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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Plural Identity and Migrant Communities in Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018)

Abstract: This paper explores the complexity of plural identities of the characters living within the sociocultural space of a London community, who define themselves as being from "here" and "elsewhere," in Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). First-generation and second-generation migrants, originally from Ireland, Pakistan, Jamaica, as well as other nations referred to in the novel, give life to the community at the Ends, a housing estate in Northwest London. On the one hand, in this suburban space, fury, neglect and powerlessness are deeply felt by the locals. However, the community also becomes the location for the creation of social habits, cultural patterns, forms of expression and group unity through the interaction and shared experiences of the locals. This dichotomy reveals underlying anxieties that raise questions about otherness, marginalisation and belonging, and how these aspects intersect in the construction of cultural identity. As characters struggle for meaning against a "cancel culture," their individual experiences are what constitutes their plural and fluid identities.

Keywords: literature, migrants, community, identity, plural identities, cancel culture

1. Introduction

Guy Gunaratne's debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) explores sociocultural practices and manifestations, such as football, slang, body language or grime, through which identity at the Ends, a housing estate in Northwest London, is constructed. It focuses on the community as the place where "the past and the present are inextricably interrelated" (Schülting, para. 5). This is reflected through the characters' shared experience as Londoners, but also as the first and second generation migrants. However, as has been argued by Lawrence Grossberg, it is

not only the past and present which contribute to the formation of identity, but also, as Stuart Hall contends, characters' subjectivity: the location and position from which they act. It is here, in the community, that locals negotiate who they are, where they belong and how they define themselves, against the backdrop of a society that pushes them to the periphery, socially, culturally and geographically. The recurring analogies to parenthood and mongrel offspring highlight characters' subjectivity as Londoners whose motherland appears to want to cancel them and insists on relegating them to the margins. Cancel culture emerged as a way of blocking celebrities or public figures who made racist, homophobic, misogynistic, or other socially and politically controversial claims. However, and as has been argued by Aja Romano, it recently has "spun out of control and become a senseless form of social media mob rule" (para. 4). In the analysis of Gunaratne's narrative, I am using the concept of cancel culture to define how migrants' experience and their voices are "cancelled" and kept from resonating beyond the Estate.

Grossberg claims that "identity has been – and may still be – the site around which people are struggling" despite the "significant advances that such struggles enabled over the past decades" (87). The question of identity and identification is important in Gunaratne's novel, as the characters struggle to make sense of who they are and where they belong, Thus, a number of theories on how identity is constituted may be used in the analysis of the migrant community at the Ends. These theories include Bhabha's "figure of *hybridity*" (Grossberg 91) and the anthropological term of liminality (an in-between cultural space), Spivak's reflections on the subaltern and the representation of identity as resistance, the notions of othering and orientalism as advanced by Said, Rushdie's use of the term "mongrelisation" and Michael Dash's claims on creolisation, as they all prove relevant to this discussion. However, by exploring and interpreting the characters, as portrayed by Gunaratne, I will argue in particular that they are subjects of "unfinished histories" (Gilroy) whose fluid identity "is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall 1990, 222).

Identity at the Ends is manifested in the daily social practices of the protagonists of Gunaratne's sonorous narrative which allows the reader to hear the language of the streets. Grime, slang, jogging, footie, and other forms of social expression and interaction the boys engage in, are all important binding factors in the construction of their unfinished history and of their plural identities. What defines them is not that they are different, or other, as migrant children from different cultural and ethnic origins, but how they position themselves within their space of representation and with whom they interact. In this sense, the shaping of identity emerges as a process of ongoing negotiation with the self, the other, the community, and the nation. As Grossberg argues,

> According to Gilroy (1992), such identifications or affiliations, rather than identities, are ways of belonging. They are the positions which define us spatially in relation

> to others, as entangled and separated. Similarly, Eric Michaels (1994) argued that people's access to knowledge is determined in part by the places – of conception, birth, death and residence – from and by which they speak, for one is always speaking for and from a specific geography of such places. That is, subjectivity describes the points of attachment from which one experiences the world. (15)

Along the lines of Grossberg's claims, Gunaratne's narrative depicts the interaction between characters of different ethnic origins within a shared socio-political and geographical space and how this results in the emergence of new forms of expression. The creation of a bond, despite ethnic, religious or linguistic differences, is essential for survival against the violence and neglect felt by those at the Estate. Taking into consideration the current and ongoing debates on cultural identity as an unfinished and transformative process, in this paper I aim to analyse the migrant experience of the periphery in *In Our Mad and Furious City.* My main argument is that the representation of the first and second generation migrant subjects in contemporary Anglophone literature is essential to an intersectional approach to identity. In my analysis, cultural identity is perceived as changeable and fluid through the character subjectivity and the experience of time and space. The novel also questions representation and agency: how individuals voice their experiences and the outreach it gets within and beyond the community. Furthermore, the narrative suggests a "reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm" (Hall 2011,3) to escape the dangers of a cancel culture that silences and seeks to remove from history the individuals labelled as "the other," "different" or coming from "elsewhere."

2. The Author and His Novel

Guy Gunaratne is a journalist, filmmaker and writer of Sri-Lankan origin who was born in Neasden, Northwest London and currently lives in Sweden. In 2011, he directed and produced a documentary *The Truth That Wasn't There* on post-civil war Sri-Lanka. *In Our Mad and Furious City,* published in 2018, is his first novel, long listed for the Man Booker Prize, and awarded the Jhalak Prize and the International Dylan Thomas Award. It is a novel of two generations of migrants. The younger generation, represented by Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf, who grew up in "drab and broke-down" London Stones Estate (19), and the older generation are their parents who speak of their experience of moving from their homelands. Caroline (Ardan's mother) fled Belfast during the Troubles (the Northern Ireland Conflict) of the late 1900s and Nelson, Selvon's father who migrated from Montserrat (Caribbean) to land in Ladbroke Grove during the Notting Hill Race riots of the 1950s.

Even though Yusuf's parents are characters in the novel, Gunaratne does not provide a first-person account of their experience in the narrative. Selvon, Ardan

and Yusuf, along with their siblings, friends and neighbours were born and raised surrounded by the violence of the city, growing up with it "like an older brother" (2). Despite having "elsewhere in [their] blood" the city where they were born, and the community they have grown up in are also important locations in the construction of their identities. It is through the community that new forms of language and communication have developed, new social and cultural practices, such as grime, have emerged, resulting in a sense of kin between residents of the Ends, the place they all call home. This "double consciousness" (a term used by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to describe the experience of African Americans being both "African" and "American") is also lived by the characters in the novel; being British, but also black, Muslim, poor and marginalised, results in this "double consciousness" that intensifies the fact that they are not easily allowed into mainstream society and, therefore, remain at the margins of the city. However, their identities are shaped by much more than their ethnic origin and British nationality, as I will continue to discuss.

According to Elleke Boehmer, "postcolonial literatures (anglophone, francophone, lusophone, etc.) proliferate and change constantly, even as postcolonial critical studies in the academy continue to grow apace" (214). Through second and by now third generation migrant experience, literature in English moves into a new ground, shedding light on the many ethnic, immigrant and other minority groups and the complex task of negotiating identity in 21st-century societies. English literature has not only metamorphosed in language, content and form since the initial days of postcolonial narratives by Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, Zadie Smith or Wole Soyinka, but is an important vehicle of agency, representative of the multiplicity of voices that characterise the world today. Again, to quote Boehmer, "what began in postcolonial writing as the creolization of the English language has become a process of mass literary transplantation, disaggregation, and cross-fertilization" (226), decentralising perspectives, struggling against a cancel culture and contributing to the decolonial debate.

Gunaratne situates his novel on the margins of the city, the place where he himself grew up. The novel does not romanticise the notions of belonging and longing for the homeland, nor is it aiming for a reclaiming or a rewriting of history from a postcolonial perspective. His "coarser kind of narrative" (144) is, rather, a critique of the colonial and neo-colonial power structures that continue to govern how migrant populations are treated in the UK. More relevant to a 21st century context, the novel might be interpreted as a warning against a cancel culture by redefining the "conditions of existence of a cultural politics designed to challenge, resist and where possible to transform the dominant regimes of representation" (Hall 1996, 442). To cancel migrant subjects is to neglect their right to representation on their own terms, labelling and stereotyping them and, consequently, silencing them. To quote Thomas Chatterton Williams:

> Black people have always been cancelled and shut out, or have been on the edge of being cancelled. I'm the son of a Black man who was born in the segregated South. I'm very familiar with the kind of cancel culture that he had to pass through and the ways in which he experienced exactly what they're talking about. But what bothers me and worries me is that the world that we're creating and that's enabled by the Twitter reality that takes hold is one in which we're not actually trying to make everybody as secure as the straight white man who used to be super-secure. We're actually trying to make everybody as insecure as my father used to be, but everybody can catch it now. (n.p.)

In other words, it is not only racial difference that is subjected to a politics of segregation and cancellation, but also ethnic, religious, gender, class and sexual difference (Hall 1996, 444). Agency and the opportunity to voice experience through narrative broaden perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of historical experience, culture and society against this emergent cancel culture.

3. Migrant Communities at Stones Estate

The Ends, four tower blocks of a housing estate that overlook the street and square, is home to the different ethnic groups which moved to Britain during the 20th century. The different nationalities and ethnicities referred in the novel are Pakistani, Jamaican, Nigerian, Bengali, Ghanaian, South Indian, Somali, Serbian, Polish, Albanian, Chinese, Turk and Irish. According to the narrator, the housing Estate hosts "a young nation of mongrels" and breeds "Proper Commonwealth Kids" (3) who contrast with "those private-school boys from Belmont and Mill Hill" they would spy on and "wonder, how would it have felt to come from the same story? To have been moulded out of one thing and not of many?" (3–4). Yusuf, Ardan and Selvon, as other members of the community of the Ends, identify with one another for they have "richer colours and ancient callings to hear" (3). This complexity of identity as being constructed on multiple "colours" and shaped by a plurality of "callings" rejects the essentialism of racial or ethnic categories. As such,

> In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process.' (Hall 2011, 3)

What Williams calls "the fiction of race" is a man-made construction which governs how we see and relate to each other. He goes on to argue "people will always

look different from each other in ways we can't control. What we can control is what we allow ourselves to make of those differences" (26). Contrasted with these differences and categorisations, Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf and others at The Ends, find forms of identification in a common story of coming from "elsewhere."

Using an intersectional approach, marginalisation of individuals at the housing estate occurs because of several factors, including ethnicity, race, class and religion. Intersectionality, a term first used by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how oppression is shaped through the intersection of different and unique factors and experiences, may help to understand how the characters make sense of their existence as marginal within the broader paradigm of a dominant society. They carry the burden of their parents' histories of violence, poverty and exile on which their cultural narratives are built, and from which they cannot fully detach themselves in the eyes of society. There is a danger in acknowledging identity as shaped primarily by ethnicity and common ancestry, since it assumes that "enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a specific place and time" (Hall 1996, 446). Their identities are also built on the present: on their dreams of escaping life at the Estate where the "common thread was footie, Estate, and the ill fit [they] felt against the rest of the world" (Gunaratne 67) and against the socio-political geography of the city and nation which is now their motherland.

Contemporary society has become a 'messy' subject, in the sense that it is difficult to define culture and identity as a whole because of the many groups that therein co-exist. Furthermore, culture and identity are in the process of constant change and need to be understood from "their own location within, and implication with, the formations of modern power" (Grossberg 3). Identity is a complex issue and should not be perceived as static or fixed, tied to a specified history or location, as scholars in the field of cultural studies, such as Hall, Gilroy and Grossberg, have been arguing. Therefore, it is worth questioning, as Grossberg does, "to what extent can a society continue to exist without a common, albeit constantly rearticulated and negotiated, culture? What are the conditions through which people can belong to a common collective without becoming representatives of a single definition?" (3). As depicted by Gunaratne, identity in the locals at the Estate is shaped and reshaped through the intersection of multiple experiences that result in plural and fluid cultural identities.

4. Spatial Representation in the Narrative

Gunaratne's narrative is carefully structured. Its layout and mapping of spaces involve a constant return to places which gradually become familiar, allowing the reader to experience life in the Estate, to walk the streets, enter the towers, step into the football pitch, and inhabit the city, either from the characters' perspective or

through a bystander position. The narrative also exposes a hotchpotch of practices, patterns, habits and social interactions between individuals of the community at the Estate. This arrangement of the narrative is meant to represent the housing estate but, according to critic Parul Sehgal, it does not reflect real life at the margins of the city. As argued by Sehgal, "Gunaratne is a very composed, very careful writer. Although interested in the clashing voices of London, of homegrown Grime music, the book itself is as tidy and contrived as a suburb" – the violence and rowdiness of the city is "only rarely staged or subverted" (n.p.). The narrative itself functions as a map of the Estate as the reader follows the characters through August Road, High Road, Market Street leading up to the Square, into the Mosque, on bus rides, into West block, East block, South block, and North block. Market Street leads to the Estate Towers, located at the End and known as The Ends. Spatially, the Estate is located at the end of the road, and although it may allude to a dead end, it is possible to reformulate the narrative and imagine a way out of the Ends. The protagonists in the story, whether from a postcolonial, migrant or diasporic context "now demand the prerogative of 'redreaming' their own lands" (Boehmer 236) and literature provides a space for this representation.

The narrative is organised into three main chapters: "I Mongrel," "II Brother" and "III Blood;" those containing 10 subchapters: Estate, Square, Ends, Fanatic, Shame, Defilement, Freedom, Faces, Fury, Echoes. These are words that are embedded in the grammar and vocabulary at the Estate. My interpretation of these chapter and subchapter titles is that "Mongrel" represents the idea of both belonging and non-belonging. Yusuf, Selvon and Ardan having been born 'here,' are from Britain, but since their parents had immigrated to London from the Caribbean, Ireland and Pakistan, they are also from elsewhere. They carry with them this sense of displacement and the label of minority, black, Muslim, migrant as opposed to white, English or British, as Williams states, "a drop of black blood makes a person black because they are disqualified from being white" (20). "Brother" stands for what unites individuals within the community, regardless of the categorisations of otherness. The narrative, through its chapter titles and content, allows access to the signs, thoughts, and patterns that Boehmer describes as that which gives this ecosystem life and meaning. "Blood" signals the anger and violence which the characters witness and are heavily burdened with. As second-generation migrants, growing up in a housing Estate, it is difficult for them to rid themselves of this stigma, since they are systemically labelled as marginal and violent, regardless of their actions. The opening of the novel reveals the fact that "a black boy had killed an off-duty soldier" in the neighbourhood (1). This event echoes the killing of an off-duty British army soldier, Lee Rigby, in 2013. The shocking effect of this murder, as the first-person plural voice explains, was that "he had just rolled out of the same school gates as us. He had the same trainers we wore. Spoke the same road slang we used. The blood was not what shocked us. For us it was his face like a mirror, reflecting our own confused and frightened hearts" (2). The danger of

this kind of association, made through racial classifications, or by defining people according to where they live, is that it leads to the creation of stereotypes and consequently to systemic racism.

5. Voice in the Narrative and the Uses of Grime

Each of the characters takes turns speaking in the subchapters: Selvon, Ardan, Yusuf, from the younger generation; Caroline and Nelson from the parents' generation. The only exception to this rotation of voices occurs in "Defilement," where Irfan, Yusuf's older brother, is given a voice in this one chapter. It is in this chapter that the reader learns of the 'defilement' Irfan engages in and which leads to the story's climax and some tragic events. The initial and final chapters have no name titles; nevertheless, from the unfolding of the story, the reader assumes the narrator in the last chapter is Yusuf. The first chapter differs from the rest, since the narrator speaks in a plural voice, "We were London's scowling youth. As siblings of rage we never meant to stray beyond the street" (2). This plural or choral voice, which echoes the shared experience of the members of the community at the Ends, has become an increasingly popular form in contemporary literature, according to author TaraShea Nesbit (2014). The use of the first-person plural reminds "the reader of the constructed nature of the story, and by extension, the constructed nature of history. One cannot get narratively comfortable reading these differentiated first-person plural stories: an experience is at first created, and then, as if on a chalkboard, erased, and rewritten by another [woman's] experience" (Nesbit n.p.). Along these lines, Gunaratne's narrative paves the way for a plural history and common struggle through one voice, a form of empowerment of the group identity, which then seems to disperse into separate voices and the construction of individual experiences throughout the narrative. The chapters through which the characters' experiences are voiced decrease in size as we move towards the end of the book, reflecting the idea that "[h]istory [he said] is not a circle but a spiral of violent rhymes" (285). In a somewhat circular motion, the chapters lead to the end or the Ends, back to the collective subject, or perhaps, to the "single story" as defined by Chimamanda Adichie: "So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (n.p.).

The first-person plural also raises social awareness which, as Nesbitt points out, plays a critical role in narratives of contemporary experience:

> However, this new iteration is perhaps a move away from the character-driven plot of the individual "I." How does one create one's self in relation to the groups we are a part of? Where do our loyalties lie? What gets lost, and what is gained by group membership? This sense of social responsibility and selfhood, as well as uncertainty about how to act on such feelings, describes, in part, our contemporary moment. (n.p.)

The choral nature of the narrative is further emphasised by the language – verbal and non-verbal – common and comprehensible to all who inhabit the Estate and which we as readers get accustomed to hearing and visualising throughout the story. As Gunaratne says in an interview, "Yes, voice was how this novel shaped itself. Writing this book often felt like an act of listening" (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.) although he was not necessarily looking for authenticity, because, as he argues, it "is one of those words that needs challenging. Authenticity in relation to whom? It's a word that needs to be released. I wasn't so concerned as to whether or not the voices measured up to "accuracy." They needed to sound true to the place" (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.).

The oral quality of the novel challenges literary conventions and the dichotomy between oral and written traditions by fusing both. As Teresa Gibert states, "current trends in literary studies are revising and questioning these distinct dichotomies, pointing out that they constitute overly simple categorizations of complex phenomena" (1). In this sense, the aim of the narrative is to decolonise migrant experience through a representation of the self and the community and to deepen the understanding of identity and belonging among London migrants. As Gunaratne himself states,

> there is an interplay between each voice that I was more interested in. The dialects have their own logical internality which then ripple and echo against each other. A word or a phrase used by one voice is then passed over to another, across generations in some cases, which I hope imbues a sense of an inherited multiplicity. That feels like London to me, a place of many voices, many threads of story, all tangled together. (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.).

The narrative also provides detailed and highly visual descriptions of the body language at the Ends, for instance: "I walk up to the bredda and give him a side-hug and palm on the back. Yoos nods, drops his shoulder and lets his bag slip to the floor" (40), "Yoos rubs his face with his sleeve and spits to his side" (42). Along with the body language, throughout the narrative, the reader is also invited into the verbal language of the Ends, becoming familiar with the slang and dialect, which Gunaratne calls "road language" and which forge new spaces of representation in English and in English speaking countries. A new vocabulary and grammar emerge on the streets of London, so that the reader gets the words "Bloods," "Ends," "ennet," "tho," "bredda," "fam," to "clock" someone, among others. Gunaratne further mixes orality and writing through his use of colloquial and slang terms such as, "yuno," "dussed out," "suttan" and "nuttan," and uses the grammar of the Ends in his narration with phrases such as "he don't" and "go footy," immersing the reader in day-to-day life and language at the Estate. The metamorphosis of the English language, its manifestation in speech and music and the spaces of representation that have opened in recent decades, along with the efforts to decolonise and decentralize culture, reflect the shifts in thought.

However, according to book critic Parul Sehgal, "there's plenty of London slang, to be sure, but it's all garnish; the real sounds and deeper rhythms of the novel aren't snatched from the streets but from literature. This book was incubated in a library" (n.p.). In order words, even though the novel situates itself in the streets and echoes its sounds, it keeps its distance from the 'grime' and remains too 'clean' for the reality it is portraying. Nevertheless, the narrative may be seen as a positive depiction of the London suburban scene which leads me to the analysis of Grime in the novel, and to the question of how it contributes to voicing experience and agency at the Estate. Gunaratne claims "you can't write about London today without mentioning Grime. It is so much part of the rhythm of the place. Grime music feels like it plays with rhythm of the city" (2020). Grime plays an important part in Gunaratne's novel since it contributes to the changing and fluid nature of language, and places further emphasis on orality as a form of expression among immigrant groups. Music plays an important role in shaping identity, since it is a means of "self-creation that was formed by the endless pressures of economic exploitation, political racism, displacement, and exile" (Gilroy 115) as well as how migrants of different ethnic origins are "reinventing their own ethnicity" (Sollors 19; qtd. in Gilroy 115). According to Paul Gilroy, "How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes that, although they may be traced back to one distant location, have been somehow changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through wider networks of communication and cultural change?" (111). Just like language, football and other cultural practices that involve social interaction, Grime is important in the formation and understanding of identity, marginalisation and oppression at the Estate.

Grime is a music genre that "celebrates a heritage and sound that's very specific to inner city London where it was born" (Waters) and several of its artists, hits and samples of lyrics are referred to in the novel. Grime is a very new form of urban electronic music with vocals. It started off as underground and was only played in pirate radio stations. As the name reflects, it originated in London's more "grimy" areas, and the lyrics denounce the chaos and violence of society. Grime, as described by Mykaell Riley, director of the Black Music Research Unit at the University of Westminster, like punk in the 70s, "caused disruption by energising a disillusioned section of youth culture" (qtd. in Holden n.p.). Riley explains how grime challenges contemporary music genres by refusing to do things in a "conventional way." Thus, a new tradition is born through the subversion and reinvention of other pre-existing forms, such as garage and jungle. To quote Gilroy:

> Today, this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the re-production of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the postcontemporary world. New "traditions" are invented in the jaws of modern

> experience, and new conceptions of modernity are produced in the long shadow of our enduring tradition. (126)

The references to grime are relevant to this discussion since the music contributes to the construction of socio-cultural identity and identification at the Ends. Ardan, an aspiring rapper spends his days writing bars in his head and "spitting rhymes" (163). As he claims, "We're the ones that started it, the music. Moulded it, not them. Grime is our own thing" (163). He considers The Ends, Neasden, Brooklyn or the Bronx as places of pain, but also places which make rappers such as himself. He hears the noise of the streets, the sound of the buses, the sirens, the doors, the leaves, the birds, Selvon's running, the "morning tempo" (21) and these help him compose his music and write his lyrics. Grime is integral to Ardan's identity, since it gives him a sense of agency. It connects him to a wider group of artists who share his experience and like him can voice it through Grime. When the reader is first introduced to his character, he talks about other boys who are "darked out every day for their hair or their accent and whatever shit music they listen to" only to add "I listen to grime so I'm fine" (23). Grime gives him the security he needs and keeps alive his dream of one day leaving the Estate.

Grime is considered to be a specifically British genre of urban music, which is described by Julie Adenuga, an Apple Music Beats 1 presenter, "as more than just songs that you can buy on iTunes," since it represents a lifestyle. With references to Grime music, lyrics, and artists such as Wiley, Bashy, D Double E, Ghetts, Akala and Kano, "Original street fighters, road rappers, champions" (58), and to their tunes "BowE3" or "How we livin" as examples from the text, grime is equally "celebrated" as part of the oral and musical culture in Northwest London. For, as Ardan says, "Even if the beats are angry, under skuddy verses, it's the same noise as on road. Eskibeat, ennet" (59), Eskibeat being a trademark style artist Wiley created and produced in the early 2000s. Through grime, rappers, or aspiring artists such as Ardan, express or voice the anger and the noise that characterises life at the Ends. And the reader grows accustomed to hearing their narrative and understanding the importance of orality as an identifying factor. To quote Omar Shahid and Robbie Wojciechowski, "grime MCs aren't recalling tranquillity, so much as expressing the everyday hardship, angst and struggle of the inner city, they speak with that spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (n.p.). To Ardan "thoughts mingle with rhymes […] Rhymes mingle with the scene [he] see[s] in front of [him]" (164), and he transforms these thoughts and images into rhyme and words:

> Like I live like a roach like daily
> See me coming, but you don't want wanna see me
> Acting like you in a ring with a misfit but I'm gifted
> And you dumb to my struggle so I'll just list it
> Road dons always jacking me, burka always buoying me. (168)

Grime, a musical form that emerges through cross-mingling and the intersection of styles may also be understood as an example of creolization, if we consider Rushdie's definition, included in his 1990 essay "In Good Faith", for grime "celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (394). Creolization was and still is a common theory used to describe the emergence of new linguistic and social manifestations born of cultural fusions. It once provided the adequate setting, the "context which, despite its brutal beginnings, permits the artist to rethink old hierarchies, to experience an openness to influences from everywhere, and to explore the emergence of new forms of hybridity" (Dash 51–52). However, speaking of the second-generation and by now third-generation migrant experience, are we still comfortable to use terminology and concepts such as "creole," "creolisation," "mongrel" and "mongrelisation"? The plurality of voices representative of the many ethnic, racial, minority or immigrant groups and the complex task of negotiating identity in the postmodern western society should no longer be looked at through the lens of creolisation, mongrelisation, hybridity, or through the dichotomy of black or white. To quote Williams on race,

> Today that impulse towards unquestioning inclusiveness (as a fully justifiable and admirable reaction to *exclusiveness*) is weakening – our words, however flawed, for people like my daughter – and even myself – gradually drifting out of the vernacular wherever it is terms like "Negro" go to retire. The reason has less to do with black people suddenly forgetting their paradoxical origins, than with the idea of whiteness, and mixed-race non-blackness, continually growing, however reluctantly, less exclusive. With greater than a third of the American population now reporting at least one family member of a different race, and with, since the year 2000, the option of selecting any combination of races on the census form, the very idea of black Americans as a fundamentally mongrel population is fraying at the seams. (n.p.; original emphasis)

As the world changes and power dynamics shift, discourses also change, evolve and adapt. Understanding cultural identity as unfinished helps in moving away from essentialist attitudes which bind migrant subjects to ethnicity, race, location and history.

6. Understanding Community in the Novel

In Our Mad and Furious City addresses the issue of migrant identity from various spatial perspectives and through transformations over time. With its focus on a multicultural community of the first and second generation migrants, it explores the context of displacement and deterritorialization which, as described by Arjun

Appadurai, "is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings labouring populations into the lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home-state" (301). Central to the novel are issues of religious fundamentalism, as Yusuf is caught in the politics of succession as Imam in the local Muslim community, following his father's death. Important here is the representation of hatred and right-wing extremism threatening migrants at the Estate, because of (though not only) the death of the off-duty soldier.

The narrative constructs the community as the location for the production of identity and identification, the place characters are able to call home. However, it also deconstructs this idealisation of the community, reminding the locals not only of its fragile nature, but also of its potential meaninglessness, as an abstract and changeable concept, permeable to abuse and violence. While communities may emerge in the 'host' country, which has by now become a home country as well, to quote Jeremy Harding, there is still a fear that welcoming migrants will result in "cities eroded by poverty and profit; the cantonisation of neighbourhoods; urban and rural societies doubly fractured by ethnicity and class" (qtd. in Margaronis n.p.). This widespread fear of the foreign – be it in terms of nationality, culture, religion, or skin colour – becomes inexplicably linked to racism, xenophobia and hatred that all lead to marginalisation, crime, rioting, blood and dangerous essentialist attitudes towards race and identity.

According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, "without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation" (n.p.). The same can be said of literature and cultural theory which focuses on the experience of migrants inhabiting the periphery from a social, geographical and political perspective. The danger of identification because of neglect and marginalisation results in a cancel culture that isolates and silences those who are different because of their race, ethnicity or religion. Each of the characters feel this in their own way. As Nelson claims, Britain was "nothing like the postcard image, never" – instead of the city he dreamed of as the place to make a better life for himself, he "was faced with bad air, grey sky and a mad, hustling whirl of a place. Everybody poor, everybody ailing" (73). The city described in this novel is a mad, furious, mean city (adjectives the narrator(s) keep(s) using), a city which keeps migrant groups hidden away beneath towers of estate housing, refusing to acknowledge them as its own. It is important to position characters and understand them according to the intersection of the different aspects that define them, that create or eliminate opportunities for them within power structures. As Crenshaw argues, "socially marginalised people all over the world were facing all kinds of dilemmas and challenges as a consequence of intersectionality, intersections of race and gender, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, all of these social dynamics come together and create challenges that are sometimes quite unique" (n.p.).

7. Conclusion

Earlier in my discussion, I referred to footie as a social practice which members of the community at Stones Estate engaged in, and the football pitch as the site for interaction. At a specific moment in the narrative, from a bird's eye view, characters from different points of origin and with different stories gravitate towards one specific place – the football pitch. This image reflects Anderson's allusion to 'constellations' when he analyses the construction of nation and nationhood as "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (123) which can be crafted and recrafted according to different and varying "political and ideological constellations" (124). In the parallel way, critic Shadhiha Bari's uses the same metaphor in her review in *The Guardian* when she writes, "a group of young men gather for a game of football in a dilapidated outdoor sports court, the players taking their places, emerging like a constellation of stars" (n.p.). This constellation that gathers and intersects in a fenced off court is a metaphor for the community composed of different ethnicities, histories, individual stories and experiences that have gravitated in the same direction.

Decolonisation, migration and the emergence of migrant communities in Britain (as well as other nations) have resulted in forging new practices and expressions. These enunciations have occupied and redefined spaces, categorisations and the dichotomies of centre and periphery, mainstream and marginal, "here" and "elsewhere." Gunaratne's *In our Mad and Furious City* voices the experience of migrants, first and second generation, of different origins, who have moved to Britain, to inhabit the housing estates of Northwest London. In these communities, dialects, social practices, music and lifestyles emerge through group identification with one another and with the spaces they have created. These cultural products are all representations and expressions of plural and fluid identities – of how they are shaped, reshaped and expressed within the community and against a power structure of a dominant society.

Rushdie suggests a tradition besides the national, racial history that any writer from elsewhere can write about: "It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group" (20) and this gives writers (and those subjects represented in the narratives) the possibility of being part of two or more histories, since, as Rushdie states, "one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant [is] to be able to choose his parents" (21). But moving forward in time and thought, beyond Rushdie's rationale, there is no need to "choose parents" since, this exercise is reductive and insists on divisions which should no longer be attributed such importance. As Williams defends, "at times, in a twist that I am sure is unusual for an African-American, race recedes from my lived experience and becomes something entirely cerebral, abstract" (n.p.). Yusuf, Ardan and Selvon, born and raised in the Stone housing Estate, see themselves as mongrels, raised in a society which, because of their skin colour, ethnicity or place of origin, neglects them, refuses to accept them, silences, cancels and pushes

them to the periphery. Even though they were born and raised in the UK, they feel the neglect and hence they state: "if this Mother Country is a bitch then I will be a bastard son" (235). But should this be an acceptable conclusion to come to for these second-generation migrants?

Gunaratne was born in London but is of Sri-Lankan origin. However, he says he is a British writer. Like his characters, he also grew up in Northwest London, as the son of a migrant who moved to Britain in the 1950s. And he claims the novel is about London and not about ethnicity, migration or diaspora. This seems to contradict his aims as a novelist writing about migrant communities and plural identities, since he is essentially defining himself according to one specific place and culture. But the novel and the themes it is dealing with are rather more complex, as I have argued. It aims at deconstructing representations of identity as linked to a unique point of origin or history or defined by a fixed location. Through his narrative, Gunaratne attempts to show how intersectionality helps to perceive identity as plural and changeable, its complexity reflecting individual experience. As the narrator in the final subchapter says, "there are parts of this city that create the form of a person, moulds them with its hard wisdom and distant cruelty" (287). But this form is fluid and perceived differently according to the location where the many aspects of cultural identity intersect.

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