared, “suddenly you see London and you think that can belong to us, it doesn’t belong to the English, it’s international [...] you suddenly see that you can claim London as your own.”⁵⁸ Through this perspectival transformation, both embattled and privileged postcolonials in the city retain the postcolonial dimension of their subjectivity alongside a sense of global citizenship through their intimate inhabitation of a global metropolis. None of this gainsays the material fact of continuing postcolonial tensions on London’s streets and its institutional spheres, but the literary explorations of cosmopolitan strategies examined here embrace a postcolonial optimism rooted in globalisation. They point the way forward for the harnessing of globalisation as a way to displace neocolonialism and replace it with an ordinary, quotidian postcoloniality. Rather than considering globalisation’s role in contemporary power relations, as most established theories of the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship do, these London texts capture the possibility of invoking globalisation as a way to transcend local postcolonial conflicts.

Singapore: the Management of Cosmopolitanism

In Chapter One I examined how the persistence of the notion of Asian Values in Singapore at the levels of both state and society have been represented in literature, focusing on the novels of Hwee Hwee Tan. A degree of ambivalent othering of the West as morally inferior to Asian culture can, I argued, be discerned within literary representations of Singapore’s engagement with the West. Western influences, in

⁵⁸ Bart Moore-Gilbert, “London in Hanif Kureishi’s Films: Hanif Kureishi in interview with Bart Moore-Gilbert”, *Kunapipi*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1999), pp. 5-14 (p. 9).

particular Western education and neoliberal culture, are valorised only to the extent that they are believed to account for much of Singapore's successful articulation into the global economy. This ambivalence bespeaks the uneasy coexistence of material empowerment on the one hand and cultural subordination to the West on the other. In Tan's novels, notably, the city-state's economic success and increasing prominence within the hierarchy of global cities is portrayed alongside the contradictory local perceptions of Western culture's moral debasement and its superior worth within the circuits of global capitalism. The local willingness to elide such contradictions is present in both official policy and in literary representations of Singaporeans. More recently, however, the concept of cosmopolitanism has insinuated itself into Singapore's national discourse. There has been an official acknowledgement of the social benefits of cultural openness to global forces, in particular that of the West (although this has not significantly displaced, in literature or in daily life, the conservative exclusions of the Asian Values disposition; rather, the two are overlapping and competing concerns). This new position is unsurprisingly rooted in the material imperative of national economic success, and therein lies part of the distinctiveness of cosmopolitanism in the Singapore context, as we shall see. The dominant conception of the cosmopolitan in Singapore is distinctive also in the extent to which it is explicitly schematised by official state discourse as the binarised counterpart of the "heartlander", the locally oriented subject. Where the Asian Values discourse is distinctly ambivalent about Western influences in particular, this more recent focus on cosmopolitanism has extended a warmer welcome to global influences of certain kinds, including that of the West, which has been conceptually dissolved into the larger and ostensibly more friendly category of the global. The simultaneous emphasis on the heartlander is intended as a kind of cultural anchorage

in “core” values for sustaining social stability, rather than as an ideological adversary of the West.

I will argue here that Singaporean cosmopolitanism is frequently represented in its literature as a market cosmopolitanism that responds to various global presences in Singapore according to market-driven valuations. That is, neoliberal economics and the global market mechanism are figured by Singapore writers as mediating the cultural openness of Singapore and shaping its disposition toward different global elements. This selectivity means that certain global elements present in the city-state are excluded from its cosmopolitan vision. The circumscription of what gets included or excluded within this vision involves a complex mix of neocolonial and global class politics. While Western professionals are prominently represented in such cosmopolitan inclusions, Singapore’s openness to the globe does encompass a broader range of cultural geographies. On the other hand, Singapore’s writers also explore cosmopolitanism’s exclusions in assigning an emergent neoimperial role for the city in their work. By examining selected representations of cosmopolitanism in Singapore, I suggest that Singaporean writers ascribe both a subordinate neocolonial relationship and a neoimperial one with different global elements, based on a combination of market and postcolonial logics, to the city-state’s global engagements. In important respects, then, the cosmopolitanism represented in postcolonial Singapore writing distinguishes itself from the vernacular cosmopolitanism depicted in Srivastava and Adebayo’s novels: where the latter is a culturalist conception dealing with subjective belonging rather than issues of power, the former is a materialist formulation of an ostensibly cultural disposition that involves a “managed” engagement with the global.

In recent years the concept of cosmopolitanism has emerged as a key buzzword in Singapore's sociopolitical arena. It has taken on highly specific, even ideological, definitions, and become schematised in official and public discourse; these conceptual textures have since become hegemonic in Singapore society. Like most issues of broad public discussion, it was first highlighted by the government, for whom the cosmopolitan desire is an expression of the need to develop talented Singaporeans able to assimilate seamlessly into and succeed within the global economy, as well as the need to welcome highly skilled foreigners who can make similar contributions to the city-state. The latter need is most tangibly manifested in recent investments in major initiatives to develop Singapore as a cosmopolis and "Renaissance City".⁵⁹ As described in my discussion in Chapter One, the notion of the cosmopolitan in Singapore has been inextricably tied to its counterpart, the "heartlander". This official schema was first given explicit expression in then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's 1999 National Day Rally Speech, in which he identified the need to "maintain cohesion between cosmopolitans and heartlanders":

As Singapore becomes more international, two broad categories of people will emerge. One group I call the "cosmopolitans", because their outlook is international. They speak English but are bilingual. They have skills that command good incomes – banking, IT, engineering, science and technology. They produce goods and services for the global market [...] They can work and be comfortable anywhere in the world.

The other group, the heartlanders, make their living within the country. Their orientation and interests are local rather than international. Their skills are not marketable beyond Singapore. They speak Singlish. They include taxi-drivers, stallholders, provision shop owners, production workers and contractors.⁶⁰

Goh here foregrounds the distinctiveness of Singapore's officially endorsed brand of cosmopolitanism, namely its emphasis on the city-state's articulation into the global

⁵⁹ See *Renaissance City Report* (2000). [http://app.mica.gov.sg/Portals/0/2_FinalRen.pdf, accessed on 6th Sept 2009]

⁶⁰ Goh Chok Tong, *National Day Rally Speech 1999*, paras. 163-4 [<http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/viewPDF.jsp?pdfno=gct19990822a.pdf>, accessed on 30th January 2008]

economy rather than an open disposition toward other cultures. For him, the cosmopolitan/heartlander divide resolves itself into two distinctive social roles. Heartlanders are crucial for maintaining traditional values and social stability, while cosmopolitans represent the city-state's extensive reach within the global economy. The two categories might also be regarded as Singapore's broad equivalents of the working class and middle class respectively, although local idiosyncracies defy any easy analogy.

There is, as Brenda Yeoh observes of this official formulation, a privileging of the cosmopolitan despite the sustaining of established state rhetoric promoting national identity and cultural traditions.⁶¹ This bias, of course, is in keeping with the city-state's reputation for material pragmatism. But the state persists in regarding cosmopolitanism as a form of dealing with the global economy rather than as a cultural stance on a globalised world, as Selvaraj Velayutham observes:

[...] while in Western contexts the term "cosmopolitanism" is used to describe the characteristics and outcomes of free-flowing, interconnected transnational relationships, in Singapore it has been harnessed by the state in the pursuit of economic success and hegemony. It is therefore, a tool to *contain* globalization, to *manage* it, rather than a description of some natural outcome of it.⁶²

Singapore society's engagement with cosmopolitanism is therefore unusual in the extent to which it applies economic criteria to what is otherwise generally invoked as a cultural term. Velayutham distinguishes the common understanding of the concept as involving unfettered cultural exchange and intermingling from the Singapore model of "managed cosmopolitanism", in which "cosmopolitanism has become government policy, measured by a dot-point checklist of characteristics which the

⁶¹ See Yeoh, "Cosmopolitanism and Its Exclusions in Singapore", p. 2435.

⁶² Selvaraj Velayutham, *Responding to Globalization: Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), p. 120.

state has determined will be most useful for nation-building and future economic success” (p. 140).

Cosmopolitanism is often instinctively understood as elitist and as a privileged mode of being, as Tomlinson suggests of Hannerz’s work on the concept, and Singapore’s cosmopolitan formulation is thoroughly infused with this kind of bias. The elitist connotations of the term have become normative in public discourse, being focused around advanced capitalist activity and globe-trotting, upper middle-class lifestyles. Singapore’s official construction of the cosmopolitan embodies the kind of neoliberal cultural privilege variously critiqued by Tomlinson, Robbins and Bhabha. But the state’s official endorsement of this elite culture is held in a complex tension with its simultaneous commitment to nation-building and cultural traditions. Local and global, in the context of Singaporean identity and cultural disposition, are couched in terms of the heartlander-cosmopolitan divide; a clear distinction between the two is presumed. They are regarded as mutually exclusive and therefore require careful management and compromise if a degree of social stability is to be sustained. Singaporeans themselves, of course, do not necessarily subscribe to such neat distinctions, as recent research has shown. According to some citizens the combination of a heartlander commitment to the nation and an open cosmopolitan stance toward global affiliations is achievable.⁶³ State discourse in fact promotes a pragmatic version of this insofar as cosmopolitans are encouraged to broaden their horizons in aid of Singapore’s national economic agenda. This tension between the national and the global will be explored further in another chapter. What is of primary interest in this section, however, is how Singapore writers explore the ambivalent

⁶³ Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho’s interviews with a representative selection of Singaporeans reveal that they have some difficulty in making clear distinctions between cosmopolitan and heartlander Singaporeans. See Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, “Negotiating Belonging and Perceptions of Citizenship in a Transnational World: Singapore, a Cosmopolis?”, *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2006), pp. 385-401 (p. 391).

cosmopolitan urges of the city-state and what their work might suggest about the Singaporean relationship with the intersecting conditions of postcoloniality and globalisation.

The texts in question here, I argue, represent Singapore's encounter with the global presence as one managed and contained by a combination of market logics and neocolonial valuations. I take as my point of departure two versions of the same poem by Paul Tan, entitled "Uptight" and "Makeover" respectively, in which he adopts the voice of what is recognisably the Singapore establishment. His sly ventriloquising of the "official" rationalisation of a cosmopolitan Singapore gently mocks the notion of cosmopolitan social engineering and its conceptual purchase in Singapore. His poetic voice formulates a cosmopolitanism that involves the management of both cosmopolitanism's risks and its returns, thus imputing a neoliberal market logic to the city-state's global entanglements. Tan alludes to perceived risks attached to cosmopolitanism such as the possibility of compromising traditional cultural values and heartland concerns. The two poems, I suggest, represent the poet's gentle satirising of the planned cosmopolitan order demanded by the city-state's official global strategy. I then turn to Daren Shiau's novel *Heartland* (1999), which constructs the encounter between the market imperative of cosmopolitanism and heartland values, in contrast to Tan's knowingly ironic rendition, as a potentially discordant one, an unruly clash of cultures that defies received narratives of pragmatic reconciliation. Shiau also overdetermines the neoliberal cosmopolitan ethos in his novel by introducing a neocolonial ideological residue, such that the West is instinctively privileged as the primary source of the fruits of globalisation. Woven into the narrative is a muted but suggestive treatment of subaltern labour from the Asian economic peripheries, particularly in the form of female domestic workers from

the Philippines, who are figured in the novel as part of the excluded elements in Singapore's globalising vision. Shiao's concern with humanising them and affording them a voice is echoed in recent Singapore writing, particularly poetry. This emergent theme in Singapore literature presents the city-state as a contemporary imperial power in relation to subaltern Asian labour. My analyses of these texts identify Singapore's characterisation by its writers as having inherited a hegemonic role from its former colonial masters; but the texts I examine here also involve a simultaneous neocolonial deference to a still powerful notion of Western capitalist culture.

The earlier version of Tan's poem, "Uptight", immediately announces his consolidated understanding of the tensions inherent in a "managed" cosmopolitanism. Through an establishment voice, he captures in the opening stanza the unusual combination of an acknowledgement of the need for a cosmopolitan ethos alongside a recognition of its risks:

We need to get Mr. Goody-two-shoes
up on the bar top for a spin;
never mind his two left feet and
fears about insurance coverage;
introduce him to a gay or two,
preferably talented and foreign;
they should be acquainted but
not overly-familiar, you know?⁶⁴

Tan observes the yielding of social conservatism to the cognisance of how minority sexual lifestyles and (foreign) liberal mores are part of a "need", a strategic imperative, to expose the city to the culture of global capitalism. He references real-life developments in Singapore, bartop dancing having been legalised several years ago and homosexuality having shed much of its taboo status in becoming an acceptable subject of public debate. But the poem's urgency in respect of globalising

⁶⁴ Paul Tan, "Uptight", *Stylus Poetry Journal* [www.styluspoetryjournal.com/main/master.asp?id=508, accessed on 25th August 2008]

trends appears to be modulated by the apparent continuing necessity of managing cosmopolitanism's risks. The poet adumbrates his sense of the official limits to be imposed on cultural openness: the cosmopolitan Singaporean, it seems, is to "be acquainted but / not overly-familiar" with gays, for example.

This characteristic caution is extended in the second stanza, which makes explicit the point of cosmopolitanism within a Singapore milieu:

Discreetly, we place *Cosmopolitan*
in his letter box so he'll understand
air-kisses, organic food, Pilates and
the peccadilloes of the privileged;
then whiz him out for a stomach
somersault on a bungee ride,
to built fortitude and new perspectives.
A loud scream can be epiphanic.

Tan here alludes, significantly, to the legalising of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in Singapore in 2004, the state's long-standing concern over its alleged promotion of permissive, "Western" lifestyles evidently giving way to a new social order in which cosmopolitanism has been recast as the (largely) salutary culture of global capitalism. A caustic irony in the first half of the stanza captures the poet's apprehension of Singapore's pragmatic management of global influences. His poetic voice begins by endorsing a modicum of discretion, a nod to the long-standing conservatism of the state. But moral issues yield, the poet suggests, to a familiar Singaporean agenda of economic prudence. The poet here openly links cosmopolitanism to the upgrading of human capital, specifically in the form of global cultural knowledge and the cultivation of an appreciation of cultural difference – in other words, the cultivation of a liberal and urbane global perspective. Cosmopolitanism as it is explicated here is a wholly elitist notion, in the capitalist sense that Bhabha or Robbins have it: thus the enthusiasm for understanding "the peccadilloes of the privileged". These minor "transgressions" of the capitalist elite undergo a transfiguration within the poem's

establishment optic such that they are recast in a beneficial light. In “Makeover” Tan’s addition of an extra line to this stanza serves to further highlight his suspicion that, in the new globalised Singapore order, legitimacy for the culture of liberal urban elites is a commodity available for purchase to the economically empowered:

Discreetly, we place Cosmopolitan
in his inbox so he’ll understand
air-kisses, organic food, Pilates and
the peccadilloes of the privileged –
You never know what investors talk about.⁶⁵

The market logic that informs the poem’s rendition of cosmopolitanism can therefore be linked to a stereotypical Singaporean politics of pragmatism. An instrumentalised approach to the potential returns to be had from courting global capitalism and its agents takes the specific form, in the last stanza of “Uptight”, of a blueprint for social change, an oblique reference to the long-standing state penchant for issuing utopian social policy statements:⁶⁶

It’ll take time but pragmatics
will eventually win him over;
together we’ll devise an ingenious
sleight of hand or rationale,
whisper in the right ears,
secure the needful attention
and justify every single thing
in this road map of reinvention.

In contrast to the culturalist formulations of cosmopolitanism put forward by Hannerz, Appiah or Hall, Tan understands this pragmatic cosmopolitanism not as a cultural good, but as an economic need for a city intent on securing its place in the upper echelons of the global city hierarchy. He evinces this material pragmatism through the employment of a diction of instrumental reason, “devise”, “rationale”, “secure”,

⁶⁵ Paul Tan, “Makeover”, in *First Meeting of Hands* (Singapore: Firstfruits, 2006), pp. 22-3 (p. 22).

⁶⁶ Probably the most prominent of these is the *Renaissance City Report*. See Velayutham for a detailed study of these statements.

“justify” and “road map of reinvention” evoking images of deliberate planning and the achievement of specified ends rather than celebratory images of cultural diversity.

The poet, however, struggles to divest his ironic account of Singapore cosmopolitanism of a conservative cultural anchorage that balances the local and the global, as evidenced by the changes he makes to the poem in “Makeover”. Aaron Lee, in his review of Tan’s *First Meeting of Hands*, observes that this later version of the poem is “written in the voice of a senior government official” and “discusses an election strategy of fielding a candidate with attributes that would show the government as being ‘progressive’.”⁶⁷ Rather than pinpointing a need for “Mr. Goody-two-shoes” to let down his hair, as in “Uptight”, Tan openly references politics in the opening to “Makeover”: “We may need to get our candidate / up on the bar top for a spin” (p. 22). From this perspective the poem posits an apparent recognition by the government of the need to keep pace with globalising forces that are creating cosmopolitan Singaporeans outside strict social blueprints. But where the final stanza of “Uptight” speaks merely of the pragmatism of embracing capitalist cosmopolitanism, Tan’s alternative ending to “Makeover” balances that pragmatism with a nod to the socially stabilising culture of the heartland:

Pragmatics will bring him round
for sure, just as he’ll remember
not to forget his humble, heartland roots,
the Asian vocabulary of piety, duty
and family that needs the occasional
loving lip service. Brushed, scrubbed,
whiter than white, they’re all ready for
the audience, blue from holding their breaths. (p. 23)

The perceived need to accommodate conservative values is not, in the establishment optic of the poem, wholly antithetical to the drive to create a cosmopolitan society

⁶⁷ Aaron Lee, “Hand on Heartlands”, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2006) [[http://www.qlrs.com/critique.asp?id=565](http://www qlrs.com/critique.asp?id=565), accessed on 25th August 2008]

that can respond to the demands of the new global milieu. Rather, both the preservation of local “heartland roots” and the welcome extended to the global are identified by the poet as the twin pillars of Singapore’s ambition as a viable globalised society.

But it is clear, ultimately, that heartland concerns require only “the occasional / loving lip service”; for the poet it is the cosmopolitan that evidently dominates the agenda, in keeping with its elitist significations. He sees this lip service as an attempted containment of the risks involved in global capitalism, risks that must be balanced against potential returns. Singapore’s cosmopolitanism largely embodies, from this perspective, a market logic rather than a cultural one. Tan’s ventriloquism, in adopting an establishment or government voice, represents a kind of knowing mockery of the instrumental rationality that gives Singapore cosmopolitanism its particular character. It hints at a broader undercurrent of critique of official global strategies, but articulates, at least on the surface, the neat schema of Singapore’s official rapprochement of local and global.

This picture of ordered coexistence is unravelled in Shiau’s *Heartland*, which enacts a discordance between market cosmopolitanism and the quotidian culture of the heartland. Shiau’s novel portrays encounters between the cosmopolitan and the heartland as unruly departures from idealised notions of the untroubled reconciliation of local and global. It also testifies to the overdetermination of the cosmopolitan ethos in Singapore by neocolonial valuations that implicitly privilege the West as the foremost element in the beneficial flows of neoliberal globalisation suffusing the city. The concomitant to this neocolonial aspect of the novel’s examination of elitist cosmopolitanism is the way the city’s global “underbelly”, its imported subaltern labour, is figured by the author as external to its exclusionary cosmopolitan vision. He

positions them as socially subordinate subjects within the heartland, itself an already subordinated milieu in his rendition of Singapore's globalising society, and in the process gestures toward an understanding of contemporary postcolonial Singapore as a minor imperial power in its own right. These exclusions, in their complex interaction with expressions of neocolonial ideology and capitalist cosmopolitanism in the novel, extend the insights of Paul Tan's verse by illuminating some of the social implications of neoliberal globalisation in a Singaporean context.

Heartland enacts certain subjective dilemmas that attend the encounter between cosmopolitanism and parochial heartland culture. Through the novel's protagonist, Wing, Shiau explores how a hybrid cosmopolitan-heartlander grapples with simultaneous, conflicting attitudes to the interplay of local and global in Singapore. For Wing, a heartlander with minor cosmopolitan aspirations studying at an elite school, reconciling these often seemingly incompatible worlds becomes a source of subjective distress. His quotidian, intimate inhabitation of a typical Singapore housing estate can be read as the author's paeon to the heartland, its landscape and its culture. But Wing's elite education and its horizon of expectations place him outside the heartland in terms of his cultural and social frame of reference. His short-lived relationship with Chloe, a wealthy, cosmopolitan schoolmate (whose interests include global environmentalism and a Western university education) founders upon his inability to sever his link to his heartland roots. A later relationship with a relatively uneducated and traditionally Chinese girl suffers, ironically, from the gulf in both intellectual horizons and relative familiarity with Western culture that exists between them. In the novel's construction of the cosmopolitan disposition, the latter is conceptually synonymous with the West.

The novel is not an unequivocal dismissal of the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between the cosmopolitan and the local. Shiau does attempt to represent Singapore as a space that can juxtapose and peacefully reconcile the cosmopolitan and the parochial:

Wing took a shortcut through the quaint little enclave in Buona Vista, known to the locals as Holland Village. Although it was just fifteen minutes from his estate, the place had a cosmopolitan air because of the expatriate population in the surrounding residences of Chip Bee and Taman Warna. The shops, many left over from the days when they catered to the British servicemen stationed at the Pasir Panjang Base, were still in the business of helping foreigners to assimilate. Rattan and cane furniture, huge flowering pots and ethnic knickknacks were sold to the expatriates trying to live like the locals in the Far East. The entire street was a pastiche of cultures: North Indian, Japanese, Mexican, Continental, Italian. Yet, the kitschiness of the setting was tempered by the presence and humility of the seemingly anomalous wet market. Within the protected confines of the iron fence was another world, where old men, callused feet on stools, could drink their kopi from saucers and feel a familiar insulation from a community they had lost touch with. At the Haagen-Dazs opposite, hip young people sat languidly, sipping caffe lattes.⁶⁸

Shiau's description arguably romanticises both the traditional heartland and the commercial Orientalism of the expatriate economy, but also recognises the market logics that have brought this "pastiche of cultures" together in a single neighbourhood. He hints at the managed nature of this cosmopolitan space, from which the heartland is mediated and "protected" by specific physical-cum-metaphorical demarcations such as the iron fence. But rather than having lines of ambiguity and imbrication, the heartland/cosmopolitan spatial divide is made flesh within a single urban site.

The spatialised character of the heartlander/cosmopolitan divide is in fact quite clearly signalled in the novel.⁶⁹ Unlike in the portrait of Holland Village quoted

⁶⁸ Daren V.L. Shiau, *Heartland* [1999] (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2002), p. 73.

⁶⁹ Serene Tan and Brenda Yeoh have observed that Singapore's cosmopolitan strategy involves both the creation of cosmopolitan Singaporeans and cosmopolitan Singapore space. *Heartland* complicates the spatial dimension of Singapore cosmopolitanism through Wing's divergent responses to cosmopolitan and heartland space. See Serene Tan and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "Negotiating Cosmopolitanism in Singapore's Fictional Landscape", in *Cosmopolitan Urbanism*, eds. Jon Binnie,

above, other spaces represented in *Heartland* take on quite clear-cut significations. These significations, notably, are ambivalently assigned by Wing, whose hybrid cosmopolitan/heartlander identity seems to fluctuate in response to the nature of his immediate surroundings. Initially Wing appears to be a proponent of elitist cosmopolitan perspectives, particularly given the apparent transcendence of colonial grievances in his views on a downtown luxury hotel:

The lounge in the lobby, furnished with armchairs and table lamps, was occupied by only two idle tai-tais with Louis Feraud paper bags and some Caucasian men in suits. It was instantly likeable. The subtle oriental touches to the European décor, together with piped-in Bach, gave the place an air of colonialism which would have been so offensive to his grandfather yet [was] so appealing to Wing himself.

In two generations, the old wounds of his ancestors had disappeared. Not healed, just no longer relevant. (*Heartland*, pp. 10-11)

Wing's ascription of irrelevance to the colonial legacy reads, in light of the hotel description, like an updating of colonial culture as the culture of global capitalism. The West is set up in the novel as the epitome of the beneficial global flows suffusing the city-state, rather than the bugbear constructed by postcolonial critique. The hotel, part of a global chain, is itself recognisably part of the infrastructure of the global capitalist network. Caucasians in suits are represented as the archetypal agents of Western capital. The scene bespeaks the positive reception of the West's globalising influence; the downtown business district is a cosmopolitan space designated as a receptacle of desirable global flows. Within the confines of this cosmopolitan space detailed by Shiau, Wing is complicit in the rewriting of the Western presence as the benign presence of global capitalism. The hotel's "subtle oriental touches to the European décor, together with piped-in Bach" disclose a Singapore space whose

Julian Holloway, Steve Millington and Craig Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 146-167.

character is determined largely by Occidental capital and cultural influence, with a “subtle” nod to a local, “oriental” variation on a site of Western power.

Wing’s sentiments in respect of the Western presence deviate dramatically when he considers its implications from the heartland perspective. Ensclosed in Chinese traditions, age-old religious practices and parochial concerns, Wing recasts the Westerner as an interloper or disturber of the peace. His appreciation of the colonial air of the luxury hotel yields to a negative Occidentalism on hearing about Western teenage shenanigans in Singapore. The vandalism and thefts perpetrated by these Western youths raise his heartlander heckles and crystallise an exclusionary – and unc cosmopolitan – patriotism:⁷⁰

Wing felt offended just hearing about it. To him it was bravado at the expense of his home. Wing was in some ways a critic of his own country but he didn’t like the idea of anyone from the outside expressing the same sentiments. (p. 53)

The stark distinction between Wing’s responses to the Western presence in different settings is particularly instructive. As a hybrid cosmopolitan-heartlander, his fluctuating responses reflect the determining effect space has on his attitude to the global and to the West. His apparent adaptability might ironically be interpreted as cosmopolitanism of a kind, but the novel does not flag up his subjective versatility in these terms; rather, he appears to be a caricature of an idealised Singaporean who oscillates, with no apparent contradiction, across the divide between global and parochial affiliations.

Any illusion of an easy reconciliation between local and global cast by Wing’s apparent cultural versatility is not sustained for long. Paul Tan’s ironic presentation of Singaporean cosmopolitanism as a salutary engagement with global capitalism is

⁷⁰ This recalls the real-life case of Michael Fay, the teenage son of an American expatriate who was caned for vandalism in 1994, an incident that provoked an outraged response from America and an energetic defence of its justice system by Singapore.

rehearsed in *Heartland*, but in a way that confounds peaceful narratives of coexistence between cosmopolitans and heartlanders. Shiau suggests a cosmopolitan bias on the part of the establishment in an episode involving Wing's friend Yong, an unequivocal heartlander, who takes exception to a local girl being harassed by an obnoxious Caucasian man exhibiting a crude Orientalist attitude toward locals.⁷¹ His violent intervention lands him in jail and earns him a rebuke from the judge, who denounces his "behaviour against an expatriate" as "shameful and an embarrassment to all Singaporeans" (p. 235). While the judge's denunciation is openly geared toward sustaining the city's reputation as a prime destination for Western capital and capitalists, and thus makes an implicit admission of the relative lack of importance the heartland has in elite globalised narratives of Singapore, a broader and more subtle observation might also be made here. The narrator notes in an ostensibly dispassionate tone that Yong's punishment by the courts "was reported in the Chinese newspapers. The next day, all the neighbours in [the] block were talking about it" (p. 235). It is through the implicit elision of the event from the English-language media that Shiau insinuates an ideological divide between the cosmopolitan and heartland segments of the city. Read in the context of the starkly delineated schema put forward by former Prime Minister Goh,⁷² the attention paid to the matter by the Chinese papers and its heartland readership also connotes its relative neglect in the English media and its Anglophone, presumably cosmopolitan and relatively elite, audience. Shiau effects, therefore, a disjuncture in Singapore's ostensible balancing act between locally rooted and globally oriented subjects. The ambivalence that prevails is dominated by a curious mix of neoliberal and neocolonial elitist valuations that extol

⁷¹ See p. 234.

⁷² See above.

the Western presence, with one that also remains troubled, if discreetly so, by parochial perspectives.

Heartland sets up a discordance between parochial heartland culture and the cosmopolitan sphere of Singapore. The welcome extended to Western representatives of global capitalism by cosmopolitan elements in the novel, with complete disregard for the dissenting voices of the heartland, suggests the actual dominance of elite cosmopolitan perspectives over parochial ones. A recently emergent strand in Singapore writing, however, involves a critique of the imperial relationship that Singaporeans have with subaltern labour from poorer Asian neighbours, and in the process imputes a shared imperial disposition to Singaporeans at large. These texts respond to a less prominent aspect of Singapore's global engagement, one that has been identified as part of the exclusions of the city-state's dominant narrative of cosmopolitanism. While the West serves as the *de facto* manifestation of the global in the Singapore context, the huge numbers of foreign workers from the Asian economic margins do not register as part of the locally predominant neoliberal understanding of globalisation.⁷³ They register instead, in the words of Brenda S.A. Yeoh and T.C. Chang, as the “‘underbelly’ of global cities”.⁷⁴ Singapore writers have attempted to grant this underbelly a voice and denounce local imperial notions simultaneously through their work.

⁷³ Brenda Yeoh observes that cosmopolitanism in the Singapore conception excludes certain foreign groups such as lowly-skilled workers from other Asian countries, focusing instead on highly-paid professionals hailing mostly from the West. See Yeoh, “Cosmopolitanism and Its Exclusions in Singapore”, pp. 2438-2441. Also see Brenda S.A. Yeoh and T.C. Chang, “Globalising Singapore: Debating Transnational Flows in the City”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (2001), pp. 1032-4. Shirley Lim has similarly argued, albeit in a different context, that the city-state's understanding of the global elides the significance of the surrounding Southeast Asian region; the global inscription on Singapore culture and space is seen as largely Western in provenance. See Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Regionalism, English Narrative, and Singapore as Home and Global City”, in *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, eds. Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 205-224.

⁷⁴ See Yeoh and Chang, “Globalising Singapore”, p. 1032.

In *Heartland* Shiau attempts to humanise the city's global underbelly by inviting his reader to share in the mundane existence of this populous but marginalised and inarticulate underclass of foreign workers. Wing's empathetic chance encounter with a Filipino maid in his neighbourhood places in stark relief her social subordination, and might be read as an atypical declaration of common humanity:

"Hello?" Wing called out.

The song stopped suddenly. Moments later, Wing heard the same voice from just behind the door. "Sirrr?"

"I'm sorry," Wing blurted out, not knowing what to say. "Is Mrs Heng in?"

He cursed himself silently. What would he say to Mrs Heng? As he was preparing to make his escape, the door was unlatched and opened slightly. The Filipino maid looked out apprehensively. When she saw that it was Wing, she smiled. Still, her fingers gripped the edge of the door as she pulled it towards her chest. "Sirrr, you are looking for Madam?"

Wing shook his head.

Seeming not to perceive the contradiction, she continued, "Madam go to sisterrr's house."

"Oh, actually, I think I lost my keys. . ." Wing said.

She paused for a while. Then, she opened the door and put a key from her bunch into the padlock on the gate. "Do you want to come in?" (p. 82)

The awkwardness of the exchange and its various manoeuvres develop from the textual encounter between two spheres of Singapore – the subaltern foreigner and the heartlander of cosmopolitan persuasion – into a tacit understanding of a shared human identity. Wing's unease at initiating the encounter is mirrored by the maid's manipulation of the door as a symbol of her insecurity and lack of social visibility. While his willingness to engage on an equal level with the maid represents a Singaporean brand of vernacular cosmopolitanism, her apprehension at this unexpected solidarity bespeaks the rarity of such expressions in Shiau's conception of Singapore. That Shiau is at pains to afford her a voice and human visibility merely emphasises the need to do so on her behalf; in the novel she represents globalisation "from below", the disavowed strand of globalisation's story. It is particularly

instructive that the poorly paid Filipino maid's employer, Mrs Heng, is portrayed as a stereotypical heartlander;⁷⁵ while the latter is, within an elitist cosmopolitan framework, part of the margins of the city, she is still empowered in relation to foreign labour. The novel thus testifies to Singapore's relationship of dominance with the Asian economic margins.

Singapore writers have explored the city's relationship with the marginalised labour in its midst in both satirical and serious modes. In *Mammon Inc.*, Hwee Hwee Tan opts for the former in literally rehearsing the exploitation of foreign labour. Chiah Deng, although not of an imperialist persuasion herself, attempts to sway her English friend Steve into roleplaying the stereotypical Singaporean contempt for the lowly paid labour from around the region in order to pass the cultural adaptation test that will land her a prestigious job with a global corporate giant. The exchange between the two is a commentary on the asymmetries of globalisation underpinning what Steve recognises as imperialist exploitation:

'I can't do it.' Steve snapped his phone shut. 'I don't know how you Singaporeans can live with yourselves. So, yeah, you have a higher GNP than your neighbouring countries, but there's no excuse for using your superior wages to tempt these poor foreign workers into subjecting themselves to slave labour. Your whole economy is built upon the exploitation of the proletariat, and if there's any justice in the world, the maids should start a revolution to overthrow their capitalist oppressors.'

Steve was obviously a product of a British university, institutions where pockets of Marxism still flourished, despite the fact that most of the world had ditched that economic theory ever since the Soviet Union collapsed. 'Yes, I agree, but if you want to pass the Test, you'll have to burn your little red book and erase your obsession with class struggle and the theory of alienation. Go ahead. Be a Singaporean. Be a capitalist Nietzschean superman who can crush his domestic help at will and send her back to the slums in Manila.'⁷⁶

Chiah Deng's flippant dismissal of Steve's moral concerns, significantly, appeals to the ideas of a European philosopher, one whose much-misunderstood work has at

⁷⁵ See p. 81.

⁷⁶ Hwee Hwee Tan, *Mammon Inc.* [2001] (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 254-5.

times been enlisted to buttress notions of white superiority. Tan thus makes an oblique allusion to a neoimperial aping of Western imperial ideology in her satirical portrait of Singapore: Chiah Deng's ironic self-mockery ascribes a hegemony over subaltern Asian workers to her fellow Singaporeans that resonates with European colonialist sensibilities.

Singapore's poets, on the other hand, have addressed such concerns in a more sombre and sympathetic mode. A common motif in contemporary Singapore poetry is the foreign construction worker, most often hailing from South Asia, and the instrumentalist role he is consigned to within the city. In Aaron Lee's "Road-works", the poet characterises the foreign worker's presence as transient,⁷⁷ leaving a material imprint on the city but no human legacy:

When they pack up and leave
two months or a year from now,
they will leave behind a criss-cross
of surgical scars and giant patchwork
squares of grey and darker grey.
Almost no other sign where they had touched the earth [...]⁷⁸

Lee's verse reduces this foreign presence to urban inscription, a kind of necessary vandalism. The precise timeframe allocated by Lee for their Singapore stint appears insignificant; it matters little if they depart "two months or a year from now". If what they leave behind is merely endured, even echoes of their presence as a human community in the city go unheard. It is only "the earth", mere space, upon which Lee acknowledges their human purchase; he bears witness to their failure to embellish, however briefly, the human and cultural landscape of his city, and obliquely figures them as part of the city's exclusions.

⁷⁷ Yeoh and Chang echo this in their observation that "there is little in public discourse to suggest that they [foreign workers] are considered anything more than a transient workforce with little role to play in Singapore's globalising vision" (p. 1033).

⁷⁸ Aaron Lee, "Road-works", in *No Other City: The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry*, eds. Alvin Pang and Aaron Lee (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2000), p. 66.

Other poets weave the figure of the foreign construction worker into explicit commentary on the emerging imperial relationship their city has with imported labour. In recuperating the human significance of these workers' presence in the city, Lena Chew's "Nation-building" ponders the family they have left behind in their homelands:

Do they know
the hardships
occasional hostility
abominable squalor
pernicious masters
or how that money he slaves for
is a pittance here, among the rising
office towers, sleek continental restaurants,
Gucci scarves, Chanel 5 in the air.
All so very post-colonial.
He is little more than a beast
of the modern burden
building...building...building
the dreams of a nation
bound, if nothing else,
by apathy.⁷⁹

By referencing Singaporeans in the poem as "pernicious masters", Chew positions them as hegemonic figures within contemporary global power geometries. The irony bound up in her poem's title – that the physical embodiments of a nation are built by those whose presence is instrumentalised, merely tolerated and excluded from the received local narrative of globalisation by Singaporeans peddling imperialist notions – is a stark counterpoint to the intimate interweaving of local and Western elements within the literary portraits of Singaporean cosmopolitanism in Paul Tan's poems or Shiau's *Heartland*. In his poem about South Asian labourers in Singapore's Little India, Shiau transplants an Indian concept of dominance in sketching the outlines of an imperial relationship between these workers and their wealthy hosts; the former

⁷⁹ Lena Chew, "Nation-building", *No Other City*, p. 69.

“watch pale *rajās* with their wives and fat children / spend riches in the shops”.⁸⁰ The thematic kernel of the poem, as in Chew’s, is the homology of economic inequality and social subalternity, whereby Shiau sees the city as the seat of an emergent imperial hegemony. But the deliberate ambiguity of Chew’s use of “post-colonial” imputes neocolonial underpinnings to what she sees as Singaporean imperialism. She alludes, on one level, to the fact that Singapore is “after” colonialism. Her invocation of the term also addresses the postcolonial as a way of understanding the world as divided by inequalities of material wealth, an optic within which Singapore is arguably part of a hegemonic First World exploiting global labour markets. But Chew effects a telling irony by associating this hegemony with the material and cultural trappings of Western capitalism and consumerism. Her intimation of Singaporeans’ social sway over foreign workers by foregrounding the former’s access to “sleek continental restaurants, / Gucci scarves, Chanel 5 in the air” is also an oblique reference to her view that the cultural hierarchies installed by European empire continue to have significant purchase in the city-state, particularly among an implied cosmopolitan elite. Chew proffers a dual perspective on locals and subordinate others, one that recognises an elitist cosmopolitanism ironically echoing European colonialist exclusions.

Singapore writers, we have seen, bear witness to the complexities of a Singaporean cosmopolitanism in their work. They characterise Singapore as an economically empowered global city that remains to some degree in thrall to colonial valuations. Their work traces an uneven acceptance of Western and non-Western elements in Singapore cosmopolitanism, even conflating the city with the West in terms of their shared imperial relationship with subaltern labour from less-developed

⁸⁰ Daren V.L. Shiau, “India, Little by Little”, *Peninsular: Archipelagos and Other Islands* (Singapore: Ethos books, 2000), p. 11.

postcolonial states. In the process, they crosscut Singapore's successful engagement with global capitalism with a residual colonial mindset, and precariously situate the city-state somewhere between a neocolonial dependency on Western culture and neoimperial hegemony over other postcolonial societies. While Singapore writers populate their city with both the "tourists" and "vagabonds" of Bauman's global mobility model, they project, in a critical vein, a cosmopolitan vision that admits only the archetypal cosmopolitan "tourists" and leaves the "vagabonds" at the impermanent periphery. The dubious link between marginalised labour and the lifestyles of elite cosmopolitans asserted by Bhabha is rendered particularly conspicuous in these representations, especially Chew's.

These are the primary insights, then, that emerge from my examination of cosmopolitanism in postcolonial Singapore writing: it is an instrumentalised cosmopolitanism profoundly shaped by material imperatives that govern both its inclusions and exclusions, but one that has not yet been able to fully divest itself of colonial allocations of cultural value. In the texts examined above, heartland concerns, elite cosmopolitan agendas and the shared imperialist ethos that overdetermines their respective literary treatments together create a highly complex picture of cosmopolitics in Singapore that confounds any official project of managing cosmopolitanism. While the literary heartland is potentially hegemonic over foreign labour, it is also conceived as parochial and unaccepting of the Western presence. Writers like Paul Tan, Shiau, and Chew, meanwhile, intertwine their cosmopolitan milieux with Western influences. The imperialist tendencies assigned to cosmopolitans in the writing are both implicitly and explicitly characterised as being rooted in neoliberal as well as Eurocentric notions.

These literary representations of cosmopolitanism and its attendant politics in Singapore disclose a number of ways in which postcoloniality and globalisation intersect that are not accounted for in the debates described in the Introduction. The globalcentric critics of the postcolonial paradigm, for example, argue that world power relations in the contemporary era are dominated by the deterritorialised forces of global capitalism, rather than by the West. But while Singapore's literary expressions of cosmopolitanism certainly foreground the way in which the city can be seen as having transcended its postcolonial subordination through a thoroughgoing embrace of neoliberal globalisation, they also overdetermine Singapore's globalisation by insinuating an ambivalent neocolonial ideology into their portrayals of the city. The texts do not disclose any discernible sentiment of Singaporean solidarity with the specifically *postcolonial* global community; if anything, they testify to a burgeoning imperial relationship with much of the rest of the postcolonial world. And even though the cosmopolitan/heartlander divide in Singapore is broadly analogous to the putative gulf between the global middle and working class that underpins globalcentric critiques of postcoloniality, the multiply ethnicised dimension of Singaporean capitalist imperialism in many of the texts undercuts any notion of transnational class loyalties taking hold, least of all in the Singaporean heartland.

For similar reasons, Singapore's literary representations of the cosmopolitan do not corroborate Robert Young's theory of tricontinentalism, or the conflictual division of the world into North and South. If Singapore's literary self-understanding situates it as part of the North on the global capitalist index, in civilisational terms it is fundamentally hybrid, notwithstanding the extent to which its writers acknowledge its Westernisation. While Young's gnomic theory continues to install the West as the centre of global power and therefore as synonymous with the North, Singapore (along

with other wealthy East Asian cities) appears to be part of a problematic category in the global order. Its critical literary self-representation as a new Asian imperialist power alongside its Western cultural dependency suggests that its writers' experience of neocolonial globalisation is not characterised by local cultural resistance to it, which Bill Ashcroft suggests is the most efficacious form of contestation of global hegemony. The texts affirm the possibility of harnessing neocolonial globalisation for local social aggrandisement. Singapore writers recognise that in its long-standing drive toward Western material standards the city-state shares the aspirations of the Guinean boys in Simon Gikandi's cautionary critique of globalisation theory's alleged optimism. But they bear witness to a Singapore that has succeeded in attaining such material standards while sustaining a heartland culture relatively divorced from global influences. It is perhaps, then, part of the contradiction of globalisation that the ex-colonial global city can be effectively selective in the management of its cosmopolitan engagements, while postcolonial societies that are less fully bound up in the circuits of neoliberal globalisation (the kind of society Gikandi presumably had in mind when writing of the "postcolony") are deemed to bear the brunt of the full onslaught of globalised hegemony.

Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism and the Global City

It has been the argument of this chapter that postcolonial London and Singapore writers harness different conceptions of cosmopolitanism to suggest how postcolonial agendas might be fulfilled in global cities. Unlike postcolonial communities in less globalised locales, those of London and Singapore find themselves at the confluence of the most intense and comprehensive global flows of capital, information and people. This advanced degree of globality is arguably what makes the respective

mobilisations of globalisation by London and Singapore writers viable, in contradistinction to the views of most theorists of the postcoloniality/globalisation relationship, who perceive globalisation as something to be wholly resisted by postcolonial subjects. Only in a genuine cosmopolis like London, where the notion of the multicultural substantially runs the gamut of the world's ethnicities and their hybrid offshoots, can the discursive strategy of recasting a Western city as a global one inaugurate a meaningful contestation of neocolonial exclusion or effect a transcendence of diasporic displacement through a reterritorialisation of roots within a contradictorily global site. Even in a global city like Singapore, the multicultural refers largely to three or four major ethnicities coexisting harmoniously; but in the Singapore texts the cosmopolitan spread of global cultures is conceived as part of the foreign presence, rather than something internal to the city's basic identity. Singapore's writers focus instead on foregrounding its successful and profitable engagement with global capitalism. They repudiate its selectivity in extending a welcome to foreigners while remaining completely open to advanced capital. They suggest that the city's global economic success, in fact, might partly be explained by its selective, indeed imperialist, relationship with subaltern Asian labour.

Postcolonial London, of course, is a minority element of the Western capital city, whereas postcolonial Singapore is synonymous with the city-state itself. Even in the present era of globalisation and deterritorialisation the West is still, in the case of Singapore, at one remove, mediated by geography, local cultural reception and translation, and local social institutions. The Singapore texts I have discussed see the discursive resilience of the colonial legacy as the root of continuing Western influence, rather than any continued direct control by the West over local matters. This deference to the West is harnessed to an unashamed project of profitable

engagement with global capital. Singapore's writers see postcolonial cosmopolitanism in this non-Western global city as characterised by a great variance in how it values its Others according to simultaneously neocolonial and neoliberal criteria, and depict an elite cosmopolitan class that appears quite content to privilege the Western capital that allows it to fulfill an imperialist role in relation to some of the city's regional neighbours. For the postcolonial London writers, on the other hand, the West is spatially unmediated; postcolonial London constitutes an internal dimension of this Western capital city. As a minoritarian and often marginalised set of cultures within a larger urban society, and directly subject to its social institutions and structures, it is perhaps understandable for postcolonial London to adopt in its writing a discursive reconceptualisation, unilaterally, of London as a global rather than Western city as the most viable point of departure for contesting postcolonial diasporic pressures and exclusions.

Global capitalism is conspicuous by its relative absence from the postcolonial cosmopolitan narratives of London. In light of its contrasting prominence for the Singapore writers, it appears that even in two such thoroughly globalised urban centres, postcolonial modalities continue to be regarded as crucial modifiers of the generic claims of global cities discourse and the neoliberal narrative of globalisation. For Singapore's writers, economic imperatives dominate its global agenda in the relative absence of overt neocolonial social conflicts. In the postcolonial London novels examined above, however, the daily lives of postcolonial Londoners are often still shaped by neocolonial or diasporic challenges within a Western space not always accommodating of their ethnic differences. The accessible cultural solutions offered by a positive vernacular cosmopolitanism are therefore some of the most urgent concerns on their sociopolitical agenda. The postcolonial recourse to globalisation in

global cities generates both salutary and insalubrious results: while continuing neocolonial social experience places the onus on accessible global culturalist strategies to transform the subjective postcolonial experience of the global city, the receding of overt neocolonial pressures can potentially herald a neoimperial mobilisation of global capitalism. Comparing postcolonial London and Singapore writing, then, has uncovered a contradictory relationship between social inclusivity, cultural (in)dependence and ethical ambiguity at the intersection of postcoloniality and globalisation in postcolonial global-city literature.

A hybrid of the outcomes of both postcolonial London and Singapore cosmopolitanism, however, in which an open, vernacular cosmopolitan disposition informs a thoroughgoing economic involvement with the global leading to a genuinely inclusive globalisation for postcolonials everywhere, is a utopian goal evoked by reading both sets of literature together. Such a fusion casts global cities as the genuine crucibles of a desirable rapprochement between globalisation and the postcolonial condition in which all cultures have an equal stake.

CONCLUSION

In his contribution to *The Global Cities Reader* (2006), Anthony D. King urges that we pay critical attention “to the overly economic nature of the criteria driving the ‘world city paradigm’ and its framing within a narrowly restrictive framework of urban political economy.” The resultant neglect of cultural concerns in global cities scholarship, he suggests, represents a significant lacuna within the field:

While the largely quantitative data which characterizes much of recent global city research may tell us something about the organization of the contemporary world economy and the worldwide growth of contemporary capitalism, it fails to address the distinctive *cultural* forms of that economy and also the cultural characteristics of all cities, including postcolonial cities, not least those affecting, and in particular cases determining, the nature of contemporary economic and political activity.¹

This thesis serves to address specific aspects of this lacuna through an examination of the writing of postcolonial global cities. Firstly, it demonstrates how a comparative study of the urban cultural aspects of postcoloniality in the global-city writing of London and Singapore illuminates neglected dimensions of economic globalisation. Secondly, its global-cities perspective on postcolonial literature, focusing on the concentrated access to, and diverse effects of, globalisation, expands our understanding of contemporary postcoloniality by exposing both its problems and the fullest range of its globalised possibilities within a single critical frame. It makes a case, in other words, for foregrounding the global city as a critical concept through which relevant literary texts can be read in order to develop new comparative perspectives on the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation.

London and Singapore have also been made to serve more specific analytical purposes, here, primarily through the literature of postcoloniality and globalisation in

¹ Anthony D. King, “World Cities: Global? Postcolonial? Postimperial? Or Just the Result of Happenstance? Some Cultural Comments”, in *The Global Cities Reader*, eds. Neil Brenner and Roger Keil (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 319-324 (p. 321).

a postimperial global metropolis on the one hand and a thoroughly globalised ex-colonial city on the other. Each city's writing can be linked with a specific set of departures from the generalisations of global-city research. The London texts, for example, address the migrant or diasporic dimension of the Western global city. King takes issue with the tendency of global cities discourse to address the "foreign" presence in cities like Paris, New York and London in monolithic terms, such that the general cosmopolitan character this presence supplies on the whole takes precedence over its internal diversity and tensions.² The postcolonial London writing that we have considered, however, documents the specificity of the globalised metropolitan experience of diasporic South Asian, African and Caribbean subjects. King also goes further, suggesting that postcoloniality involves particular complications for understanding the politics of migrant empowerment in Western global cities:

Clearly, the historical, cultural and political status and power (or lack of it) possessed by migrants from different countries, when relocated in the cities of another society, is highly variable and differentiated. Given that a large proportion, both in Europe and North America, are from "Third World," postcolonial societies, their colonial histories [...] place different kinds of migrants in very different situations of power and lack of it, irrespective of their relation to the (economic) labor market. (p. 322)

The truth of this observation is borne out in much of the London literature in this thesis, but especially in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), which represents the white members of the Jewish diaspora the Chalfens, for example, as untroubled by the racial discrimination experienced by Londoners of black or Asian origin.³

Another influential generalisation in global cities discourse has involved regarding Western global cities as the template for global city development worldwide. Ryan Bishop et al. have been scathing about such generalisations, citing

² See p. 322.

³ See my discussion of the novel in Chapter Three.

two particular assumptions that highlight the need to diversify our understanding of such cities through postcolonial and regional categories:

The first is that global urbanism can be regarded as a uniform or homogeneous outgrowth from Europe and America, belatedly affecting Africa, Asia, and South America; and the second is that cities in Africa, Asia, or South America can be understood on the model of cities in Europe, Australia, or the United States. These assumptions implicitly carry over into the notion of what it is to be truly “global,” suggesting that world citizenship erases essential differences between residents of, say, Hong Kong and New York.⁴

The Singaporean efforts at writing the Asian postcolonial global city examined in this thesis capture local mediations of global urban features and a particular mix of capitalist postcoloniality and modern Asian culture; they represent a specific discourse that confounds the assumptions identified in the passage above.

My accounts of these texts alongside the London writing serve as one kind of attempt to contest the sort of generalisations about global cities cited by Bishop et al. Whether considered in terms of agency, place, the nation or cosmopolitanism, postcolonial Singapore and London literature lay bare two literary milieux in which postcolonial and global forces meet both consonantly and discordantly. My examination of cosmopolitanism in Chapter Four, however, also gestures toward a kind of convergence of the politics of migrant agency in Western cities like London on the one hand with that of Singapore on the other. If, as King argues, postcoloniality decisively modifies the nature of migrant agency in cities like London, it can be seen to do the same in the case of migrant minorities and their reception by the postcolonial Singaporean majority. The welcome extended to, and empowerment possible for, migrants of different social classes and ethnic or geographic backgrounds in Singapore are very starkly codified in the writing according to valuations that

⁴ Ryan Bishop, John Phillips, and Wei-Wei Yeo, “Perpetuating Cities: Excepting Globalization and the Southeast Asia Supplement”, in *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, eds. Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-34 (p. 2).

associate highly skilled (and highly regarded) migrant professionals with Western or Western-oriented backgrounds, and poorly skilled migrant workers (who receive a distinctly mixed reception) with postcolonial and South Asian origins.

The glaring difference between the London and Singapore cases is, of course, that the normative group in Singapore conducting such valuations is itself postcolonial. That the Singapore literature in question is written from the relatively assured perspective of an ex-colonial national community, while the London writing documents the experience of a significant (if not always welcome) postcolonial minority in a Western city, is testament to the unevenness of globalisation, the postcolonial, and their encounters and complex imbrications across the global city network. Power relations, identity politics and spatial experience vary, but often in unexpected ways: minority cultures in the West are ascribed greater force in some spheres than Asian postcolonials whose place in their own city is ostensibly less embattled, while in other spheres the opposite holds true. My comparison of postcolonial London and Singapore writing in this thesis highlights both the perils and possibilities of globalisation for postcolonials in global cities; more specifically, it does so while also identifying divergences in these areas between the postimperial global metropolis and the ex-colonial global Asian city. Comparing the two thus crystallises an awareness of the spatial differentiation and unruly pathways of postcolonial and global urban forces, and illuminates the simultaneity of their divergences and convergences in global city literature.

Contradictions or inconsistencies between the postcolonial London and Singapore texts considered in this thesis do of course emerge from this unruliness, and deserve some comment. One in particular stands out. The chapters on agency and cosmopolitanism deal with the implication of postcolonial London and Singapore

subjects in the ethical difficulties posed by global hegemonies. In Chapter One, postcolonial agency in London and Singapore writing appears as a Janus-faced engagement with postcolonial and global forces, such that postcolonial empowerment relies on the perpetuation of certain neocolonial structures. Chapter Four, however, presents Adebayo and Srivastava as producing positive and empowering accounts of the potential of globalisation to liberate postcolonial Londoners from narrow and parochial assertions of both postcolonial and English nativism. In the form of London's cosmopolitan mix, global culture particularly enables this subjective liberation without being in thrall to neoliberal global interests. Singapore's writers, on the other hand, focus on their city's dominant postcolonial mode of market cosmopolitanism, criticising it as bound up with an emergent neoimperial ethos alongside a relatively unacknowledged debt to the West. Where the Singapore material across Chapters One and Four is in important ways homogeneous, then, the corresponding London texts at times diverge quite dramatically from it and from each other. The discrepancies involved foreground the multiply asymmetrical forms of access to globalisation to which postcolonials, even in global-city contexts, are consigned. Much depends on the analytical point of view from which we reflect on such issues in the texts. But the extent to which the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation is itself potentially enabling of multiple points of view is equally significant.

This thesis gestures toward future trajectories in critical work on postcoloniality, globalisation and their theoretical relationship. It opens up a discursive and theoretical space for similar interventions in literary and other fields of inquiry. Globalisation's uneven imbrication with postcoloniality in the global-city literatures of London and Singapore suggests that similar comparisons are likely to

yield their own unique sets of insights. Other Asian global cities can be examined comparatively and from the postcolonial-cum-globalisation perspective: Hong Kong literature, to take the most obvious example, might be mined in order to broaden our literary vista of empowered globalised postcolonialities. As a global city that might be said to have traded one colonialism for another, Hong Kong has its own historical and sociopolitical specificity. But it might also be intriguingly compared with either London or Singapore. Comparisons with Singapore, in particular, would serve to expand our understanding of how writers perceive globalisation to have transformed East Asian postcolonialities. Comparative studies of the postcolonial writing of Western global cities would fulfill a similar role in respect of postcolonialities in the West. Clearly what lies ahead is the possibility of a broad critical focus on the writing of the postcolonial North and its engagement with globalisation. This thesis, however, has hardly exhausted potential insights into the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation offered by postcolonial London and Singapore literatures themselves. As globalising processes continue apace, future investigations by London and Singapore writers into postcolonial negotiations of contemporary hegemonies and globalised experiences will continue to require close critical attention.

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