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COSMOPOLIS NOW
URBAN NARRATIVES IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL MIGRATION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Jin Suh Jim

September 2012

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ABSTRACT

Cosmopolis Now:

Urban Narratives in the Age of Global Migration

by

Jin Suh Jirn

This dissertation looks at the growing diversity of the modern city and its impact on the way we think about culture and identity today. The city, as I argue, represents a cosmopolitan space of possibility where locals and non-locals can come together, interact, and create a new sense of community that is not defined by race, religion or nationality.

Thanks to the recent advances in telecommunications and transportation which are largely responsible for what we now call “globalization,” cities have not only become central to the daily operations of global capital but also play host to a wider range of immigrants, who have transformed the way we “imagine” the city. Therefore, by centering on the dynamic between the urban and the global, I will look at a number of contemporary novels and films rooted in what can be described as the “migrant sensibility.”

The writers and filmmakers discussed in this dissertation—which include Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Joseph O’Neil, Chloe Aridjis, Teju Cole, Shin Dong-il, Shim Sang-guk, and Kim Dong-hyun—all deal with issues of transnational
migration and its impact on the representation of urban life in cities such as London, New York, Berlin and Seoul, forcing us to redefine the age-old notion of cosmopolitanism and what it means to live “together in difference.”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No sooner do you arrive in the city than you feel rewarded. The resolve to not write about it is futile.
—Walter Benjamin

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Many thanks to Earl Jackson, who served on my QE committee and graciously commented on my work. I have also been fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of Earl’s vast knowledge of Korean cinema, which is reflected in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

I have also had the benefit of knowing and learning from a number of gifted graduate students at Santa Cruz and beyond including Steve Carter, Sean Connelly, Christine Hong (now a professor in my department), Johanna Isaacson, Shige (CJ) Suzuki, Andy Wang.
A very special acknowledgement to all the other people who made my time in Santa Cruz and Seoul all the more special, including Soh-young Chung, John Eperjesi, Kate Kwon, Hiro & Mayumi Takeda and Karen Tei Yamashita.

A special thanks to my brother James and his family (Jenny, Sophia, Nathalie) for their wonderful hospitality in Oakland and to my mother-in-law and sister-in-law in Korea.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the two most important people in my life. First, my mother who never stopped believing in me, and second, my wife and partner Mi Jung, who stood by my side as I struggled to put my thoughts to paper and who is in many ways responsible for my post-baccalaureate education. Without her, I would not have been able to write this dissertation.
In Other Words: A Preface in Twelve Quotes

In an age of migration the world city is not only defined by its financial and technological connections but through the diversity of its inhabitants. […] The human dimension of the global city is where people must learn to live with each other, concerned with the quality of life and its sustainability, where negotiation plays a full part in the process of transformation. Those negotiations must recognize the difference and draw on the richness of those layers if the city is to have a future, if it is to move towards cosmopolis.
—Andrew Davey

Today, cosmopolis is conceived as a city of the world, or the world as city, composed of citizens who accept and tolerate each other, who cross boundaries and are aware of their interrelations.
—Verena Andermatt Conley

Across the globe, citizens of the metropolis are asking themselves ‘how do we live with difference?’, as the problem of multiculturalism poses a challenge to the way in which people make sense of their own lives.
—Michael Keith

[T]he city is a contested zone in which racialized difference is lived and practiced in some ways at a distance from the force of the nation state.
—Virinder S. Kalra

[G]lobalization has opened up cities of all sizes to new and rapidly changing influences from the world at large, including a profound diversification of city populations.
—Eric Sheppard and William S. Lynn

New York, London, or Paris are not merely localized manifestations of American, British, or French culture, or even peculiarly urban versions of them, but something qualitatively different.
—Ulf Hannerz

[C]osmopolitan dispositions are closely associated with cities. Cities have long been the sites for markets and the mixing of people, commodities, ideas and cultures.
—Mike Featherstone
Ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, it seems, are at the heart of what makes a twenty-first-century city “vibrant.”
—Jon Binnie et al.

Global cities daily register this uncanny circulation and mix of locals, strangers, and non-locals.
—Rob Wilson

[T]he global city, which operates as a partly denationalized platform for global capital and, at the same time, is emerging as a key site for the most astounding mix of people from all over the world. The major cities in the world are becoming partly denationalized platforms also for immigrants, refugees and minorities.
—Saskia Sassen

Many respondents sidestepped this ambivalent understanding of the term “American” by describing themselves as “New Yorkers.” This was open to them even as blacks or Hispanics or Asians, and it embraced them as second-generation immigrants. A “New York” identity embraced the dynamic cultural activities familiar to them, but not necessarily the larger white society. “New Yorkers,” for our respondents, could come from immigrant groups, native minority groups, or be Italians, Irish, Jews, or the like. We argue that the individual changes necessary to become a New Yorker are not nearly so large as those required to become American. As immigration continues to transform our nation, New York may serve as a positive model of creative multiculturalism and inclusion. Whether other parts of America can replicate that openness remains to be seen.
—Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf and Mary C. Waters

The new immigrants here have made our city […] more international, more alive. Sometimes the old people object because the white-bread areas are full of samosas. But it’s good: cosmopolitanism has made the place more tolerant.
—A host at the Harbourfront Writers’ Festival in Toronto, Canada
Notes—Preface

1 My inspiration here is Rob Wilson’s wonderful treasure trove of citations entitled *Beat Attitudes: On the Roads to Beatitude for Post-Beat Writers, Dharma Bums, and Cultural-Political Activists* (Santa Cruz: New Pacific Press, 2010).


INTRODUCTION

The Promise of the City

Lessons for the Urban Age

They were drawn to the city itself […] To settle there was, in some oblique and intuitive way, to be a part of the present moving into futurity.
—Peter Ackroyd

Cities bring a lot of people together; some people feel too many people, too big crowds but there’s a commandment of urban life that can be a tremendous source of happiness: thou shall share space. I mean cities in many ways are expensive, inconvenient, noisy, and dirty, but the wonderful thing about them is the way they bring people together.
—Marshall Berman

Living in a city of immigrants
I don’t need to go traveling
Open my door and the world walks in
—Steve Earle

In May 2005, the Tate in conjunction with BT (formerly British Telecom) launched a special series featuring the work of various artists living in and around London. The showcase “40 Artists, 40 Days” marked the final leg of London’s bid to host the 2012 Olympics and shined a light on the city’s diverse population, one of its major selling points to the International Olympic Committee.

Among those participating in the project was the Nigerian-born writer Ben Okri whose poem “Lines in Potentis” served as the basis for a video installation
piece. The poem, a tribute to London’s multiculture, opens with a rhapsodic
description of the capital as “one of the magic centres of the world” where “lives the
great music of humanity” from which can be heard “the harmonisation of
different histories, cultures, geniuses and dreams.”

Although Okri takes pains to acknowledge the less than savory aspects of the
city’s past, including its participation in the transatlantic slave trade (for which a
formal apology was issued in 2007), he nonetheless insists on the view that history
“can yield wiser outcomes” and that “out of division” comes “unity” and a persistent
desire to “re-make the world” for a “future” that “is yet unmade.”

By midsummer, however, Okri’s vision of a brighter future took a rather bleak
turn as the city, just hours after it was chosen to be host of the XXXth Olympiad,
suffered a string of attacks that left fifty-six dead and hundreds of others injured.
Ironically, the same poem, re-titled “A Hymn to London,” was read by Okri the
following week before a large crowd at Trafalgar Square to commemorate the victims
of what became known as “7/7.”

While a number of politicians like Tony Blair used the occasion to vigorously
defend the British way of life from the “barbarism” of its opponents, Mayor Ken
Livingstone in his address spoke more “specifically and concretely of London” while
championing the right to the city for all of its citizens, regardless of their class, creed,
colour or nationality.

According to Livingstone, what sets London apart from the rest of Europe is
its tremendous diversity, which allows for all kinds of people—who in this case represent over two hundred nationalities and speak no less than three hundred languages—to live “side by side” in relative “harmony.”

The bombings, which occurred on the city’s public transport system, were targeted not against “the mighty and […] powerful” but rather “ordinary, working-class Londoners” whom the mayor described as “black and white, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Jew, young and old.”

In addressing “those who came to London […] to take life,” Livingstone urged their followers to have another look around the city. For, in the following days and months, they will see people from the rest of Britain [and] around the world […] arriv[ing] in London to become Londoners and to fulfill their dreams and achieve their potential […] choos[ing] to come to London, as so many [others] have come before [them] […] to live the life they choose, to be able to be themselves.

If anything, Livingstone’s words speak to the reason why cities like London still matter today and why most of the world’s immigrant population choose to live in densely populated metropolitan areas throughout Western Europe, North America and (parts of) Asia.

With the rise of globalization, cities have become no less vital in the role they play at home and abroad. Not only is the world becoming increasingly urbanized (just witness China, where dozens of new cities have sprouted up in just the last few
decades) but over half of its total population live in cities of one kind or another. Despite the innovation of cheaper and faster ways to travel and communicate, more and more people are choosing to cluster in urban areas where they are able to “live cheek by jowl” with others.11

***

Thanks to the cultural diversity present throughout a number of cities today, it has become fashionable (yet once again) to speak of “cosmopolitanism,” a term that until recently had fallen out of favor among intellectuals. Despite its roots in a discourse dating back to the 4th century B.C.E., Cosmopolitanism 3.0 (as I shall describe the current iteration of thinking and feeling beyond the nation state) is by and large the product of the “increasingly rapid flows of people, information, money, commodities, and cultural productions, and the changes of consciousness” that have resulted.12

And yet, the central thrust of cosmopolitanism today, at least in terms of its “vernacular” form, lies not so much in a universal appeal to “fellow feeling” but rather the act of “translation” across different cultures. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the mongrelized spaces of the (post)modern city where the practice of “rubbing shoulders” with “others” has become an “unavoidable fact of life.”13

While mass migration remains driven by global capital and largely caters to its geographical demands, much of what is worthy about cities today, despite their serious faults and shortcomings, stems from the arrival of newer migrants who are
creating a space of possibility for the coming together of strangers. “For the modern metropolitan figure,” as Iain Chambers writes, “is the migrant: she and he are the active formulators of metropolitan aesthetics and life styles, reinventing the languages and appropriating [its] streets.”

***

Therefore, throughout this dissertation, I want to consider the impact of global migration on the representation of the modern city. In other words, how (im)migrants have changed the way we “imagine” the city, a process that is rooted in what Salman Rushdie describes as the “migrant sensibility.” Since our image of the city is more often than not mediated through the words, sounds and images of culture (after all, who can imagine Victorian London without the novels of Dickens? Or nineteenth-century Paris sans Monet?), this study will look closely at a number of literary and filmic texts that “re-appropriate the city for its migrants” and “daringly imagine an alternative city in which divisive tensions are resisted.” Such works also serve as “a historical palimpsest that reveals the structure and experience of lived space during massive urban shifts most often studied empirically within the social sciences;” in this case, documenting the interlocking forces of globalization and migration, and their impact on urban life since the 1970s. It is my hope that this work contributes in some minor way to a much larger “discourse of the urban” that takes its “constantly evolving blend of ideas from a variety of sources,” which not only includes literature but also painting, architecture, photography, philosophy, geography, economics and
In terms of its overall structure, this dissertation is divided into four chapters, each of which deals with a different aspect of transnational migration along with its impact on the representation of life in a number of cities, which in this case includes London, New York, Seoul and Berlin.*

Chapter One, “Maybe It’s Because I’m a Londoner”: Hanif Kureishi’s ‘London Trilogy,’” looks at the role of the city in what I characterize as Kureishi’s “London trilogy,” three novels—*The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995), *Something to Tell You* (2008)—that address the subject of postcolonial immigrant life in London and the struggles of those trying to find their place in British society. I also discuss the issue of urban identification and how the city—as (re)imagined by Kureishi—operates as an intermediary space between the British nation and the world at large.

In Chapter Two, “New York Stories: Reimagining the City in *Fury* and *Netherland,*” my focus turns to New York City as I consider the work of Salman Rushdie and Joseph O’Neill, two former Londoners who, in their respective novels *Fury* (2000) and *Netherland* (2008), write about the Big Apple from the perspective of (well-traveled and well-heeled) newcomers. A central thematic in both novels is the increasing globalization of urban life in the new millennium, and how New York

* N.B. I do not claim to offer a totalistic view of the world or of all its cities. It would be disingenuous of me or anyone else to say otherwise. For any vision of the city, as Nicholas Freeman writes, “must, of necessity, be a partial one.” *Conceiving the City*, 2.
as one of the premier “global cities” plays a central part in our discussion of cosmopolitanism today. Moreover, I discuss how the global city has reshaped the way we think about literature, which has traditionally been seen through the prism of the nation state. By appropriating the work of Rushdie and O’Neill as case studies, I argue that it is more relevant—in certain instances at least—to speak of writers in terms of their affiliation with a particular city rather than country of origin and/or citizenship.

Chapter Three, “A Walker in the City: In the Footsteps of the Immigrant Flâneur” attempts to revive the role of the flâneur in the context of global migration to the city. Throughout this chapter, I make a case for the continuing relevance of this nineteenth-century figure (popularized by Walter Benjamin and others) by analyzing two contemporary novels set in Berlin and New York—Chloe Aridjis’s Book of Clouds (2009) and Teju Coles’ Open City (2011)—which illustrate how the art and practice of flânerie serve as a metaphor for the migrant’s relation to the changing landscape of the global city.

Finally, in Chapter Four, “‘Happy Seoul for Foreigners’: Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in the ‘New Asian City,’” I will look closely at the figure of the migrant worker who has appeared in a handful of independent Korean films, including Bandhobi (2009), Hello, Stranger (2007), Where Is Ronny? (2008), and whose uneasy presence reveals many of the underlying contradictions in a small nation going global as witnessed by Korea’s recent and much overstated turn towards
multiculturalism. In short, these films address the possibility of an urban and vernacular cosmopolitanism in a society that still views itself in terms of one culture and bloodline.
Notes—Introduction


2 Quoted from New York: A Documentary Film (1999), directed by Ric Burns and produced by Steeplechase Films.


5 Ibid.


7 According to David Harvey, the “right to the city,” a term coined by Henri Lefebvre, “is not merely a right of access to what the property speculators and state planners define, but an active right to make the city different, to shape it more in accord with our heart’s desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image.” David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research (December 2003).


9 Ibid.


11 Edward L. Glaeser, Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 2-6. It would only be misleading to imply that cities are without their faults or problems. In fact, throughout many cities today, the disparity of wealth has only increased. In New York, for instance, the lack of affordable housing has forced many low-income families to move out to the suburbs, reversing the historical trajectory associated with “white flight,” while on the other side of the Atlantic one in eight Londoners live on public assistance and nearly a third of Inner London’s children live in poverty.

12 Mary Louise Pratt, ”Comparative Literature and Global Citizenship,” Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism, Ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 59. The term “Cosmopolitanism 3.0” refers to the three different stages in the development of cosmopolitan thought, starting with Ancient Greece, continuing with Kant and the late Enlightenment period, and most recently in the age of globalization as represented by the work of Martha Nussbaum, Anthony Appiah, Bruce Robbins, Ulrich Beck, among others.


reality, a kind of Geiger counter we maneuver in order to capture the deep structure of our world, [...] which is inaccessible to everyday perception and experience.” Fredric Jameson, “Future of Culture, Future of Utopia,” Lecture at the University of Toronto (December 05, 2007).


CHAPTER 1

“Maybe It's Because I’m a Londoner”¹

On Hanif Kureishi’s “London Trilogy”

Cities like London were to change. They were to cease being more or less national cities; they were to become cities of the world.
—V.S. Naipaul²

London has always been a city of immigrants. It was once known as “the city of nations.” [...] It has often been remarked that, in other cities, many years must pass before a foreigner is accepted; in London, it takes as many months. It is true, too, that you can only be happy in London if you begin to consider yourself as a Londoner. It is the secret of successful assimilation.
—Peter Ackroyd³

I was brought up in London. It’s my city. I’m no Britisher, but a Londoner.
—Hanif Kureishi⁴

Few have written about the city of London with as much fondness and appreciation as Hanif Kureishi, who is regarded by many as the “first major Asian or Caribbean writer” to be born and raised in the UK.⁵ In fact, one would be remiss to approach Kureishi’s work—whose recurring problematics include questions about race, immigration and multiculturalism—without also considering the tremendous influence of the city he has called home throughout his adult life and where much of his writing happens to be set, including his Oscar-nominated screenplay for My
Beautiful Laundrette (1985), which not only launched his long and illustrious career as a writer but also made him a spokesman for the sons and daughters of Britain’s Commonwealth immigrants who began arriving after the fall of the British Empire. For Kureishi, the city becomes a site for renegotiating the borders between the British nation and the world at large, and where allegorically speaking once “you found the right place, you could consider yourself a citizen the moment you went to the same local shop twice.”

***

As a child of the suburbs, Kureishi longed to live in London and become part of a world where “possibilities” seemed “unlimited.” His love for the city, a popular sentiment among many of today’s British postcolonial writers (including Zadie Smith, Brian Chikwava, Andrea Levy and Monica Ali), resonates throughout Kureishi’s body of work, most notably in what I shall refer to as his London trilogy, which consists of The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), The Black Album (1995), and Something to Tell You (2008).

Read together, these novels provide a candid account of life in the city and its remarkable transformation throughout the last several decades (from the Seventies to the so-called Noughties), a period that began in socioeconomic terms with London’s deindustrialization and the closure of its docklands and factories, which led to massive layoffs and a general sense of malaise throughout the country (“there is no future in England’s dreaming,” as Johnny Rotten snarled in the Sex Pistols anthem
“God Save the Queen”), and concluded with the capital reinventing itself as a world city centered around finance and other service industries.\textsuperscript{10}

***

But apart from chronicling the city’s collapse and postindustrial renaissance, Kureishi’s trilogy also “investigates, interrogates and celebrates the realities of post-colonial London” and the ties that bind its multiethnic population to its former colonies, reminding us all too well of imperialism’s strategic role in “bring[ing] the world closer together” which has ironically become the mantra for what we now know as “globalization.”\textsuperscript{11}

According to Paul Gilroy, the “post-colonial character of contemporary London has a simple facticity” that is undeniable, and yet those who continue to “assess contemporary London as though it could be a simpler, more homogenous and less irreducibly diverse place” should be regarded with “the utmost suspicion” since such an “impulse” is invariably linked to not only “fantasies of return to the imaginary homogeneity of past whiteness and the restoration of Britain's imperial status, [but also] the lingering suggestion that ‘race,’ like the black bodies that are its primary bearers and signifiers, belongs elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{12}

One of the more prominent aspects of London’s “postcoloniality” has been the city’s “reorientation” with respect to the territories it once governed. In other words, a reversal in the course of territorialization, which the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett lightheartedly described in her 1966 poem as “Colonization in Reverse,” prodding her
fellow islanders to “jus a pack dem bag an baggage/An turn history upside dung!”

Once the seat of a mighty empire that ruled over a quarter of the world’s population, London today finds itself looking more and more like its former outposts while playing host to a massive flock of “imperial chickens” that have “come home to roost.”

No doubt, there have been quite a few diehard Britons who have opposed this “wholesale reversal of the proper ordering of colonial power.” Among the most famous and outspoken was the late Enoch Powell, who in 1968 delivered his famous “Rivers of Blood” address, which railed against the growing tide of non-white migration to Britain. Powell, who admittedly fantasized about being Viceroy of India, argued that any mixing of “the races” would be nothing short of disaster and would lead to a society in which “the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.”

Yet, in spite of the racial demagoguery of Powell and his supporters, including Eric Clapton who in 1976 told a crowd in Birmingham that England was becoming overrun with “wogs” and in danger of becoming a “black colony,” the bigger question here no longer concerns whether Britain’s immigrants have a right to work or settle down (with over a hundred thousand new arrivals per year, this issue has become more or less moot) but rather how they fit into the nation’s image of itself and whether their native-born “descendants,” who were once regarded as “second-generation immigrants” and lack the hyphenated status of their North American
counterparts, have a right to call England their “home.” Or, to quote a “Jamaican” lawyer born and raised in the UK:

in America, a black is an African-American […] In Germany, they’re Afro-Germans. But here, they are always Afro-Caribbeans. Never Afro-English. You and I, we could never belong: we were born here, we’re as English as Jack and Jill, but we’re never allowed to be English.18

For conservatives like Powell, the “West Indian or Asian” or for that matter any non-white in general “does not by being born in England” have the right to call himself an “Englishman.” “In law he [sic] becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; [but] in fact he is [an] Asian still” [italics added].19

***

Perhaps it is only fitting that Kureishi’s first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (*TBS*), begins with a qualified self-introduction by its narrator Karim Amir who, like the author, is the product of mixed heritage (i.e., half-Anglo, half-Asian) and in the famous opening line describes himself as “an Englishman born and bred, almost;” in other words, a “new breed” descended from “two old histories” that are closely intertwined but have yet to be “reconciled” [italics added].20

Set amid the “lost decade” of the 1970s, which witnessed the birth of punk and Margaret Thatcher’s rise to power, *TBS* tells the story of Karim and his father, Haroon, two restless individuals longing for a way out of the dreary suburbs of South London, who refuse to settle for what life has to offer there, including the false sense
of “security and safety” that comes as a “reward” for a lifetime of “dullness.”

Rather, for Karim, a starry-eyed teenager ready to take on the challenges of the adult world, and Haroon, a self-taught New Age guru who toils by day as a clerk in the Civil Service, the suburbs represent a “leaving place” for “the start of a [new] life” that awaits them in “London proper.” While the city is not without its faults or shortcomings (after all, the 1970s have been described by many as a tumultuous time for London and its rival cities), it nonetheless provides a refuge for those who are shut out from the “cul-de-sac world” of the suburbs where, as Kureishi describes, “people rarely [dream] of striking out for happiness.”

The novel, winner of the Whitbread Prize for best first novel, is divided into two parts, the first of which, “In the Suburbs,” introduces us to the Amir family—in addition to Haroon and Karim, there is Allie, the younger sibling, and their English “Mum” Margaret who appears to be content with her life in the suburbs and wants nothing to do with her husband’s “China-thing,” as she describes his interest in Eastern spirituality—along with a cast of oddballs and misfits including Eva, Haroon’s free-spirited mistress and business partner; her son Charlie, an up and coming musician who has a fling with Karim; Anwar, Haroon’s “oldest friend in the world” who runs a corner shop with his wife, and their daughter, Jamila, a hard-nosed feminist who takes after Angela Davis and ordinarily does whatever she likes (including sleeping with her bisexual “cousin” Karim) but is coerced by her father into an arranged marriage with Changez, a fresh-off-the-plane Indian who wants
nothing to do with the family business and prefers spending most of his time reading lowbrow fiction.

While the suburbs, as depicted by Kureishi, may seem quite amusing at times, there is nevertheless a dark cloud that hangs over Amir père et fils. In the case of Haroon, a native of Bombay (Mumbai) who arrived shortly after the war, hoping to make his mark as a “qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer,” his inability to feel at home in the country he has chosen to spend the rest of his life in (having no desire to “physically” return to India or Pakistan) leads him to conclude without reservation that he will “never be anything but an Indian,” which can hardly be said for Karim, who knows virtually nothing about his father’s homeland—having never breathed any of its “dust” up his “nostrils”—and, apart from a brief spell in New York, has rarely ventured outside of London or its suburbs. It is on account of this discrepancy that second-generation “life in the diaspora is often held in a strange suspension.”

***

Though they have little in common, both father and son are united by their dream of leaving behind the suburbs for the big city. For Haroon, “[b]eneath all the Chinese bluster” of wisdom is a “desire for internal advancement.” Described as a “renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist,” Haroon’s passion for the “mystical arts” (in this case, a mishmash of Buddhism, Daoism, Sufism, and Yoga) allows him to overcome whatever sense of racial inferiority he has internalized and become at
peace with himself. But rather than trying to assimilate or become *plus anglais que les Anglais*, Haroon turns his back on the West and looks to Asia as a source for identity. Yet by returning to his supposed “roots,” Haroon also comes to abandon his wife and family for an adventurous life in the city with Eva, a decision that leaves his son feeling unsettled and conflicted.

Karim, who is a precursor to what is nowadays described as the “confused desi,” appears to be not only torn between his parents but also the different “cultures” that they represent. Despite his mother’s insistence that he is not from India and would catch diarrhea “the minute [he] stepped off the plane” there, he also feels alienated from the locals he meets in the suburbs who, on the surface at least, remind him of his mother.

Despite being half-English on his mother’s side and not knowing any other language or culture, Karim is still seen by his fellow countrymen as just another foreigner. “The thing was,” as he bitterly describes, “we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it.”

Indeed, a vivid illustration of this occurs when Karim visits the home of Helen, a local girl he fancies, and is confronted by her angry father who tells him that his daughter does not “go out with boys or wogs” and, right before he slams the door in his face, adds for good measure:

We don’t like it […] However many niggers there are, we still don’t like it.

We’re with Enoch [Powell]. If you put one of your black ‘ands near my
daughter I’ll smash it with a ‘ammer!\textsuperscript{25}

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But not unlike the nineteenth-century characters he reads about in the Bildungsromans of Stendhal and Balzac, who came from the provinces and sought their destiny in \textit{la Ville-Lumi\`{e}re}, Karim decides to wager his future in London and take advantage of all that the city has to offer including its bohemian culture and racial diversity (“thousands of black people” as he describes) which allows him to feel less “exposed” as a non-white subject.\textsuperscript{26} This is also where Kureishi departs from the traditional “city novel” which, as defined by Lionel Trilling, begins with “the dream of the city” and the (male) hero setting forth on a “journey […] imbued with the ritual solemnity of a knight’s quest in Arthurian legend, and culminates in profound “disillusionment” (or in the case of Lucien de Rubempré, the hero of Balzac’s \textit{Illusions Perdues}, suicide).\textsuperscript{27}

By the time that Karim arrives “In the City,” as the concluding section is appropriately titled, he finds himself wandering the streets of London, trying to make sense of “how the city work[s]” which he likens to “a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick [is] to work out how they [are] connected, and [in time] walk through all of them.”\textsuperscript{28} In many ways, Karim’s adventures in \textit{fl\`{a}nerie} recall Michel de Certeau’s quotidian notion of “reinscribing” the city through the simple yet unpredictable act of walking, and thereby deemphasizing its “qualities” as a “planned and static […] ‘place’ in favour of [an] active and spontaneously reorganized
‘space,’” which in turn allows one to “take over the city” by claiming it in “the image of one's own story, [or] one's own unique tour through its spaces.”

In TBS, London, as reinscribed by Kureishi, operates as an open “cosmopolitan space” that lies somewhere between the “nation-space” of Britain and a much broader “world-space,” allowing Haroon and Karim to be a “part of England and yet proudly [stand] outside it” at the same time. Therefore, the desire to identify with the city overrides any concern for the nation as an “imagined community,” a sentiment that is wonderfully conveyed by a line from Sammy and Rosie Get Laid in which one of the characters proudly declares, “We love our city and we belong to it. Neither of us are English, we’re Londoners you see.”

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On the other hand, TBS also presents us with a less than flattering side of the city as revealed by Karim’s introduction to the world of theatre where, thanks to the help of Eva, he discovers his talent and calling as an actor. Unfortunately, he also finds himself being typecast and forced to cross the line from performance to mimicry. Ironically, the first role he is offered is Mowgli from The Jungle Book, a “stock character of literary Orientalism.” As much as he tries to resist the demands of his overbearing director, who forces him to don a loin cloth, smother himself in “shit,” and speak with a foreign accent (all of which he objects to on “political” grounds), he resigns himself to the fact that his luck as an actor has less to do with his talent or ability than his sense of “authenticity.”
Ironically, the same holds true for Haroon who, upon moving to London, finds work as a spiritual advisor thanks in part to his “foreign” appearance and the fact that “the city was full of lonely, unhappy, unconfident people who required [his] guidance, support and pity.” And yet by downplaying his “westernness” and overstating his “Asianness” instead, Haroon not only reinforces his status as an “other” but also the idea that the East and West are incompatible, or as Kipling put it, “never the twain shall meet.”

But in choosing their respective paths, both characters also play into a falsely constructed image of themselves, becoming “faux-Indians” who “successfully [market] back to the English warmed-over versions of their own popular appropriations of Indian culture.” Their cultural “impostericism,” which ironically allows them to take advantage of all that the city has to offer including its conglomeration of cultures, nonetheless comes at the price of “inauthenticity” and raises a number of questions about their “place” in British society. For instance, is Karim an “Englishman,” or a hybrid of two or more worlds? Does Haroon in his attempt to avoid one kind of stereotype merely replicate another? And to what degree is race “performative,” as suggested by Karim’s ironic choice of profession?

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Such questions, as they relate to the city, also apply to The Black Album (TBA), the subsequent volume in Kureishi’s trilogy, which is set a decade later (1989) around the time of the so-called Rushdie Affair and recalls Britain’s struggle to come
to terms with its multicultural society, which to this day remains a work in progress.\(^{36}\)

Throughout *TBA*, the city appears as a “plethora of cultures, all jostled[ed]” together while trying to “preserve” their separate “identity.”\(^{37}\) Amid this backdrop is our central character, Shahid Hasan, who was born to Pakistani migrants and raised in the “countryside” of Kent, where the burden of feeling as if he were “the only dark-skinned person” around became so overwhelming at times that he would imagine himself as a “racist” inflicting violence on “Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, [or] any foreigner scum.”\(^{38}\)

Shortly after the death of his father, Shahid packs his bags and moves to London, hoping for “a new start with new people in a new place.” “The city,” as Kureishi writes, “would feel like his; he wouldn’t be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong.” But by the time he arrives to Kilburn and signs up for classes at a local “derelict” college, he has a hard time reconciling himself to the city’s “mundane poverty” and all the lonely, disaffected people around him.\(^{39}\)

It is not long, however, before things start to look up as Shahid makes the acquaintance of “two sage-like figures” who show him the way around the city and impart some valuable lessons on the meaning of love, friendship, and sacrifice.\(^{40}\)

The first is Riaz Al-Hussain, the self-appointed leader of the Asian Muslims in Kilburn, who introduces Shahid to a small band of “brothers” and “sisters” working to promote justice and fight against racism. Despite his secular roots in a family of non-believers, Shahid finds himself drawn to Riaz and his followers, whose
sense of kinship and community allow him to feel as if he “belongs” somewhere. At the same time, Shahid remains a man of the world with a passion for reading literature and listening to pop music. In fact, it is his love for “western culture” and his desire to become “challenged intellectually” that leads him to Deedee Osgood, a free-spirited lecturer who not only becomes Shahid’s mentor but also his lover.

No doubt, the contrast between Deedee and Riaz is viewed by many critics as a representation of the “clash” between (Western) “liberalism” and (Eastern) “fundamentalism,” which is underscored by a scene in which Riaz and company set fire to a book in public, despite Deedee’s vociferous objections. The book in question, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), not only triggered an international crisis when the Ayatollah Khomeini put a bounty on its author’s head but in Britain, where the novel was first published, set the stage for “a pivotal moment in the forging of a British Muslim identity and political agenda.”

Whereas most of the young “Asians” in *TBS* are committed to the mantra of “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll,” many of their counterparts in *TBA* choose to sing a different tune altogether, forgoing pleasure for pleasure’s sake and turning to “radical Islam” as a way of dealing with the pain of being “shunted back and forth between two cultures,” a condition that Kureishi describes as being “neither fish nor fowl” and is symbolized by the periodic shifts in the labels used to describe those like Shahid or Kureishi, including “Black” (1970s), “Asian” (1980s) and “Muslim” (2000s).
For Shahid, the “heroic” journey he undertakes in London becomes nothing less than a search for his identity. Although the notion of “identity” may seem weak or tenuous at times, its “multiple associations with ‘race’ and raciology” cannot be simply dismissed or ignored. Rather, as Paul Gilroy argues, identity offers far more than an obvious, common-sense way of talking about individuality, community, and solidarity, and has provided a means to understand the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical setting in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed […] We are constantly informed that to share an identity is to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, “racial,” ethnic, regional, and local. Identity is always bounded and particular. It marks out the divisions and subsets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries between our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world.45 However, because identity remains “bounded and particular” (i.e., non-universal), it tends to “operate through [the process of] exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects.”46 Therefore, one turns to identity “whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that
Indeed, such is the case with Shahid, for whom the bitter scars of racism have left him feeling torn apart while “trapped inside the local logic of race, nation, and ethnic absolutism,” and sheds some light on why he is initially drawn to Islam, which provides him with a “sense of rootedness and belonging” that is largely absent from Thatcher’s England, where the “values” of “self-interest” and “over-consumption” have ruthlessly triumphed above all others. Or, as Frederick Holmes puts it, “Islam attracts Shahid because it seems to him to constitute a solid, authoritative foundation for living in a […] world lacking in moral substance and spiritual direction,” a view that is affirmed by his visit to a local mosque where he is struck by the sight of “so many types and nationalities” joined in prayer, and where “it would have been difficult, without prior knowledge, to tell which country [one] was in.” Not only does Shahid hear “dozens of languages,” but all “race and class barriers” seem, for the moment at least, to disappear.

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And yet, as Shahid comes to discover, the desire to be at one with “his people” is far from simple or straightforward. What begins as a journey to stake his claim in the identity politics of the city, where “everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew,” turns into a messy affair as Shahid is forced to choose between Britain’s liberal society and the tight-knit community of Islam.
Thus, the notion of identity, which nominally serves as “a meeting ground for many different allegiances,” is reduced here to a “single affiliation.” As a result, it “ceases to be an ongoing process of self-making and social interaction” and becomes instead “a thing to be possessed and displayed […], a silent sign that closes down the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of particularity and its equally well fortified neighbors, between one national encampment and others” while stirring up many of the “authoritarian and antidemocratic sentiments and styles” associated with “fundamentalism.”

It is out of this struggle that Shahid ultimately chooses his love for Deedee and the city over the “solidarity, friendship, and direction” of Riaz and his disciples. His decision, however, is not just guided by his relationship with Deedee but also a faith in the “redemptive power” of culture and the “freedom of imagination” which is represented in this case by the music of Prince, the pop virtuoso and icon whose 1987 recording, *The Black Album*, provides the title for Kureishi’s novel.

As an artist, Prince personifies the virtues of “hybridity” by incorporating a wide and eclectic range of styles into his music including rap, funk, rock, soul and jazz. Moreover, in terms of his public persona, which has challenged (and perhaps confounded) certain assumptions about race, gender and sexuality, Prince “contains” what Walt Whitman described as “multitudes”—not only is he “[p]olymorphous, perverse, [and] self-transforming,” but he is also “limitless” in terms of his “ego and imagination.” As a “mongrel” who straddles many different cultures, it is not hard
to understand why Prince became such an “idol” to many of the younger British-born Asians who, like Shahid, “felt themselves constrained by the order of things.”

According to Ien Ang, the notion of hybridity, which thrives on the lifeblood of the city, “foregrounds” the nature of “entanglement” along with the various challenges of living “together in difference.” Not unlike *The Satanic Verses*, the novel that inspired Kureishi to look more closely at the problems surrounding British Asian identity and the “radical otherness of belief and religious fanaticism,” *TBA* pays tribute to “the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs” while repudiating the “absolutism of the Pure,” a sentiment that is invoked by the novel’s bittersweet conclusion where Kureishi asks:

> How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world.

Such questions also figure in the more recent *Something to Tell You*, which opens in 2005 as London, a “dynamic, bustling” city that more or less reinvented itself after the deregulation of its financial industry under the “Big Bang,” is being trumpeted as a cosmopolitan center where “[v]irtually every race, nation, culture and religion in the world can claim at least a handful of [representatives].”

After a period of writing about adultery and other “domestic” matters,
*Something to Tell You (STTY)* also marks Kureishi’s return to “the subject of immigrant life in London.” The central character, Jamal Khan, is a middle-aged shrink who is haunted by a past love affair that was cut short after a sudden act of violence whose repercussions continue to resonate many years later. By juxtaposing the present (2005) with the past (the 1970s and 80s), the novel provides an honest reflection on the sweeping changes throughout the city over the past several decades, including its massive influx of new immigrants.

For instance, in his account of Shepherd's Bush, the area of West London where he lives and works, Jamal describes a part of the city that is not only teeming with foreign nationals, but where making one’s way around the local markets, which bear an uncanny resemblance to what one might find in Bogota or perhaps the Middle East (albeit with inclement weather), requires having some knowledge of a secondary language such as Polish, Czech, Bosnian or Portuguese.

Walking along Uxbridge Road, Jamal, who makes his living as a psychoanalyst (or, as he likes to put it, “surgeon of the soul”), takes note of the various shops and businesses that cater to Caribbean, Polish, Kashmiri, and Somali residents. Nearby, he finds a mosque that is adjacent to a popular football ground, two local institutions that share (on the surface at least) little in common and yet are vital to the fabric of daily life in the city.

In spite of all the “difference” around him, the city appears, to Jamal’s surprise and delight, not only “calm” but quite “industrious,” with many of its
residents “busy with schemes and selling.” However, in contrast to the posh and pristine neighborhoods of Belgravia and Knightsbridge, which are labeled as the “ghetto” (since their snobby residents choose to live apart from the rest of society), areas like Shepherd’s Bush with its mix of rich and poor, black and white, Christian and Muslim, are where one finds “London as a world city.”

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More important perhaps, London, as imagined in STTY, (re)presents a postcolonial “city of exiles, refugees and immigrants” where locals must learn to “live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful, or violent,” a view of the city that overlaps in many ways with the notion of “conviviality,” which, according to Paul Gilroy, describes “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere.”

Taking off from “the point where ‘multiculturalism’ [has] broke[n] down,” conviviality also “introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term ‘identity,’” which as I indicated in my reading of TBA is fraught with a number of limitations in terms of its theory and practice, and proves to be “ambiguous” in its “analysis of race, ethnicity, and politics.” On the other hand, a convivial culture, which attempts to reconcile the “tension between cosmos and polis,” invites a sense of “radical openness” that corresponds to the “always unpredictable mechanisms of identification.”
While conviviality does a fine job of illustrating the more quotidian aspects of living with difference and how life in the city fosters “human relationships not upon fixed racial classifications and ordering,” it remains, at least in the work of Gilroy, under-conceptualized and, apart from its semi-utopian role as wish fulfillment, tends to raise more questions than answers.  

One way of developing this notion as it applies to STTY and its depiction of London’s “multiculture” is by re-examining the “intimate relationship between psychoanalysis and cosmopolitanism,” two discourses that not only originate in the city but also “assume a universalism (of mind and culture, respectively),” albeit with a “Eurocentric” bias. At their core, both share a fundamental concern for the Other, which appears as “the outsider, the stranger, the alien, the subversive, the radically different.” Whereas cosmopolitanism tries to reconcile difference by appreciating “what it feels like to be Other,” psychoanalysis, on the other hand, turns to the opposition between the self and Other, and shows us how we are “foreign” to ourselves.

One scholar whose work attempts to bridge these two concerns is Julia Kristeva, who proposes a cosmopolitanism that is “[d]erived from psychoanalysis” while “challenge[ing] the dominant view that self and other can be clearly demarcated.” According to Kristeva, psychoanalysis presents a picture of the modern world in which we are all “foreigners” and otherness “becomes an integral part of the same.” This play on the notion of “transference” involves “a journey
into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, towards an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable.” 74 And because “[t]he foreigner is within me, […] we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners.” 75 Or, as Jamal puts it, “we are [all] made of others.” 76

By “inserting foreignness into the construct of reason,” Kristeva seeks to demonstrate how the former is “not confined to any particular group [“the foreigner is neither a race nor a nation”], and [that] the possibility of different groups living together depends on acceptance of this general truth.” 77 Therefore, the “ethics of psychoanalysis” implies a “new sort” of cosmopolitanism that “cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious—desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible.” 78

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For Jamal, his view of the city is largely shaped by his work in the clinic—first as an analysand and later on as an analyst—where he deals in the “secrets of desire, of what people really want, and of what they they fear the most.” 79 By rejecting what society prescribes as “normal,” psychoanalysis, as Jamal insists, becomes not a way to “make people behave better” or “morally good” but to allow them to become “more aware of their desire” including the “desire to dwell convivially with difference.” 80 And in realizing how “we are ‘peopled’ by others,” psychoanalysis also insists on the “social” dimensions of the psyche and the
“foreigner” as “both a psychological and [...] political symptom.”

Rooted in the culture and society of fin-de-siècle Vienna, psychoanalysis also found its second home in London, where Freud spent his last days in exile and his disciples, men and women of “various nationalities,” refined its practice of a “talking cure” while at the same time insisting that “[l]istening is not only a kind of love, [but] is love” itself, whose object of affection include the city and its alternate social, political and cultural imaginaries.

More than anything, STTY re-affirms Kureishi’s love for the city, including an affection for its people, regardless of their quirks and “frailties,” as well as “a love of one’s own liberation by and in connection to” all that the metropolis has to offer, including the convivial “stain” of its cultures and institutions, which set it apart from the rest of the country. According to Kureishi, London “bears [no] resemblance to England. It's a right crummy place without London. I think if England didn't have London, it'd be a fucking dump.”

While London has long served as “one of the inspirations and abiding pleasures in Kureishi’s work,” STTY takes what is a more inclusive view by offering the “ideal of city life as a vision of social relations affirming group difference,” to quote Iris Marion Young, who argues that “[a]s a normative ideal, city life instantiates social relations of difference without exclusion” or conforming to the “logic of identity” which suppresses the “ontological difference within and between subjects.”
Although this “rich pageant” may represent “an unrealized social ideal” (just witness the riots last summer that erupted in Tottenham and elsewhere), it can still “inspire hope and imagination that motivate action for social change,” as indicated by the novel’s account of “7/7.” As the final section opens, Jamal describes the horrors of that summer day and takes us to Tavistock Square, one of the bomb sites and where he and two of his two closest friends once attended philosophy lectures and afterwards “drank wine and ate sandwiches […] on the grass, discussing the idiosyncrasies of the lecturers.”

But “that beautiful London square,” as he describes it, is more than just a site for nostalgic memories, it also represents a vital landmark in the city’s cultural and political history. It is where

Dickens wrote *Bleak House*, and Woolf *Three Guineas*; where Lenin stayed, and the Hogarth Press published James Strachey’s Freud translations in the basement of number 52. There is also a plaque to commemorate conscientious objectors in the First World War, as well as another for the victims of Hiroshima, along with a statue of Gandhi.

In other words, Tavistock Square serves as a metonym for the cosmopolitan city and its “being together of strangers” whose “dwelling situates [their] own identity and activity in relation to a horizon of a vast variety of other activity,” which is described by Young as “vast, even infinite.” Those who dwell in the city are brought “together, bound to one another, in what should be and sometimes is a single polity.”
Ultimately, this is what makes the city worth writing about and why writers like Kureishi (and the many others who have followed in his footsteps) help us to understand and appreciate what it means to call oneself a Londoner today. For Kureishi, the “romance of London” continues to resonate as a central theme throughout his work, and “presents the urban milieu” as a central character. Like its real-life counterpart, London, as (re)imagined in the work of Kureishi is “reinvented, reimagined from different locations, perspectives, and subject positions.” Or, to put it simply, “there is always,” as he describes, “a sense of possibility in London, always.”
Notes—Chapter 1

1 The title of this chapter refers to a popular 1947 song by Hubert Gregg.


5 Sukhdev Sandhu, London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 231. According to Sandhu, Kureishi’s work also “offered for the first time a recognisable portrait of British Asian life” that was not based on racial stereotypes.

6 Kureishi’s status was in many ways affirmed by his visit to Buckingham Palace in 2008 when he was made a Commander of Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.), a title that no doubt rings with historical irony. In describing the medal he received with the inscription, “For God and the Empire,” Kureishi remarked, “You can’t get better than that. The only causes are the lost causes—or the nonexistent ones.” Rachel Donadio, “My Beautiful London,” New York Times (August 18, 2008).


8 Kureishi, London Kills Me, 163. Kureishi comes from the town of Bromley, which was originally a part of Kent until it was incorporated into what is now known as Greater London. Despite living only 20 kilometers or so from downtown London, Kureishi felt as if he was raised in another “world.” Colin MacCabe, “Interview: Hanif Kureishi on London,” Critical Quarterly 41, no.3 (2004), 38. This sense of spatial polarity between the metropolis and its outskirts is also played up for laughs in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane (New York: Scribner, 2003), which includes a scene in which a Bangladeshi family living in the East End act like “tourists” and make a trip to Buckingham Palace.

9 Throughout this chapter, “London” will refer to the City and its central boroughs while “South London” will apply to suburbs like Bromley, which is where the first half of Kureishi’s semi-autobiographical novel is largely set.

10 For a detailed summary of this transition, see Saskia Sassen’s The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Britain’s neoliberal turn not only brought about a number of cuts in public spending and the privatization of various social services, but also led to the formation of a new “underclass” with over 20% of the population living beneath the poverty line.


12 Paul Gilroy, “A London Sumting Dis…,” Critical Quarterly 41.3 (1999), 57. Likewise,
the novelist Zadie Smith raises a very similar point in the following quote: “If I were to write a book about London in which there were only white people, I think that would be kind of bizarre. People do write books like that, which I find bizarre because it's patently not what London is, nor has it been for fifty years.” See “An Interview with Zadie Smith” (2003) http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teeth/ei_smith_int.html.


15 See “Enoch Powell’s 'Rivers of Blood' Speech,” The Telegraph (November 06, 2007).

16 Gilroy, Postcolonial Melancholia, 101. Powell’s inflammatory speech was responsible for bringing scores of racists out of the woodwork and inciting violence against ethnic minorities.

17 J. Street, Rebel Rock (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 74-75. Clapton’s racist diatribe became a catalyst for the Rock Against Racism campaign, which targeted the rise of hate groups like the National Front and staged a series of influential concerts featuring bands like The Clash and the Buzzcocks. To this day, Clapton, who is musically indebted to a number of black artists and scored a #1 hit with a cover of Bob Marley’s “I Shot the Sheriff,” has yet to disavow any of his views on Powell and Britain’s immigrant population.


21 TBS, 8.

22 TBS, 3; 8; 117.


24 TBS, 24; 263; 141; 53.

25 TBS, 40.

26 TBS, 232; 121.


28 Ibid., 128.

Ibid., 9; *TBS*, 227; *London Kills Me*, 55.


32 *TBS*, 147.

33 Ibid., 279.

34 The line comes from “The Ballad of East and West” (1889).

35 Ball, “The Semi-Detached Metropolis,” 23. By the 1980s, one could find a nostalgic longing for Empire in a number of period films and television dramas (most notably *Chariots of Fire* [1981]), a sentiment that was reinforced by Britain’s intervention in the Falkland Islands. See Salman Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism* (London: Granta, 1991), 87.

36 As a historical aside, *TBS* closes on the night of Thatcher’s victory in the 1979 general election, which is regarded by many observers as a turning point in British politics.


39 *TBA*, 20.


41 *TBA*, 98. Later on, when Shahid tells his sister-in-law that he visited a mosque, she replies, “But you had a decent upbringing!”

42 Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Identity Crisis,” *New York Times* (September 17, 1995). Taking issue with *TBA*’s didactic tone, Appiah proclaimed that a “novel is not an argument, and it would be unwise to reduce this tale to a thesis.”

43 Colin MacCabe, Monica Ali, Paul Carlin, Paul Gilroy, Kate Hext, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Natasha Serret, Sandra Young, “Multiculturalism after 7/7: A CQ Seminar,” *Critical Quarterly* 48.2 (July 2006), 3. As a close friend and mentor, Rushdie was in some ways responsible for Kureishi’s venture into writing fiction. Long before *TBS* was published, Rushdie once told Kureishi, “We take you seriously as a writer, Hanif, […] but you only write screenplays,” which spurred him to write longer fiction. Quoted in MacCabe, “Interview,” 42.

44 Johann Hari, “Hanif Kureishi on the Couch,” *The Independent* (February 02, 2009); Holmes, “The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West”; Kureishi, Dreaming and Scheming, 69. For Kureishi, this point was brought closer to home when he traveled to Pakistan and one of his uncles told him “We are Pakistanis, but you will always be a Paki.”


47 Hall and Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 19. What became known as “identity politics” grew out of multiculturalism as practiced in the West (symbolized in the United States by the so-called Culture Wars), which promoted a laissez-faire approach to the question of “tolerance” and accepting other cultures.


49 Frederick M. Holmes, “The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West.”

50 *TBA*, 138.

51 *TBA*, 98.


55 Holmes, “The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West.” Prince’s album is not without its own backstory. Originally scheduled to be released in 1987, Prince decided at the last moment to withdraw the album and released *Lovesexy* the following year, which climbed to #1 on the UK billboard chart. Not surprisingly, bootlegged copies of *The Black Album* surfaced everywhere until Warner Bros. finally released it in 1994.

56 Following Nietzsche’s diatribe against Christianity, one can argue that Prince symbolizes a “Dionysian” force opposing any view of art that “relegates” it to “the realm of lies” and uses religious doctrine to instill a “fear of beauty and sensuality. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 23-24.


59 Fredric Jameson, “Realism and Utopia in The Wire,” *Criticism* 52.3-4 (Summer and Fall 2010), 368; Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 394; *TBA*, 281.

According to Paul Krugman, Britain’s “over-reliance” on its financial industry and the profits made from “wheeling and dealing” is a major reason why the UK is currently in a financial hole. “British Fashion Victims,” *New York Times* (October 21, 2010). Also, as Earl Jackson pointed out to me, London benefited from the less stringent restrictions on its immigration policies compared to New York after 9/11.

61 “Books Briefly Noted: *Something to Tell You,*” *The New Yorker* (September 22, 2008). Like many of the older characters he now writes about, Kureishi, who is in his late fifties, can no longer be considered as an *enfant terrible.*


63 *STTY*, 10.

64 *STTY*, 11.


66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.


74 Ibid., 182.

75 Ibid., 192. Kristeva’s reading of psychoanalysis and cosmopolitanism also had an influence on Bhabha’s notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism.

76 *STTY*, 7.


78 Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192. For another perspective on the relationship between
cosmopolitanism and psychoanalysis, see Ashis Nandy’s *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Thanks to Earl Jackson for this reference.

79 STTY, 3. Having been in analysis for over two decades, Kureishi has publicly acknowledged his debt to psychoanalysis, which has helped him as both an artist and a person.

80 STTY, 58; Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 5.


82 STTY, 190, original italics.


87 STTY, 341.

88 Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 237-238, italics added. For more on Tavistock Square, see Donadio, “My Beautiful London.”


91 Colin MacCabe, “Interview: Hanif Kureishi on London,” 46. Also, see Donadio, “My Beautiful London.” Elsewhere, Kureishi writes: “My love and fascination for inner London endures. Here there is fluidity and possibilities are unlimited. Here there is fluidity and possibilities are unlimited. Here it is possible to avoid your enemies; here everything is available.” Kureishi, *London Kills Me*, 163.
CHAPTER 2

New York Stories

Reimagining the City in Fury and Netherland

The challenge in the modern world is to find a city that speaks to as many of our homes as possible.
—Pico Iyer

[T]o live in the modern city means to live in the presence of difference. For better or for worse, it requires frequent interaction with those who probably do not share one’s beliefs and values.
—Philip Kasinitz

I […] feel increasingly at home in big cities. Perhaps because big cities have become the place where people of different backgrounds tend to congregate.
—Kazuo Ishiguro

Globalization, which by most accounts concerns the “rapid assimilation” of formerly “autonomous national markets and productive zones into a single sphere” driven by the hyper-mobilization of people, capital, information, and commodities, has not only brought the world closer together but is also responsible for creating a new type of urban configuration known as the “global city,” which provides all of the necessary financial tools and services in order for capital to make the world go round.

But apart from doing the “work” of capitalism, many global cities also offer a
space where the “erosion” of national boundaries can be observed firsthand and, as Ien Ang argues, people of different backgrounds can “settle in search of a better life, creating in the process a polyglot urban environment where rubbing shoulders with heterogeneous others is an unavoidable fact of life.”

Therefore, by looking at two novels set in New York City—*Fury* (2001) and *Netherland* (2008)—I will consider the interrelationship between urbanism, globalization and migration and its impact on the contemporary representation of the city. Moreover, I will look at the transnational figure of the migrant, who is central to unpacking the dynamic between the city and the world at large.

My analysis will highlight the role of the “urban imaginary,” which illustrates how the city is “socially, economically, and culturally constituted, and at the same time, configured in the imaginary through the regimes of representation.” The urban imaginary represents “a set of meanings about cities that arise in a specific historical time and cultural space” and, according to Morris, Reisenleitner and Turner, “offers a syntax of urban life” that underscores “how the city is being acted upon, how struggles over urban space are framed, and how spatial justice […] is claimed, achieved or denied.”

Since cities are more often than not “divided” along lines of race, class, gender and sexuality, there will invariably be “a number of urban imaginaries coexisting and competing […] for dominance.” In regard to New York, I would like to look at two imaginaries that are central to understanding the city today, which can

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be described as such:

*New York as a global city*

*New York as a cosmopolitan city*

Despite their tendency to overlap or perhaps contradict one another, both imaginaries shed light on the various material forces at work in constructing the popular image of the city, which has throughout the last several decades undergone a dramatic makeover that is reflected in both novels.

Finally, I will conclude with a brief discussion of how the city is reshaping the way we read and think about literature, which has traditionally been viewed through the looking glass of the nation state, where “the literary and the territorial” are often equated.⁹ Rushdie’s insistence that “[l]iterature has little or nothing to do with a writer’s address” raises a number of questions about the relationship between fiction and place, including what it means for a writer to identify with the city, rather than the country, he or she resides in.¹⁰

In dealing with two novels which fly in the face of any conventional reading of national literature (a notion that is hardly immune to any discrepancies or contradictions), I will make a case for why it is appropriate—in certain instances, at least—to speak of writers in terms of their affiliation with a particular city (in this case, New York) rather than their country of origin and/or citizenship (which in this case includes India, Ireland, Britain and the US), and what this might imply for the future of literary studies and its “planetary” aspirations.¹¹
Not long ago, in a joint interview with Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie was asked whether he thought of himself as an “American writer” now that he resides in New York City (Manhattan, to be more precise) and has published, so far at least, one novel set primarily in the US. But rather than framing his answer in terms of national identity (thus refusing to put himself in the same company as Philip Roth, Don DeLillo or Cormac McCarthy), Rushdie claimed that one of the “pleasures” of writing about a city like New York is that “anybody who brings their story here automatically makes it a New York story,” thereby allowing “the stories of the world [to] become the stories of the city.”

_Fury,_ Rushdie’s 2001 novel set in the Big Apple, is in many ways a reflection on his status as an alien writer living in the United States who finds shelter in the city and avoids a potential “turf war” with the nation’s literary establishment. Wary of being regarded as an interloper, Rushdie, a British citizen, shies away from the more personal or intimate settings that have become a staple of American literature (for instance, “Newark in the forties or fifties”) and instead “write[s] about the kind of New Yorker […] who has arrived and who is making his story one of the layers of the stories of the city.”

Then again, the city that Rushdie has chosen is anything but run of the mill. New York, which is arguably the world’s premier metropolis, serves as a local and international center for finance, commerce, telecommunications and corporate
administration. The city also attracts a wide array of immigrants from far and wide who come to the five boroughs to work, play or study, making it one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan areas on the planet.

It is no wonder that the city, once described by former mayor David Dinkins as a “gorgeous mosaic,” has often been ridiculed and maligned by the rest of the country (or at least by those who claim to represent it). “Real America,” as clerics and politicians would have us believe, is located along Main Street, in small towns and villages far away from the big cities which are “full of people […] too rich or too poor, the wrong sorts of foreigners” as well as “bohemians, and writers who turned their backs on America and look across the Atlantic for their cultural inspiration.”

What Philip Kasinitz describes as the “denial” of New York’s “Americanness” speaks to a much broader distrust of the city and its inhabitants. For New York, in contrast to the Bible Belt or Midwest, is defined by the heterogeneity of its residents. As the nation’s first “majority-minority city,” over a third of New York’s population are foreign-born and another quarter are the offspring of first-generation parents. Described by Tony Judt as “a city more at home in the world than in its home country,” New York not only fosters contact between locals and non-locals by bringing them together on a scale never before imagined but also untangles the notion of identity from its more traditional sources such as the clan or the imagined community of the nation state.

This, according to Werner Schiffauer, is why the city appeals to so many
“foreigners,” including Rushdie and Joseph O’Neill, who have “less interest in identifying with the nation to which they migrate” and prefer to “identify with a city, […] be proud of it, boast about it, without [necessarily] sharing the values” of most of its citizens. More importantly, the immigrant’s affiliation with the city provides a source of “positive identification” that allows for “integration/loyalty/solidarity without [any strict sense of] conformity.”

Furthermore, the urge to “identify with a city” suggests “a refusal to be reduced” to a particular type of national, religious or ethnic identity. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that for some critics, cities like London, New York and Toronto pose a “threat” to the idea of “national unity.” Or, to quote Charles Simic, nationalists of all stripes hate cities. It’s hard to remain the faithful and obedient son of your clan when so many other attractive options offer themselves. One has to be a fool or a hypocrite to [only] sing the praises of one’s native customs […] after one has lived in New York City. The cities are, indeed, agreeably corrupting.

In the case of Rushdie, whose views on nationalism more or less concur with Simic’s, the lure of the city lies in its organic melding of different cultures, which is responsible for producing “new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, [and] politics.” As a result, the city as imagined by Rushdie and other postcolonial writers represents a “place of variety, mystery, fortuity, possibility, conflict […] where strange people live next door and unimaginable worlds are
waiting to be discovered on the next block.”

Despite being a relative newcomer to New York and its literary scene, Rushdie is no stranger when it comes to writing about life in the metropolis. In fact, throughout his career, the city has played a pivotal role in framing his “migrant’s-eye view of the world,” which celebrates the values of hybridity and “mongrelization,” while rejecting what he describes as the “absolutism of the Pure,” a term that connotes a fear of the other.

In addition, the city as a real and imaginary place has served as a catalyst for much of his writing, including what many critics regard as his masterpiece, *Midnight’s Children* (1981), a novel set in postcolonial Bombay (Mumbai), which not only happens to be Rushdie’s birthplace but also where he first “fell in love with the metropolis” and why to this day he still regards himself as “a writer of the big city.”

Ironically, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the first major work by Rushdie to look at life beyond the Asian subcontinent by setting Bombay alongside its former metropole, “Proper London,” propelled him into the international spotlight after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* calling for his death and forced him to live in hiding for the better part of a decade before reemerging in New York, the city he now calls home.

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New York also happens to be home to Joseph O’Neill whose most recent novel, *Netherland*, pays tribute to city and its thriving immigrant cultures. Born to an
Irish father and Turkish mother, O’Neill spent much of his childhood residing in a number of countries (including Iran, Turkey and Mozambique) before being sent off to boarding school in The Hague. Later on, after studying law at Cambridge and working as a barrister in London, O’Neill, carrying a British passport, packed his bags once more and moved across the pond, where he became not only a full-fledged writer but also a US citizen.  

According to James Wood, much of O’Neill’s work, *Netherland* in particular, is marked by a “world-directed curiosity” with a keen “interest in [the] marginal lives” of diasporic subjects. For O’Neill, the city represents a place of possibility where people from different walks of life can come together and interact in ways that are not prescribed by race, class, nationality or religion. In other words, *Netherland* reaffirms the role of the city in the nexus of global migration while reinscribing the meaning of home(land) in a world that is increasingly on the move. 

Though often regarded as tertiary to the globalization of trade and finance, global migration continues to transform “the face of the modern urban landscape” by bringing together “different life-worlds and temporalities” and “reconfiguring [its] social divisions and conflicts,” which are less rooted in the traditional struggles over labor relations or the “color line.” As Stuart Hall observes, “the worldwide movement of peoples across the globe is, in its scale, composition, direction, and diversity, a phenomenon of world significance,” and has in many ways been responsible for
the creation of radically new types of human being people who root
themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material
things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are
so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves
strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and
where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced
several ways of being, he [sic] understands their illusory nature. To see things
plainly, you have to cross a frontier.29

With more and more people crossing borders and taking part in what is by far the
biggest global migration in history, it is no surprise that over half of the world’s
population (including over 200 million migrants) now live in cities, prompting UN
officials to describe the current century as “the century of cities.”30

Yet, as cities play host to a proliferation of diasporas and undergo a process of
what might be described as “multicultural normalization,” there is, as James Clifford
suggests, a tendency among “dispersed peoples” to maintain “border relations with
the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of
transport, communication, and labor migration” which “reduce distances and
facilitate two-way traffic.”31 As a result, the study of migration today is less
cconcerned with the question of “assimilation” (whether or not immigrants are
incorporated into a dominant culture) than the spread of cross-border flows and
transnational networks, which are at the heart of what we call globalization and have
transformed our view of the world today, as witnessed in the two novels I will from now on discuss in detail.

**Big Apple Inc: New York and the Rise of the Global City**

Here I was in New York, city of rose and fantasy, of capitalist automatism, its streets a triumph of cubism, its moral philosophy that of the dollar. New York impressed me tremendously because, more than any other city in the world, it is the fullest expression of our modern age.

—Leon Trotsky

Well, New York City really has it all.
—The Ramones, “Sheena Is A Punk Rocker”

Despite their contrast in tone, style, and characterization, *Fury* and *Netherland* share a number of notable features, including their specific reference to time and place—i.e., New York at the turn of the new century and millennium. In fact, any comparison of the two novels must also take into account the “materiality of modern, urban life” and the actual space of the city (as opposed to its literary representation) along with its unrivaled dominance among today’s world cities (not counting London, which is similar in terms of size, population, and economic base) while re-affirming what Ben Derudder describes as the “commonplace observation that contemporary urban life cannot be properly understood without making some [kind of] reference to ‘globalization.’”

Yet, to appreciate the city’s broader influence and why this matters when it comes to reading *Fury* and *Netherland*, I would like to return to Saskia Sassen’s
notion of the “global city,” which provides a useful framework for considering the “global/local synergy” that thrives on “[r]egions and region-states increasingly overrid[ing] national borders and older territorial forms and creat[ing] special economic zones of uneven development and transcultural hybridity.”

As a point of articulation between the world and the nation, cities like New York play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of global capital, relying on a decentralized network of urban “command points” that are notably “distinguished by a disproportionate concentration of corporate headquarters, international financial services, advanced producer services [in law, accounting, public relations, insurance and real estate], advanced telecommunication facilities and other supporting social and physical infrastructure.”

Thanks to this global/local interface, cities across Europe, Asia and North America have been drawn closer together by a web of “similar [financial] interests” and a fluid “exchange of resources.” As a result, “much of what we call the global economy” depends on a network of a few dozen cities that “handle most of the [world’s] financial transactions and assets under management.”

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In terms of their content and subject matter, both *Fury* and *Netherland* rely on New York’s status as a global city along with its tremendous concentration of labor, capital, and technology, making it quite difficult to imagine these novels in any other setting, let alone period. That is to say, they could not have been written without the
global city as a spatial, cultural and economic point of reference. Rather than citing all the ways in which this might be true, I would like to consider a few that stand out in particular.

First, there is what Robin Cohen describes as the transformation of the “internal labour market” and the “marked shift from industrial to service and information related employment,” a trend that is “particularly notable in the global cities,” which “have a high percentage of professionals, business people, financiers [as well as] people working in the global information, media, fashion, computer and [entertainment] industries.”

In *Netherland*, Hans van den Broek, the Dutch protagonist and narrator, works as a stock analyst for a large investment bank where, from “[his] desk on the twenty-second floor of a glassy tower” in Manhattan (having transferred from the branch in London on a “non-permanent” basis), he provides “reliable opinions about the current and future valuation of certain oil and gas stocks.” Although he tries to downplay his profession by claiming that “the analyst business” has “lost some of its sheen” after the media exposed the unlawful practice of “stock-tipping” (for the sake of verisimilitude, O’Neill drops the names of Jack Grubman and Henry Blodget, two real-life analysts who have been barred from the securities business), he is less shy when it comes to describing his own success, having acquired “the beginnings of a reputation as a guru.”

Hans also makes a point of connecting the subject of his trial separation from
his British wife and son, who moved back to London shortly after 9/11, to his rise as
an analyst (“number four in my sector” according to the trade journal Institutional
Investor), which serves to remind the reader of the blurring between his personal and
professional lives and the degree to which the logic of the market has infiltrated the
way he interacts with other people including his wife Rachel.39 (Likewise, in
contemplating the possibility of a divorce, his thoughts turn to their jointly-held
assets, which include a pricey loft and over a million dollars in savings and checking
accounts.40)

In Fury, the central character, Malik Solanka, is a “retired historian of ideas”
from London (by way of Mumbai) who regards himself as “a born-and-bred
metropolitan of the countryside-is-for-cows persuasion.”41 Solanka is also the
mastermind behind Little Brain, a time-traveling puppet, which starred in its own
BBC series and, thanks to merchandising and the afterlife of syndication, became an
international “cult” phenomenon (imagine Harry Potter meets Hello Kitty), making
Solanka a very rich man in the process. Solanka’s success, which carries over to New
York when he becomes involved in a project with his neighbor Mila, is perhaps
indicative of what Fredric Jameson in his reformulation of the Marxian “base” and
“superstructure” describes as “[t]he becoming cultural of the economic, and the
becoming economic of the cultural.”42

According to Allen J. Scott, cities not only play “a privileged role as centers
of cultural and economic activity” but they also are responsible for bringing about the
“marked convergence between the spheres of cultural and economic development,” thereby laying the foundation for a “new cultural economy of capitalism.” As a result:

cultural forms and meanings of its outputs become critical if not dominating elements of productive strategy, and […] the realm of human culture as a whole [becomes] increasingly subject to commodification, i.e. supplied through profit-making institutions in decentralized markets. In other words, an ever-widening range of economic activity is concerned with producing and marketing goods and services that are infused in one way or another with broadly aesthetic or semiotic attributes. 43

In addition, the cultural economies of cities subsist on the “output” of a “creative class” which is responsible for the production and distribution of new or repackaged content. 44 In New York alone, the culture industry (which includes film, music, television, art and theatre) accounts for over $20 billion in annual revenue for the city. 45

And yet, despite their differences, both Hans and Malik represent a new type of migrant worker who is not only “skilled” and well educated but also quite “flexible” in terms of citizenship. 46 Such “mobile professionals,” who reap the benefits of their “pied-à-terre status” are part of a global workforce for whom the city, according to John Clement Ball, serves as an “interstitial space” where questions of belonging and national identity are often left on the back burner. 47
Because living in another country today requires less of a commitment in terms of immersing oneself in a new culture or its set of “values,” more and more newcomers are attracted to a “city-derived citizenship that is disarticulated from” the rest of the country. As a result, cities are increasingly “replacing [national] states in the construction of social identities.”

By creating the conditions in which there is more mobility today than at “any [other] time in world history,” globalization has also, to quote Sheppard and Lynn, “opened up” a number of cities to “new and rapidly changing influences from the world at large, including a profound diversification of city populations.” And because “the globalization of labor flows is part of the same process as the development of global finance and the global circulation of capital,” there is far more diversity (at least in terms of class, education and geography) among today’s immigrants, which includes not just highly skilled professionals (as represented by Hans and Malik) but also underprivileged, low-skilled service workers who, as described in the film Dirty Pretty Things (2002), “are the ones who drive your cabs […] clean your rooms. And suck your cocks.”

It is the coexistence of these two life-worlds that allows us, for a moment at least, to look beyond the mandates of the global city and (re)imagine New York as a place where people of various backgrounds can, despite their cultural, linguistic and religious differences, come together and take part in “hybrid cultural practices that transcend fixed identities and closed community boundaries.” In other words, New
York as a cosmopolitan city.

The City of Final Destination: Cosmopolitan New York

Crazy New York, inspiring New York, fractious New York, ugly New York, beautiful New York, impossible New York—New York as a laboratory of human contradictions. America has had a tortured, even antagonistic relationship with our city over the years, but to an astonishing number of people […], the five boroughs are a living embodiment of what the [US] is all about: diversity, tolerance and equality under the law. Alone among American cities, New York is more than just a place or an agglomeration of people. It is also an idea.
—Paul Auster

New York is not ‘America’, but […] a place characterized by the dynamism and energy of a transnational urbanism made and remade over the decades of the 20th century by millions of immigrants from all over the world.
—Ien Ang

Though written over half a century ago, E.B. White’s “Here Is New York” remains just as timely and relevant in its observations on the city which, as he describes, is “by way of becoming the capital of the world.” There are, according to White, “three New Yorks,” the first being that of the “native,” who largely “takes the city for granted” and “accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable.” The second is “the New York of the commuter” who “dies with tremendous mileage to his credit” (and considers home to be some other place). Lastly, there is the New York of the “settler” or newcomer, who arrives to the city “in quest of something.”

Of these three, the third is in White’s opinion the most significant and
accounts for much of the city’s “high-strung disposition, its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements.” Whereas commuters provide New York with its “tidal restlessness” and natives its “solidity and community,” it is the settlers who “give it passion” and absorb its landscape with “the fresh eyes of an adventurer.”

Among those included in White’s description are the immigrants who have been instrumental in making New York “a permanent exhibit of the phenomenon of one world.” Although the city no longer revolves around manufacturing (as it did during White’s time), it has in the last several decades witnessed a flood of migrants that not only rivals the “huddled masses” of a century ago but is quite diverse in socioeconomic status, “ranging from millionaire capitalists and highly-skilled middle-class professionals to impoverished laborers or refugees.” This fact also illustrates how “growth at the top” of the service sector has spurred the demand for cheap labor at the bottom. According to Saskia Sassen,

[i]mmigration can be seen as a significant labor supplier for the vast infrastructure of low-wage jobs underlying specialized services, and the high-income life-styles of its employees. Messenger services, French hand laundries, restaurants, gourmet food stores, repair and domestic services—these are just a few examples of the vast array of low-wage jobs needed for the operation of the specialized service sector and its employees. Immigrants represent a desirable labor supply because they are relatively cheap, reliable,
willing to work on odd shifts, and safe.”

While the overabundance of cheap immigrant labor reinforces many of the social and economic divisions within the city, it is also responsible for generating a cosmopolitan urban space in which “the modern experience of ‘togetherness in difference’ [has become] a central reality, from which we can and must longingly learn.” Therefore, a central problem is how to reconcile the opposition between the city as a “site for social injustice” (to quote O’Neill) and where (as Rushdie describes) “newness” is “born” through the “fusions, translations, [and] conjoining” of different cultures.

The juxtaposition of these rival imaginaries only re-affirms Doreen Massey’s definition of the city as the “intersections of multiple narratives,” a view that resonates throughout Fury and Netherland as both novels wrestle with the promises and failures of New York as a cosmopolitan city.

In the case of Fury, the cosmopolitan ideal is put under erasure, having been compromised by the “capitalist engine” of America’s “relentless commercialism.” Not only has this made the US the “object and goal of the world’s concupiscence and lust” but it has led to the dumbing down of its mass culture, as witnessed in the following apostrophe:

O Dream-America, was civilization’s quest to end in obesity and trivia, at Roy Rogers and Planet Hollywood, in USA Today and on E!; or in the million-dollar-game-show greed or fly-on-the-wall voyeurism; or in the eternal
confessional booth of Ricki and Oprah and Jerry [...] or in a spurt of gross-out dumb-and-dumber comedies designed for young who sat in darkness howling their ignorance at the silver screen; or even at the unattainable tables of Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Alain Ducasse? [...] Who demolished the City on the Hill and put in its place a row of electric chairs [...]? Who paved Paradise and put up a parking lot? [...] Everyone was an American now, or at least Americanized [...]. America was the world’s playing field, its rule book, umpire, and ball. Even anti-Americanism was Americanism in disguise, concealing, as it did, that America was the only game in town and the matter of America the only business at hand [...].

As a global trendsetter, America has also inserted itself into the collective unconscious by “always labeling things with the American logo: American Dream, American Buffalo, American Graffiti, American Psycho, American Tune.” (In contrast, the use of another “nationalist prefix”—e.g., Egyptian Dream, Australian Buffalo, Indian Graffiti, English Psycho, or Chilean Tune—does not “seem to add much meaning.”)

In Fury, not only is the cosmopolitan ideal offset by the shadow of Empire, which functions as a “big Other” (to borrow a Lacanian term) to New York’s cosmopolis, but the novel also rejects a “naïve account of the city as a multicultural paradise.” Rather, the city is seen as both wonderful and appalling; a space of hope that also represents what is wrong with society today. This dialectic is critical to
understanding how the premise of New York as a cosmopolitan city is both true and false at the same time.

While the “defining elements of American identity” have undoubtedly become “global in their reach,” it is conversely true that the “rest of the world has insinuated itself into American space” as scores of new settlers, who represent the human face of globalization, have also brought along their cultures and traditions and have maintained relatively close ties to their “homeland” in a way that their “assimilationist predecessors did not.”

And yet, for those haunted by the darker side of nationalism (including many of Fury’s secondary characters), New York represents a place of opportunity where, regardless of where one is from and “the whole useless baggage of blood and tribe,” one can reinvent oneself and “receive the benison of being Ellis Islanded.” The potential for what Rushdie describes as “automorphosis” (i.e., transformation of the self) is what Americans believe to be “their own special, defining characteristic.” While this may be quite rewarding for some, the allure of “starting over” can also turn into a nightmare for others. This is, perhaps, most true in New York where life is a “race” where

[m]ere rats need not bother to enter this high-intensity competition. This [is] the main event, the blue riband contest, the world series. This [i]s the master race, whose winners would be […] gods. Second place was nowhere: “Loserville.” No silver or bronze would be struck, and the only rule was
victory or bust.\textsuperscript{73}

By viewing the act of reinvention as a doubled-edged sword, \textit{Fury} also invokes \textit{The Great Gatsby} whose “paradigmatic” hero is referred to as “the highest bouncer of them all,” who, after having “remade” himself “for love,” not only “failed […]”, but lived out, before he crashed, that brilliant, brittle, gold-hatted, exemplary American life.\textsuperscript{74}

The intertextual influence of \textit{Gatsby} is even more apparent throughout \textit{Netherland}, which re-imagines the classic American novel in the context of post-9/11 New York. Instead of Nick Carraway, we have Hans, for whom the city, to quote Fitzgerald, is always “seen for the first time, in its […] wild promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world,” a perspective that, according to O’Neill, is ingrained in the “newcomer’s imagination.”\textsuperscript{75} And taking the place of the iconic Jay Gatsby is Chuck Ramkissoon, a smooth-talking immigrant from Trinidad who, like his literary predecessor, pretends to be a self-made businessman who is taking advantage of the American Dream.\textsuperscript{76}

Yet, unlike Gatsby, what drives Ramkissoon is not an old flame or the irretrievable past but rather his love and devotion to the sport of cricket, which bonds and unites many of the characters throughout \textit{Netherland}. Through cricket, O’Neill presents the city as “a place where the unlikeliest of people can become friends and change one another’s lives.”\textsuperscript{77} In tackling the thorny question of what is “alien” to American culture, cricket, a “symbol of the un-American,” becomes a way for the
author to challenge the “boundary of American identity and vision.” In other words, to quote one of the novel’s peripheral characters, “[t]here’s a limit to what Americans understand [and that] limit is cricket.”

Few have understood the social implications of this sport as well as C.L.R. James, the West Indian writer and revolutionary, who once posed the question “What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?” For James, the cricket field was not only “a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles that were charged with social significance” but also where a certain “ethic” brought people with little in common together and broadened their worldviews as a result. In Beyond a Boundary, James recalls a scene from his childhood in colonial Trinidad (which remained a British colony until the 1950s), describing how cricket’s “imported code of stoicism and sportsmanship” was “the one unifying factor among the scattered islands of the Caribbean” and why its people were, according to George Lamming, “perhaps the most cosmopolitan race in the world.”

To quote James:

as soon as we stepped on to the [...] field, all was changed. We were a motley crew. The children of some white officials and white businessmen, middle-class blacks and mulattos, Chinese boys, some of whose parents still spoke broken English, Indian boys, some of whose parents could speak no English at all, and some poor black boys who had won exhibitions or whose parents had starved and toiled on plots of agricultural land [...]. Yet rapidly we learned to obey the umpire’s decision without question, however irrational
it was. We learned to play with the team, which meant subordinating your personal inclinations, and even interest, to the good of the whole. We kept a stiff upper lip in that we did not complain about ill-fortune. We did not denounce failures […]. We were generous to opponents and congratulated them on victories, even when we knew they did not deserve it. We lived in two worlds.\textsuperscript{83}

In \textit{Netherland}, New York is home to “bush cricket,” a “degenerate version” of the sport that is played on makeshift fields throughout the city (and as far away as Philadelphia or New Jersey).\textsuperscript{84} Through cricket, Hans comes into contact with a vibrant subculture where, as “the only white man,” he becomes acquainted with strangers who would ordinarily make “no intersection with the circumstances of [his] everyday life,” including Umar, a Pakistani cab driver who introduces him to the locals who devote their weekends to this “foreign” pastime that James likened to a “hot-house flower […] transplanted” from “another land.”\textsuperscript{85} Not surprisingly, what unites many of these amateurs is their link to the British Empire, which brought the sport to the Caribbean and many other parts of the world, including India and Pakistan, where it remains the one and only part of South Asian culture that “seems forever to be England.”\textsuperscript{86} Although it was originally intended to be an “instrument of socialization” for “distilling, constituting, and communicating the values” of Victorian society, cricket inadvertently became a way for colonials to forge anti-imperialist “sodalities that transcended class” and the limits of the colonial
Yet, in *Netherland*, cricket in its postcolonial context becomes “an immigrant’s imagined community, a game that unites […] Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, West Indians, and so on, even as the game’s un-Americanness accentuates their singularity.” Or, to quote Zadie Smith, what was “basically the Englishman’s game [was] adapted by the immigrant.”

For O’Neill, the irony is that despite its “unintelligibility” to most Americans, cricket was the first “team sport” to be played in North America and was followed by prominent Americans such as Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. In other words, the sport is “already in the American DNA.” But if cricket appears to be making a comeback (particularly in densely populated areas like New York and Miami), it is thanks to the recent influx of immigrants who have adopted it as an alternative to the national pastime of baseball, which after 9/11 became a rallying point for the country and its military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. By contrast, cricket, as represented in *Netherland*, provides a momentary refuge from the national hysteria of the War on Terror, which for Hans is brought closer to home when he has an unpleasant episode at the DMV and is unable to apply for a learner’s permit thanks to new regulations imposed by the Department of Homeland Security. As a result, the normally phlegmatic Dutchman becomes “seized for the first time by a nauseating sense of America, [his] gleaming adopted country, [is now] under the secret actuation of unjust, indifferent powers,” and is in part responsible for the
“transatlantic standoff” between him and his wife, who is afraid of raising their child in what she describes as an “ideologically diseased country.”

Later on, when Chuck offers some driving lessons in his Cadillac (which is “aglitter with banners and stickers of the Stars and Stripes and yellow ribbons in support of our troops”), Hans is introduced to a whole other side of the city, one that is populated by a variety of people who allow him to experience the world in one city. During one of their many drives, Hans comes upon Coney Island Avenue, that low-slung, scruffily commercial thoroughfare that stands in almost surreal contrast to the tranquil residential blocks it traverses, a shoddily bustling strip of […] synagogues, mosques, beauty salons, bank braches, restaurants, funeral homes, auto-body shops, supermarkets, assorted small businesses proclaiming provenances from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Ethiopia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Armenia, Ghana, the Jewry, the Christendom, Islam: it was on Coney Island Avenue […] that Chuck and I came upon a bunch of South African Jews, in full sectarian regalia, watching televised cricket with a couple of Rastafarians in the front office of a Pakistani-run lumberyard.

It is this other New York that inspires Chuck Ramkissoon with the idea of building a cricket stadium in one of the city’s abandoned ports. With more and more West Indians and South Asians relocating to the Eastern seaboard, Ramkissoon envisions a large untapped market for the exhibition of matches in North America. But what propels him is not the entrepreneurial spirit but rather the hope that his venture will
finally put the sport on the national map and, as he reasons, once America adopts cricket, it will do the same for its immigrants. Applying a logic that almost reeks of colonialism, Ramkissoon insists that the US is “not complete, [...] has not fulfilled its destiny, [is] not fully civilized, until it has embraced the game of cricket.”

This view, as the novel implies, is not only misguided but also misses the bigger point, which is that New York not only belongs to the nation but to the entire world as well. Or, as Ien Ang argues,

New York transcends that national dimension of US hegemony. New York is not “America,” but a global city that is the recognized capital of global modernity, a place characterized by the dynamism and energy of a transnational urbanism made and remade over the decades of the twentieth century by millions of immigrants from all over the world.

And yet, cricket as it is played in New York retains a special quality not only because of its departure from the traditional grassy setting but more importantly because it brings Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs together in a way that would be unlikely or impossible outside the backdrop of the global city.

In contrast to the America of The Great Gatsby which O’Neill has described as “a zone of exclusive opportunity and privileged possibilities,” the America described in Netherland is “just a geographic spot like any other for the global economy.” Or, as one of Chuck’s friends concludes, “you don’t need America. Why would you? [...] Not relevant.” In other words, one of the lessons of the
novel is that one needs the city more than the country in which it is located, which is why I would like to conclude my discussion of *Fury* and *Netherland* by briefly considering the question of what it means to identify a writer in terms of his or her affiliation with a city.

**Conclusion: A Tale of Two Writers and One City**

I don’t care about passports. Literature is located beyond flags and anthems, simple ideas of loyalty.
—Kiran Desai

For me it’s always been New York, not America.
—Salman Rushdie

*New Yorker* is a collective term. How many are we?
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

It is still taken for granted that the nation remains the most viable way to categorize the work of any writer or artist. In fact, many of the annual honors and prizes in the arts and humanities seem to only reaffirm this assumption. However, as Theodor Adorno points out in his discussion of what is German, the “ideal” tends to “suffer[…] at the expense of idealization” and “presupposes an autonomous collective entity” whose “characteristics” are only “determined after the fact.” In other words,

[i]t is uncertain whether there even is such a thing as the German person or a specifically German quality or anything analogous in other nations. The True and the Better in every people is much more likely that which does not adapt itself the collective subjective but, wherever possible, even resists it. The
fabrication of stereotypes, on the other hand, promotes collective narcissism. Those qualities with which one identifies oneself—the essence of one’s own group—imperceptibly become the Good; the foreign group, the others, Bad. Consequently, “those who most loudly proclaim Kant, Goethe or Beethoven as German property as a rule have the least concern for the contents of these authors’ works. They register them as possessions despite the fact that what these writers taught and produced precludes transformation into something that can be possessed.”

In the case of American literature, it has become increasingly difficult to assert whether such a singular “literary system” actually exists or how, if at all, its “borders” are to be “patrolled.” According to Jonathan Franzen, there is little to suggest that there is still such a thing as a common American culture; for the “primary fact about the country is that it is multipartite and eclectic and pluralistic,” thereby “mak[ing] a fool of anyone [today] who tries to write about Important American Themes.”

It is just as misguided to turn to the “global” as a way to compensate for all the texts that do not fall under the banner of a particular nation since, as Christopher Connery points out, there is no single literary work that “fills the desiderata” of such a category, which remains “inadequately available as an object of representation.”

Rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach to literature, I would like to modestly propose another label that is just as partial and applies to only a subset of
writers like Rushdie and O’Neill: namely, the global city writer. The work of such writers not only “involves the revision of national identity in light of postcolonial migrations and of selves constituted […] by displacement and diaspora” but also articulates a “city-derived citizenship that is disarticulated from” the nation state.\textsuperscript{107} In the case of Rushdie and O’Neill, New York functions as a literary space that is more “conditional” or “elastic” and allows both to align themselves with the city without necessarily being forced to assimilate into American subjects.\textsuperscript{108}

Also, thanks to the Internet and air travel, the act of migration appears to be less “decisive” today in that one can come and go as much as you want, “subject [of course] to legal and financial restrictions,” while staying in constant touch with family and friends back home. This relative ease in mobility has led to a greater destabilization of identity for many newer immigrants, who learn to call home whichever city they decide to settle in. But not all American cities are alike and what O’Neill refers to as America being “a welcoming place, where people [a]re less inclined to make judgments based on race or class” applies more to its densely populated urban areas than to the rest of the country, where immigration is still viewed in a less favorable light.\textsuperscript{109} Even Hans, the narrator of \textit{Netherland}, describes the smaller towns and cities he visits on business (Omaha, Oklahoma City, Cincinnati) as “Timbuktus, from [his] New Yorker’s vantage point.”\textsuperscript{110}

Therefore, for writers like Rushdie and O’Neill who profess to have “no deep roots” in any society and “no natural allegiances to any particular culture,” New
York, a city that is “more at home in the world than in its home country” (to quote Tony Judt once again), becomes the one (and perhaps only) place that they can call “home” and where the stories they tell about the city also become stories about the world at large.\textsuperscript{111}
Notes—Chapter 2


3 Quoted in Iyer, *Global Soul*, 106.


12 Two other novels, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), also contain sections which take place in North America but are for the most part set in South Asia. Also, unless otherwise noted, “New York” will refer to the city and not the state.

13 Salman Rushdie and Orhan Pamuk, interview by Deborah Treisman, *The New Yorker Festival*, October 05, 2007. Rushdie made a similar point in another interview, saying “I wanted to write about arrival. I didn’t want to pretend that I was Don DeLillo or Philip Roth or anyone who’d grown up in these streets. I wanted to write about the New York of people who come here and make new lives, about the ease with which stories from all over the world can become New York stories. Just by virtue of showing up, your story

14 Ibid.

15 Geoff Nunberg, “Parsing the Politics of ‘Main Street’,” Fresh Air from WHYY, October 08, 2008. As laughable as this characterization may sound, much of it still rings true in the national political discourse. Witness the 2008 presidential election and the rise of Sarah Palin, who often referred to “small town” values in her stump speeches while wearing the finest couture purchased from retail stores on Fifth Avenue in New York.

16 Kasinitz, 85.


23 Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands, 394.

24 Rushdie, interview by Rosemary Magee, “Creativity Conversation,” Emory University, February 01, 2008. Rushdie also says that once “you see yourself as an urban writer, you can inhabit a number of big cities. It’s not so hard to move from Bombay to London to New York. I sometimes [think] that the journey from a small Midwestern town to New York City might be a bigger journey than the journey from Bombay.”

25 Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands, 404. Although Rushdie came “out of hiding” in 1996, he did not actually settle down in the US until around 2000. His move was prompted by several factors including the breakup of his third marriage and a deep hatred for London’s literary scene, which he found to be rather smug and insular. Nor was he willing to forget the fact that a number of prominent British authors (including John Berger, Roald Dahl and John le Carré) had publicly expressed their sympathy for the Muslim reaction to The Satanic Verses (minus the fatwa) which infuriated Rushdie and his supporters and led to a rather nasty tit-for-tat within the British press.

75
Prior to *Netherland*, O’Neill worked as a reviewer for *The Atlantic* and several other publications.


Iyer, *Global Soul*, 29. Researchers also predict that by 2050 over 75% of the world’s population will be living in urban areas. Unfortunately, a vast majority will inhabit slum-infested megacities as described by Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).


Quoted in Kasinitz, *Metropolis*, 85.


*Netherland*, 30-31.


Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as Philosophical Issue,” 60.

Allen J. Scott, “The Cultural Economy of Cities,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 21.2 (June 1997), 323-324. It should be noted that not all of the goods associated with culture are immaterial or service-based. As Scott points out, many
“cultural products” are “extremely heterogeneous in their substance, appearance and sectoral origins. In some cases they emanate from traditional manufacturing sectors [...] (e.g. clothing, furniture or jewelry); in other cases, they are more properly thought of as services in the sense that they involve some personalized transaction or the production and transmission of information (e.g. tourist services, live theater or advertising); and in yet other cases, they may be thought of as a hybrid form (such as music recording, book publishing or film production).” 323-324. In the case of Spider-Man, for instance, you have the Marvel comics and film series as well as various ancillary products like toys and video games and more recently a Broadway musical, whose logistical and financial troubles have been widely discussed in the media.

44 Unlike the 1950s, when many young aspiring artists could find cheap housing, there are fewer unestablished artists today who can afford to live in the city.

45 In a perhaps misguided attempt to capture a totalized picture of this merger and its social consequences, Rushdie argues that New York in the year 2000 was part of “a period in which the two great industries of the future were being born. The industry of culture would in the coming decades replace that of ideology, becoming ‘primary’ in the way that economics used to be, and spawn a whole new nomenclatura of cultural commissars, a new breed of apparatchiks engaged in great ministries of definition, exclusion, revision, and persecution, and a dialectic based on the new dualism of defense and offense. And if culture was the world’s new secularism, then its new religion was fame, and the industry [...] of celebrity would give meaningful work to a new ecclesia, a proselytizing designed to conquer this new frontier.” Fury, 24.


48 Ong, “Please Stay,” 84.


Ibid., 698.

Ibid., 698-699.

Ibid., 707.


Ibid., 15.


Quoted in Peter Brooker’s Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1.


Fury, 6; 33; 87-88.

Fury, 55-56.

Fury, 56.


Fury, 51.

Fury, 55.

Fury, 213.

Fury, 79, 82.


Chuck’s business ventures include a kosher sushi restaurant and an underground numbers racket.


*C.L.R. James, Beyond a Boundary* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2005), preface.

Ibid., 88.

Quoted in Iyer, *Global Soul*, 244.

Ibid., 33.

*Netherland*, 7-9.

*Netherland*, 9-10; 19. The final quote is from *Beyond a Boundary*, 55.

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 89. In the case of Holland, Hans’s birthplace, cricket is a sport enjoyed by the ruling class whose players are “ghosts of sorts from an Anglophile past.” *Netherland*, 42.

Ibid., 91-92. See also Kenan Malik, “C.L.R. James by Farrukh Dhondy,” *New Statesman* (July 30, 2001).

James Wood, “Beyond a Boundary.”


One obvious example is the inclusion of “God Bless America” during the seventh-inning stretch.

*Netherland*, 68; 95-99.

*Netherland*, 146.

*Netherland*, 78-80.

*Netherland*, 210.


Quoted in Katie Bacon, “The Great Irish-Dutch American Novel,” *The Atlantic* (May 06, 2008). Reading *The Great Gatsby*, the references to the decline of the White race and the fear of intermarriage is another sign of how different things are today.

*Netherland*, 251. Chuck dies an untimely death and his wife, despite Hans’s objections that Chuck wished to be buried on American soil, takes his body back to Trinidad for burial.


Peter Catapano, “A New York State of Mind: An Interview with Salman Rushdie,”


Ibid., 122.


Christopher L. Connery, “Ideologies of Land and Sea: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Carl Schmitt, and the Shaping of Global Myth Elements,” boundary 2 28.2 (Summer 2001), 174. This is not to mention the fact that the literature of globalization has had very little to say about literature compared to visual and electronic media.


Netherland, 33.

Chapter 3

A Walker in the City

In the Footsteps of the Immigrant Flâneur

The flâneur appears in various forms [...] As a city stroller, the flâneur is at once a dreamer, a historian, and a modern artist, someone who transforms his observations into texts and images.
—Anke Gleber

The flâneur now walks abroad in many guises and in many texts.
—Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson

This chapter aims to revive the spirit of the flâneur, a once popular figure from the nineteenth century who was said to wander the streets of Paris, “botanizing” its “asphalt,” and whose apparent demise was brought on by the forces of modernization under Baron Haussmann along with the decline of the city’s arcades, “his” chosen stomping ground. And yet, as a “key figure in the critical literature of modernity and urbanization,” the flâneur, as I argue, remains with us today and can be found in the various depictions of immigrant life in the global city.

Although the flâneur as migrant makes a brief appearance in some of the works discussed in this dissertation (including Nederland whose central character refers to himself at one point as “trying out for the part of flâneur”), I will devote most of my attention here to a pair of recent novels—Chloe Aridjis’s Book of Clouds
(2009) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011)—which offer a unique and insightful take on the *flâneur*, and demonstrate why this aloof and mysterious figure who was immortalized in the work of Walter Benjamin, remains relevant to the study of urban life in the age of global migration.⁵

**City Walking: On the Art of Taking a Stroll**

Perception of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets.
—Raymond Williams⁶

[O]ne thing remains constant: the image of an observant and solitary man strolling […]
—Rebecca Solnit⁷

There is, to begin with, something quaint and all too familiar about the act of walking which, in practical terms, requires no money or planning (although a nice pair of sneakers are highly recommended). As a physical activity, walking not only promotes one’s health and well-being but is good for the planet as well. In short, to walk is to be on the side of “life.”⁸

And yet as more and more people live in big cities and work longer hours, the act of walking becomes reduced to a mode of transportation. The “time inbetween”—that is, the time it takes to travel from point A to point B—is increasingly viewed as idle or unproductive, demanding the latest distractions in mobile technology (beginning with the superannuated Walkman and continuing with today’s “smart” phones).⁹
In short, walking for the sake and pleasure of walking has lost much of its appeal. Therefore, we have lost touch with what Franz Hessel once called “the art of taking a stroll.” And no one perhaps was more familiar with this art form than Walter Benjamin, the itinerant *homme de lettres* who single-handedly revived the *flâneur* as a figure for “20th-century criticism.”

For Benjamin, the *flâneur* was synonymous with the casual stroller who “loves to wander through the streams of urban masses, anonymous in the throng, observing the spectacle of modern life.” “His passion and profession,” as Charles Baudelaire (Benjamin’s favorite poet) observed, “is to merge with the crowd,” which is “his domain, just as the air is the bird’s, and water that of the fish.”

However, the “truth” of the *flâneur* lies not in his appearance (often characterized as a “dandy”) or socio-historical context (i.e., Paris *sous le Second Empire*) than in his methodological approach to “reading” the city as a “text,” which opens up “the way for a micro-sociology of the urban daily life.” And in light of all that has happened since the mid-nineteenth century (it would be cynical to dismiss decolonization and the struggles against racism, sexism, and homophobia as merely “minor” developments), today’s *flâneur* can no longer assumed to be white, male, bourgeois or heterosexual. Rather, he or she takes on a variety of forms that “no matter how new they may appear, continue to bear his traces, as *ur*-form,” which in our case includes the transnational migrant who is trying to make sense of the city by traipsing through its dynamic and multilayered landscape.
Berlin Story: Chloe Aridjis’s Book of Clouds

The *flâneur* was, above all, someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company. This is why he seeks out the crowd.
—Walter Benjamin

Where to begin our journey but on the streets of Berlin, where Benjamin nurtured his life-long obsession with the city and its people. However, the Berlin I would like to discuss here is not that of *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (*Berlin Childhood around 1900*) but rather the German capital of today, which is home to a number of diasporas whose members began arriving after the creation of West Germany’s *Gastarbeiterprogramm* in the 1960s.

It is in reference to this modern and multicultural Berlin that I would like to open my discussion of Chloe Aridjis’s *Book of Clouds* [*BOC*], which follows the peregrinations of Tatiana, a Mexican Jew who arrives to the capital in 2002 for a year-long fellowship and finds herself five years later, surviving on a series of part-time jobs and a small monthly allowance (in the form of a money order) from her parents, which allows her to stay “afloat.” Despite her impecunious circumstances (not to mention lack of long-term prospects), Tatiana chooses to stay in the city and wander its streets as a “low-wage, immigrant *flâneur.*”

Her “impulse” to “find a new home” every ten to twelve months (having lived in a number of “dwelling[s]” throughout the city) reflects her restlessness and
discomfort with “domesticity,” which, as Keith Tester describes, happens to be one of the trademarks of the flâneur, for whom “the private world of domestic life is dull” and “devoid” of any “pleasure” that might be found in the “spectacle of the public.”  

Despite the cold and damp weather, Tatiana still finds herself “succumbing to the usual restlessness born of too much time between four walls” (whose spaces are all “too familiar, too elastic, too accommodating”) and often wanders alone in the nearby streets, where she spends many “loveless hours” trying to defamiliarize herself with her surroundings.

Her penchant to leave the house is also reinforced by her lack of companionship, which makes Sunday, a day that is spent for most Berliners in the company of family and loved ones, all the more unbearable. Unlike the rest of the week, which poses “no problem,” Sunday invariably becomes a day “to be reckoned with” as her solitude “harden[s]” into “loneliness.”  

Tatiana’s disdain for domesticity and the private sphere is perhaps ironic considering that women have traditionally been seen as a “problem of cities” and until recently were largely excluded from the “public world of work, city life, bars and cafes” (with the notable exception being that of the street walker).

While the flâneur is a “public” figure who, as Benjamin describes, “seeks refuge in the crowd,” he or, in this case, she is also a loner, alienated by the spectacle of modern society. This sense of being on the outside and inside is central to how the flâneur views the city, which involves a “play of proximity and distance” and
allows her to become privy to certain details often overlooked by the more casual observer. Therefore, what may appear as “incoherent” and “meaningless” to the untrained voyeur is in the eyes of the flâneur brought to life and “invest[ed] with significance.” As a result, the flâneur is “able to transform faces and things so that […] they have only meaning which he attributes to them.” In Tatiana’s case, this includes the various landmarks throughout the city, which help her map the city’s Byzantine topography, which can be “at once absorbing and alienating” like, to quote Robert Walser, “a wave-filled ocean that for the most part is still largely unknown to its own inhabitants.”

Not unlike the flâneur of the nineteenth century, Tatiana tends to be passive, preferring to watch people, places and things from a distance, as indicated by the following scene which takes place on the corner of a local bakery where she observes four boys crowd around a hatted woman as she opened a paper bag. Four pairs of impatient hands clutched at the cinnamon buns that were doled out, one by one. All of a sudden a gust of wind blew the woman’s hat off but the children failed to notice. Before the woman could react, a passing deliveryman jumped off his yellow bicycle and ran to fetch it. From inside the shop a baker watched.

Ironically, one of the few times in which she breaks this sense of detachment is when she stands outside a bar and spots a tiny dog with taut leather skin and a “sparse black mohawk.” Right away, she is able to identify it as a Xoloitzcuintle, a breed that is
native to Mexico and whose ancestry dates back to the time of the Aztec empire. The shock of finding a dog so far away from “home” and susceptible to the harsh “elements” of the local climate becomes for Tatiana a moment of self-recognition, realizing how alien(ated) she is from the day-to-day machinery of the city itself.\(^\text{28}\)

As an \textit{Ausländer}, Tatiana is also more prone to notice other “foreigners” like herself, whether they be the “young Vietnamese” smoking in front of the supermarkets or the dispirited Russians she finds at a nearby park and flea market. For Tatiana, \textit{flânerie} becomes a way for her to feel more at home in the city, where on certain days she feels “attached” and “assimilated,” and on others like “some kind of botched transplant with a few renegade veins.”\(^\text{29}\) Being on the “margins” of German society also forces Tatiana to seek “asylum” in the “anonymity of the crowd.”\(^\text{30}\) Not surprisingly, one of the things she fears most is a run-in with the German police and bureaucracy, which for her is represented by the local immigration office, which is housed in a “bleak concrete building” that she visits every two years to renew her visa and fills her with a sense of dread.\(^\text{31}\)

Tatiana’s status as an “outsider” is also reinforced by her lowly economic position. Since her arrival to the city, she has become a self-described “professional in lost time” for whom “[i]t was impossible to account for all the hours,” which are mostly spent walking around and observing local life.\(^\text{32}\) The city, as she describes, ran on its chronometric scale. Days would draw to a close and I would ask myself what had been accomplished, how to distinguish today from yesterday
and the day before.\textsuperscript{33}

This sense of being out of joint with the temporality of the city, along with a penchant for “idleness” and “slowness,” can also be read as “a demonstration against the division of labor” and the “temporality” of capitalist society in which one’s labor time, as Marx observed, is transformed into a commodity.\textsuperscript{34} Once she is no longer a student, she is forced to take on a string of jobs, ranging from the “requisite stint as au pair” and Spanish tutor to working at a copy center, health food shop and indoor skating rink.\textsuperscript{35}

Fortunately, her final job in the city turns out to be as a transcriber or “mechanical ear” for Friedrich Weiss, a retired historian who specializes in the “phenomenology” of the city (among the imaginary titles for Weiss’s books are \textit{Berlin: The Wounded City}; \textit{Walter Benjamin & Joseph Roth}; \textit{Berlin Chroniclers Between Wars}; \textit{Musings from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain}), arguing that “[s]paces cling to their pasts” and that “sometimes the present finds a way of accommodating this past and sometimes it doesn’t.”\textsuperscript{36}

Through her job of transcribing Weiss’s tape-recorded musings, Tatiana develops a keener sense of the city’s history and its “hauntedness.” Berlin, which she refers to at one point as “omphalos of evil,” remains in part a Gothic city whose “ghostly” remnants include the famous Reichstag, the Holocaust Memorial (officially known as \textit{Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas} [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe]), and the appropriately named \textit{Topographie des Terrors}, which serve
as a reminder of Germany’s descent into fascism.\textsuperscript{37}

While “[p]art of the pleasure” of reading \textit{BOC}, as Amelia Atlas observes, is “its catalogue of Berlin minutiae,” many of the novel’s “details are never without their ghostly counterparts” and indicate how “haunting,” to borrow from Avery Gordon, has become a “constituent element of modern social life” in Berlin.\textsuperscript{38} And to become truly familiar with this city, one must “confront” its “ghostly aspects” which “can lead [us] to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” and create interesting characters like the \textit{flâneur}.\textsuperscript{39} However, this notion of the \textit{haunted} city is not just limited to Berlin but applies to a number of other cities as well, including New York, the location for the other novel discussed in this chapter.

\textbf{Walkabout: Open City and the Immigrant \textit{Flâneur}}

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—this calls for quite a different schooling.

—Walter Benjamin\textsuperscript{40}

The role of the immigrant \textit{flâneur} also figures quite prominently in Teju Cole’s \textit{Open City}, which tells the story of Julius, a young Nigerian psychiatrist doing his residency at a New York hospital. The novel opens in 2006 as he recounts his nightly walks throughout the city, which serve as a “counterpoint” to his busy days at work.\textsuperscript{41} Like Tatiana, Julius can be described as a loner who prefers to roam the city and take in its scenery and constant activity. As he wanders through the local streets
and neighborhoods, he is “able to live in thought and reverie” and reflect on a variety of matters, ranging from his personal life—which is marked by the failed relationships with his mother and long-distant girlfriend—to the city and its rich but troubled history.42

Julius’s walks, which usually begin in Morningside Heights, lead him “farther and farther afield” (sometimes forcing him to ride the subway home) and take him to what he describes as the “busy parts of town” where he runs into “more people […] than [he] was accustomed to seeing in the course of a day,” which ironically does little to “assuage [his] feelings of isolation.”43

Since his professional life involves a “regimen of perfection and competence” in which there is little room for improvisation or mistakes, the streets not only provide a welcome relief but also allow him to feel once again like a dilettante.44 By wandering the city without a specific “purpose” or destination, Julius finds himself drawn closer to the “attractions of the terrain” and the “encounters” that one might “find there.”45 This also reflects the pleasure he takes in meandering, which is wonderfully described in the opening of Sven Birkerts’ The Other Walk, which describes the sense of liberation that is felt in breaking the tide of “[h]abit and repetition:”

This morning, going against all convention, I turned right instead of left and took my circuit—one of my circuits—in reverse. Why hadn’t I thought of this before, given that the familiarity of the other loop has become so oppressive,
even to one who swears by the zen of familiarity, the main tenet being that if you are bored with what you’re seeing, you’re not seeing clearly enough, not looking? Still, going against the grain of my usual track, seeing every single thing from the other side, was suddenly welcome.\textsuperscript{46}

In the case of Julius, the act of wanderning offers a look into the daily life of the city and the negotiations of culture, race and identity that occur on its streets.\textsuperscript{47} A good illustration of this is when he takes a detour in Harlem, where he finds two “cultures”—namely, African and African-American—meshed together and represented by the brisk trade of sidewalk salesmen: the Senegalese cloth merchants, the young men selling bootleg DVDs, the Nation of Islam stalls. There were self-published books, dashikis, posters on black liberation, bundles of incense, vials of perfume and essential oils, djembe drums, and little tourist tchotchkes from Africa. One table displayed enlarged photographs of early-twentieth-century lynchings of African-Americans.\textsuperscript{48}

The scene described above is not just the product of Afrocentrism (as in the celebration of Kwanzaa) but also reflects an important demographic shift within the American population in which more and more “blacks” are arriving from Africa than during the time of slavery.\textsuperscript{49} No doubt, as someone born and raised in Nigeria, Julius is a part of this new diaspora, despite being half-German on his mother’s side. Unlike the conventional \textit{flâneur} of the nineteenth century, who was able to retain his
anonymity by being “the man of the crowd,” Julius is aware of his skin color whenever he is greeted by strangers who share the same “ethnicity,” not to mention that in the “Harlem night,” there are “no whites” to be found anywhere.°

But as soon as Julius leaves Harlem, his attention turns to a Blockbuster Video nearby his apartment which, in contrast to the makeshift stands in Harlem, is going out of business. Contemplating the role of the market in neighborhoods like his, Julius concludes that if Blockbuster “couldn’t make it,” it only “meant that [their] business model had been fatally damaged.”  While he feels no sympathy for “faceless national corporations” like Blockbuster or Tower Records, which “made their profits and their names by destroying smaller, [...] local businesses” and are now fading like old empires, he is nonetheless disturbed by the “swiftness and dispassion with which the market swallowed even the most resilient enterprises.” This instance of what might be called the “creative destruction” of capital’s invisible hand leads him to observe that businesses which had seemed unshakeable a few years previously had disappeared in the span, seemingly, of a few weeks. Whatever role they played passed on to other hands, hands that would feel briefly invincible and would, in their turn, be defeated by unforeseen changes. These survivors would also come to be forgotten.

This sense of fragility and impermanence (as Marx described in his famous line “all that is solid melts into air”), which is “symptomatic of the violence inherent in
capitalism’s configuration of the space of the production and reproduction of its social relations,” is in spatial terms signified by the void of the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan.  However, as Julius points out, this is hardly the “first” instance of “erasure” on this particular site, which has had a long history of urban renewal and redevelopment.  Prior to the construction of the World Trade Center, which demolished over a dozen square blocks of property, there had been a bustling network of little streets traversing this part of town. Robinson Street, Laurens Street, College Place: all of them had been obliterated in the 1960s to make way for the World Trade Center buildings, and all were forgotten now. Gone, too, was the old Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwives, the Christian Syrian enclave that was established here in the late 1800s. The Syrians, the Lebanese, and other people from the Levant had been pushed across the river to Brooklyn […]. And, before that? What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble? The site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten.

Like the Angel of History in Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” (a work that is referred to in the novel), Julius has his face “turned towards the past” and views its “chain of events” as “one single catastrophe.”

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It is nearby “9/11” (as a tourist refers to Ground Zero) that Julius comes upon a very strange site, at least for a flâneur like himself. What he notices is the “glass
frontage” of a sports club, behind which lie rows of stationary bicycles occupied by men and women in Lycra who stare out at pedestrians like him.58 This image, which recurs throughout the first part of the novel, suggests that the art and practice of flânerie is out of sync with today’s society and that the “perspective of the solitary individual” is no longer appreciated.59

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is when Julius takes a walk one Sunday morning along the Upper West Side. As he heads towards Columbus Circle, he comes upon a throng of spectators who are cheering on the runners of the New York Marathon, an activity that is diametrically opposed to flânerie and, in Julius’ case, is prohibited by the “bad lungs [he had] as a child.”60

Banished by the crowd who are watched over by mounted police, Julius decides to curtail his morning walk and visit Saito, a retired English professor who taught him Beowulf and Shakespeare when he was an undergraduate and, now at 89, plays the role of a “grandfatherly figure” (not unlike Prof. Weiss in Book of Clouds). During their conversations, Saito reflects on his past as a Japanese American growing up in the Pacific Northwest. Just as he was about to finish his D. Phil in England, he was forced to return to the US and was sent to a camp in Idaho. He recalls being “confused about what was happening” to him since he was “American” and “had always thought” of himself as such.61

The reference to the Japanese American internment camps also recalls the more recent renditions and detentions in Guantanamo Bay and the wholesale
discrimination against Muslims in the West after 9/11 and the War on Terror. For Julius, this subject is brought closer to home when he visits Belgium and befriends Farouq, a young Moroccan immigrant working at an Internet café. Throughout their conversations (where the notions of difference and otherness are often brought up), Farouq describes what it’s like to live as a Muslim in Belgium, where the idea and practice of multiculturalism is still a novelty that sits uneasily with much of the population. After a Flemish man is allegedly killed by two Arabs and a journalist launches a public tirade against the “murdering, thieving, raping Vikings from North Africa,” Julius becomes more aware of his “presentation” as a “dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger,” which is why he fears becoming the “target” of “inchoate rage” and decides, as a “precaution,” to “cut down on the length of [his] late-night walks” in the city. Despite the fact that “exile” appears to be meaningless in a world where “everyone goes and comes freely,” Julius’ visit to Brussels only confirms that not all cities are as “open” or welcoming as New York, where he feels more or less free to wander as an immigrant flâneur.

The title Open City suggests a utopian view of the city in which “hospitality” is “unconditional” and where the “right of refuge” applies to each and every migrant including refugees and asylum-seekers. This other city, as suggested by Derrida, dreams “of another concept, of another set of rights for the city, of another politics of the city,” one in which the “law of cosmopolitanism,” as defined several centuries ago by Kant, “must be restricted to the conditions of universal hospitality.” In other
words, a *cosmopolis* that is composed of refugees, postcolonial subjects and other migrants to whom local citizens as cosmopolites offer hospitality [...] [and] accept the other with his or her cultural differences [...] In turn, they expect others [...] to insert themselves respectfully in the city that welcomes them and that transforms them at the same time that it too is being transformed.67

Opposed to this sanguine interpretation is the city that is occupied or under attack, fighting to “prevent [the] physical destruction of its infrastructure” (which is also associated with Roberto Rossellini’s 1945 neorealist drama *Roma, città aperta*).68 The one thing that matters in this version of the “open city” is what type of immigrant you are, as Julius realizes when he visits a detention facility in Queens and interviews an undocumented man from Liberia, who applied for asylum but was rejected and is awaiting deportation. Despite their common West African heritage, these two immigrants could hardly be less similar and demonstrate how “migration itself is not a singular experience; [rather] it takes place under a multitude of conditions and circumstances, for different—economic, political, personal—reasons, in vastly varied contexts.”69

However, in the case of the first African settlers, these distinctions were only minor at best, as Julius notes in his observation of Ellis Island, “the focus of so many myths,” which “had been built too late for those early African—who weren’t immigrants in any case” and who “had known rougher ports of entry.”70
Tatiana, Julius is aware of the city’s darker past, including its involvement in slavery and the genocide of Native Americans. During one of his daytime strolls, he wanders the streets of downtown Manhattan and stumbles upon a memorial for an African burial ground in which “fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves” were interred and above which stands the Civic Center and its supply of “office buildings, shops, streets, diners [and] pharmacies.” Although he is wary of people trying to “lay claims” on him on the basis of race, including an African cabdriver and a Barbudan who tells him “I’m African just like you,” he is at the same time aware of what it means to be a black man walking in the city and how in the past people like him were unable to roam so freely as today. Ironically, the one time that he finds himself in real physical danger is when he passes by two African American men who give him a glance, which he (mis)interprets as a “gesture of mutual respect based on our being young, black, male; based, in other words, on our being ‘brothers.’” Such glances, as he describes, were exchanged between black men all over the city every minute of the day, a quick solidarity worked into the weave of each man’s mundane pursuits, a nod or smile or quick greeting. It was a way of saying, I know something of what life is like for you out here.

What is initially viewed as a sign of kinship is later understood to be a sizing up and thus a prelude to a violent mugging. What lesson we are supposed to draw from this incident is, however, not so clear, other than that Julius’s misreading of this situation
is perhaps very unflâneur-like.

On the one hand, there is the sense that what makes Julius stand out from others and feel like an outsider is not only his identity as a black man, but also as a flâneur. It is perhaps no surprise that one of the few times he feels “conspicuous” is when he is the “only person among the crowd who stop[s] to look” at what’s around him. It is in this sense that the flâneur is akin to a “minority” figure since so much of what she is and does is at odds with the rest of society.

On the other hand, it must be said that Julius is not like your more conventional flâneur. Many of his observations derive from the fact that he is an immigrant who is new to the city. As a result, most of his sympathy lies with other (more stationary) immigrants, whether they be the “old Berliner” and his wife who run a museum shop; the Chinese erhu players and accompanying dancers in the park; or the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler who was “a New Yorker for the last three years of his life” (before returning to Vienna just in time to die).

In the penultimate scene of the novel, Julius, who has decided to take a permanent job in the city (which was not a difficult choice since “[r]emaining here in the city is the only choice that makes emotional sense”), attends a performance of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, which was composed in New York and premiered posthumously. Although Julius becomes aware of his “appearance” as soon as he steps inside Carnegie Hall and takes a seat (never ceasing to be surprised “how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of
which [...] causes no discomfort to the whites in them”), he soon finds himself “weary[ing] of such thoughts” while professing his utopian belief that Mahler’s music “is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question.” The same can be said for the global city where, according to Ben Okri, a fellow Nigerian, “lives the great music/Of humanity” from which can be heard “the harmonisation of different/ Histories, cultures, geniuses/ And dreams.” And no one, perhaps, is more attuned to the city’s harmonies and discordant sounds than the immigrant flâneur who, like her nineteenth-century counterpart, remains the “personification” of “urbanity” today. Which is also why contemporary writers like Teju Cole and Chloe Aridjis have “recast” the flâneur in their own image as their novels attempt to “make sense of the changed and changing social and cultural landscape” of the modern globalized city.

If, as Iain Sinclair declares, you must “belong to a place before you are qualified to speak” about it, then this begs the question of what it means to “belong to a place,” particularly a city like Berlin or New York, which contains far “more than any [single] inhabitant can know.” This dilemma, however, is one that confronts millions of new arrivals for whom the city appears as a maze that is forbidding in terms of richness and complexity. Unlike the “natives” who take the space of the city for granted and mistake walking as a form of “exercise” the flâneur reminds us that the first step in claiming a part of the city is through the act of walking, which for
many occurs step by step.\textsuperscript{83}
Notes—Chapter 3


3 Questions concerning the gender of the flâneur or flâneuse and whether such a figure “can only be male,” as Janet Wolff argues, will be addressed in my discussion of Book of Clouds, which presents a female protagonist who in many respects resembles the nineteenth-century flâneur. See Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity” Theory, Culture & Society 2.3 (1985), 37.


5 Netherland (New York: Vintage, 2008), 91. Similarly, in Fury (New York: Modern Library, 2002), Rushdie describes a scene in which Malik Solanka is “rub[bing] shoulders” with others and discovers that there is “a satisfying anonymity in the crowds, an absence of intrusion. Nobody here was interested in his mysteries. Everyone was here to lose themselves.” Fury, 7. Also, see Chapter 1 for a brief discussion of flânerie in terms of Michel de Certeau’s theory of reinscribing urban spaces through the act of walking.


8 Ibid., xi.

9 Ibid., xiii.


13 Quoted in Tester, The Flâneur, 2.


18 This term is borrowed from the Bosnian-American writer Aleksandar Hemon, who
describes the urban experience of wandering as his “main means of communication with the city.” Aleksandar Hemon, “Mapping Home,” New Yorker (December 05, 2011), 42-47.

19 BOC, 10; Tester, The Flâneur, 2.

20 BOC, 11; 26. A funny scene that illustrates her obsession with walking occurs when she is asked by a young German man what she is doing the upcoming Saturday. Tatiana answers, “Going for a walk.” “All night?” he asks. Her reply: “No, during the day.” BOC, 65.

21 BOC, 16. Nor is Tatiana a fan of the countryside, of which she says: “There are few things more irksome than the stillness of a country night, far from the hum and crackle of modernity. The unbroken darkness would of course be welcome but not the thought of being the only soul awake for miles nor […] of handing oneself over to the psychosis that remote places inspire.” BOC, 48.

22 Elizabeth Wilson, “The Invisible Flâneuse,” New Left Review I/191 (January-February 1992), 90, 93. The annual parade known as “Slut Walk,” which argues against the notion that sexual violence is somehow provoked by how a woman dresses or acts, attests to the perseverance of this notion of women as an urban problem.


28 BOC, 17-18.

29 BOC, 24.


31 BOC, 83.

32 BOC, 15.

33 BOC, 15-16.


35 BOC, 27.

36 BOC, 33; 42.

37 BOC, 25.
39 Gordon, Ghostly Matters, 7-8.
42 Rebecca Solnit, Wanderlust, 21.
43 Open City, 6. Ironically, Morningside Heights was once described by Jane Jacobs as a “surly kind of slum in which people fear to walk the streets.” Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Vintage, 1961), 6.
44 Open City, 7.
48 Open City, 18.
49 Sam Roberts, “More Africans Enter U.S. Than in Days of Slavery,” New York Times (February 21, 2005). Not surprisingly, the majority of these new migrants are drawn to large metropolitan cities like New York, Los Angeles and Miami. Also, as Roberts points out, the number of African immigrants in the US pales in comparison to their Caribbean counterparts.
50 Open City, 18.
51 Open City, 19.
52 Open City, 19.
54 Open City, 58.
55 Open City, 59. One can only imagine how much worse lower Manhattan would be today had Robert Moses been allowed to build his proposed expressway there, a project that was quashed thanks to the valiant efforts of Jane Jacobs and other local activists. See Anthony Flint’s Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City (New York: Random House, 2009).
According to Cole, this is an example of “place” becoming a “metonym of its disaster.”


Julius’s point may be ironic considering that so many of the marathons in the US are won by runners from Africa.

Farouq, whose dream was to become “the next Edward Said,” also happens to be a graduate student who is well read in critical theory and namedrops people like Gilles Deleuze and Gaston Bachelard.


Indeed, one of the more surreal moments in the novel occurs when Julius mistakenly sees the “body of a lynched man dangling from a tree.” Open City, 75.
Ben Okri, “Lines in Potentis,” http://www.tate.org.uk/40artists40days/ben_okri.html. See also the introduction of this dissertation.

Keith Tester, ed., The Flâneur, 22.

Ibid., 23.


CHAPTER 4
“Happy Seoul for Foreigners”

Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in the New Asian City

Seoul is [...] Korea’s window on the world.
—Richard Child Hill and June Woo Kim

For the final chapter of this dissertation, I would like to turn our attention to Seoul, the capital of South Korea (henceforth Korea), which has throughout the last decade attempted to refashion itself as a global city and is thus attracting more and more settlers from around the world. But rather than focusing on the figure of the professional nomad, who plays a central role in my analysis of Fury and Netherland and is undoubtedly the beneficiary of certain class and educational privileges, I want to consider the case of the irregular migrant worker from the Global South, who is largely ignored by the media and whose uneasy presence is viewed by many Koreans as a “necessary evil” in today’s globalized economy.\(^3\)

Despite being at the bottom of the pecking order, the figure of the migrant worker appears in a number of “minor Korean films” which, as Rob Wilson describes, are “more expressive of minority angles of vision, socially occluded perspectives and local voices, undeveloped characters, urban or rural hinterlands, drifting visual modes, narrative digressions, low-tech inscriptions of minor and marginal communities, and a more fully dialectal warping of voice and angle of
After a discussion of multiculturalism in Korea and its relation to the impact of urbanization, I would like to look at three films “wrought in [the] minor mode” that address the plight of the migrant worker and raise the possibility of a vernacular cosmopolitanism in a society that remains insular in terms of its attitudes towards the other.

**A Multicultural Korea? Life in the Age of One Million Foreigners**

[M]any Koreans are still sticking to the belief that Korea is an ethnically homogenous country. The misconception has alienated so many non-Koreans. Concerted pan-national efforts are needed to get rid of this myth and acclimate ourselves to the emerging multicultural society.

—Seok Dong-hyeon, Korea Immigration Service

Korea no longer has to decide whether it wants to become a multicultural society. It made that decision years ago – perhaps unconsciously – when it decided to be a full participant in the emerging global economy. It confirmed that decision when it decided to actively recruit foreign migrants to meet the economic and demographic needs of a fast-growing society.

—Stephen Castles

Back in 2006, during the annual fall harvest festival known as *Chuseok*, a number of viewers in Korea tuned into a special broadcast on the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) featuring a panel of Westerners describing life as a “foreigner” (*waegukin*) on the southern half of the peninsula. For the audience, what was unique and appealing about the program was that all of its guests were able to speak in fluent Korean and could offer a wide range of opinions about Korean society without the aid of a translator, who might be liable to distort or misconstrue what was
being said. Thanks to the unexpected popularity of the broadcast, which was widely discussed among Korea’s “netizens,” KBS decided to launch “Chitchat of the Beautiful Ladies” (Minyeodeurui suda), a weekly one-hour show hosted by the comedian Nam Hui-seok. The program, which premiered the following month and later became known as “Global Talk Show,” ran for nearly three years and featured women of various nationalities who would offer (in Korean) their “candid” insights and opinions about the “cultural differences” between Korea and their respective countries (much of which, as we later learned, was scripted by the show’s writers).

In a poorly worded synopsis on KBS’s English-language website, the show is described as a public forum where ladies from many different cultures talk about what is good and bad, funny and boring, and making sense and nonsense [sic] in Korea. [...] Talk show with a new concept. Korea is a country where purity in lineage has been upheld for tens of centuries. Now with more than 1 million foreigners who are making Korea their home, Korea tries to become a multi-cultural country.

The final sentence refers to a 2007 report by the Korean Ministry of Justice which declared that the country’s foreign population had for the first time topped the one-million mark, accounting for over two percent of the total population of 48 million. While this may seem trivial by Western standards (that is, compared to 33% in London and 37% in New York), few can deny the increasingly visible presence of
Korea’s “foreign” population—most notably in the Seoul Metropolitan Area which includes the neighboring cities of Incheon and Ansan—and its impact on the national psyche, thereby transforming the way that Koreans regard themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{12}

Overnight, Korea, a nation that had long prided itself on its single “bloodline” (a view that is more or less shared by its Northern counterpart), transformed itself into a “multicultural society” (\textit{damunhwa sahoe}), at least according to local politicians and journalists who have overplayed Korea’s “diversity” as a way to boost its standing within the international community and acquire more recognition and respect from its G20 allies.\textsuperscript{13} One notable figure who has attracted considerable attention is Hines Ward, the former wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers who was crowned MVP of Super Bowl XL. Ward, the biracial son of a Korean mother and African American father, was invited to Seoul in 2006 and was “hailed as a proud son of Korea and a symbol of what Korea might achieve if it could cease to call itself a single-raced nation.”\textsuperscript{14} In light of his visit, President Roh Moo-hyun took the opportunity to stress “the need to stop teaching ethnic homogeneity” by promoting “the tenets of multiculturalism” and vowed to increase the funding for NGOs devoted to the welfare of foreign wives and biracial children (who are ostracized by their “full-blooded” peers and have the highest dropout rates in public schools).\textsuperscript{15}

What the “Hines Ward phenomenon” and other recent developments (including the election of Jasmine Lee, a naturalized Korean citizen from the
Philippines, who became the nation’s first foreign-born legislator) indicate is the extent to which Korea’s multiculturalism is orchestrated by those in a position of power like, for example, Jun Byung-hun, a lawmaker for the Democratic Party (Minjudang) who in 2009 proposed an anti-discrimination bill in the National Assembly.\(^\text{16}\) If anything, this state-driven multiculturalism reflects a desire to take on globalization as a “nationalist” project, which on the surface contradicts the more commonly-held claims about globalization as a “deterritorialized phenomenon.”\(^\text{17}\) Since the inauguration of Kim Young-sam, the Republic’s first civilian president, in 1993, Korea has actively pursued a top-down approach to globalizing its economy, which is currently ranked as the world’s thirteenth largest. At the heart of this worlding project, officially known as segyehwa, is a drive to turn Seoul into a premier global city while “instantiating” the country’s “claims to global significance.”\(^\text{18}\) In fact, much of the nation’s rapid development since the postwar period—or what many pundits like to refer to as “the miracle on the Han River”—has been closely linked to its full-scale urbanization along with the rising fortunes of its capital which, like Tokyo and Taipei, has benefited from a geographical and social concentration of labor, capital and power. According to one survey, no other country in the last century has urbanized itself as rapidly as Korea, which in the span of just four decades went from being over 80% rural to 80% urban, a fact that corresponds with its rise in the Pacific Rim and Seoul’s arrival as a New Asian City.\(^\text{19}\)

And yet the drive to urbanize Korea seems far from over or complete.\(^\text{20}\) Take
the case of Oh Se-hoon, the former mayor of Seoul, who, like his predecessor Lee Myung-bak (who was known to Seoumites as “the Bulldozer”), was smitten by all things global and during his tenure (2006-2011) launched a series of “beautifying projects” to make Seoul a place where “foreign nationals can live [more]
comfortably,” including a costly redevelopment project in Yongsan that led to a
deadly confrontation between local tenants and the police.21 Also, by promoting more
service centers that cater to non-Koreans (including five-star hotels, Michelin-calibre
restaurants and a state-of-the-art international airport), Oh hoped to turn the city into a
21st-century rival of Hong Kong or Singapore.22

While this may sound like welcome news for travelers or “global souls”
visiting a part of the world that was once forbiddingly known as the “Hermit
Kingdom” (and where, according to Peter Underwood, “just a century and a half ago,
being a foreigner was a capital crime”), it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on
the term “foreign national” and what it says about the role of multiculturalism in
Korean society.23

In terms of its demography, Korea is “not the same society it was even a
decade ago.”24 Among the million-plus foreigners currently residing in the country (a
figure that is expected to quadruple by 2050), nearly half are from China, many of
Korean descent and are for the most part treated as second-class citizens (in contrast
to the preferential treatment of overseas Koreans from North America and
Australia).25 The Korean Chinese, joseonjok, also make up the bulk of the migrant
workers who have arrived since the 1988 Olympics to take up positions that are no longer wanted by the local population, including the physically-demanding 3D (dirty, difficult, dangerous) jobs.\textsuperscript{26}

In fact, one sign of Korea’s newfound wealth and influence is that it is now primarily a labor-importing country, flying in workers from all around the world (including parts of Africa). Along with a sharp rise in the foreign population, there is also a greater range of cultures on display, as witnessed by the variety of restaurants (Thai, Turkish, Bulgarian, Uzbekistani, South African) that have popped up throughout the city, not to mention the frequent appearance of non-Korean faces on film and television who often serve to affirm the more unique and singular aspects of Korean culture or cuisine.\textsuperscript{27} However, amid the hype and hoopla surrounding multiculturalism, it is Korea’s unskilled migrants who are the least represented in the spotlight. Unlike the many privileged “expats” who appear on programs like “Global Talk Show,” much of the foreign proletariat live in the shadows of Korean society and work for low wages, saving whatever they can to remit to their families back home.

A perfect illustration of this disconnect between appearance and reality can be found in the romantic comedy \textit{Seducing Mr. Perfect} (\textit{Miseuteo Robin ggosigi}, 2006) in which Robin Heiden (Daniel Henney), a Harvard-educated corporate raider, comes to Seoul and, unbeknownst to everyone (including the audience), acquires a Japanese company in order to honor the memory of his late grandfather, a devoted
employee of the same company who “worked himself to death.” This veiled and ultimately meaningless reference to the exploitation of Korean labor implies that such practices are a thing of the past and that all Koreans today are upwardly mobile like Min Joon (Uhm Jung-hwa), the film’s narrator and Robin’s love interest, who in the opening scene describes her love for the city, which is where she acquires her “share of nature” at one of the many “organic restaurants” or indulge in her “beloved trinity” of coffee, shopping, and entertainment.

The picture of Seoul presented in the film is more akin to a postcard than life as we know it in the New Asian City, which, as Jini Kim Watson describes, is marked by a breakneck style of development that challenges the traditional (i.e. Western) view of urbanization and, in the three “minor” films I will analyze, provides another perspective on the relationship between the migrant and the city.28

**Minority Report: Multiculturalism and Korea’s Independent Scene**

As part of a new wave of independent films being produced outside of Chungmuro (the local equivalent of Hollywood), Shin Dong-il’s *Bandhobi* (2009) tells the story of two individuals left behind by the “progress” of urbanization in Korea. The first is Karim (Mahbub Alam), a poor migrant worker from Bangladesh who is living on the outskirts of Seoul and in search of a runaway boss who owes him a year in back wages. The second is Min-seo (Baek Jin-hee), a feisty high school student who lives with her single mother and, unlike most of her peers, cannot afford to attend any of the private institutions (*hagweon*) that prepare students like her for
their university entrance exams.

The first time we see the two of them together is at a bus stop after Min-seo’s classmates are picked up by a local *hagweon* shuttle. Later on, when Karim misplaces his wallet and finds it hidden in Min-seo’s school bag, he tries to haul her into a police station but changes his mind after she promises to do him a “favor.” It is from this chance encounter that an unlikely friendship is born, the kind that seems only possible in a big city like Seoul where a sense of “conviviality” becomes possible through the spontaneous interaction between different cultures. And by crossing the barriers of race, class and gender that would normally keep them apart, both come to realize how much they have in common.

Ironically, the second time they meet is outside a police station after both have been arrested. In Karim’s case, the act of being a good Samaritan turns awry when he tries to break up a fight between two men at a convenience store and is accused of knocking one of them down. Worse yet, he is forced to listen to a xenophobic rant by his accuser who complains about all the foreigners who are supposedly taking away jobs from other Koreans.

While Karim’s polite attitude and manners make him appear as “an overly nice, passive figure,” the same can hardly be said for Min-seo, who prefers to take matters into her own hands, as illustrated in the scene prior to her arrest at a gas station, where she works in order to pay for English lessons with a “native speaker.” After her boss refuses to help her out with an advance, she decides to vent her
frustration on his spoiled *baeksu* son by squirting fuel all over him and his new convertible.32

This minor form of class warfare draws attention to the fact that many working women in Korea are also victims of economic discrimination. Because they tend to be viewed as “non-essential workers,” most are limited in terms of their career prospects and are often the first to be laid off during a “restructuring” period.33 However, the one “option” that many young women like Min-seo have is to sell their bodies—or, in this case, hand—to the sex industry. Desperate to finance her private education, Min-seo takes a job at a “massage parlor,” providing “hand jobs” to the middle-aged customers. Regardless of how awful or degrading this work may be, it seems almost leisurely compared to Karim’s job at an industrial laundry, which, as Min-seo observes, has left his hands badly chapped and blistered. Another important contrast applies to the length of time that Karim is allowed to live and work in Korea (a worry that does not obviously concern Min-seo). Once his visa expires, Karim is required by law to fly back to Bangladesh in order to come back to Korea and work under a new visa, a process that is meant to discourage long-term residency (a lesson learned from Germany’s *Gastarbeiter* program) and, in Karim’s case, leads to his subsequent deportation after he overstays his visa and works illegally.

In addition to the theme of class solidarity, what resonates most strongly about *Bandhobi* is its depiction of a friendship between two people who are brought together by “the heartless mores of the global-driven city.”34 By the time that Karim
is locked up and awaiting deportation, all that remains between him and Min-seo is the memory of a relationship that has changed the way they view the other. Although her desire to learn English indicates a sense of what Park and Abelmann describe as “cosmopolitan striving,” it is her friendship with Karim that provides her a truer sense of what it means to be at home in the world today.35

Perhaps it is only fitting that the film closes with a touching yet bittersweet scene in which Min-seo, who is slightly older and better dressed, visits a restaurant located in the Muslim quarter of Itaewon (formerly the red-light district of Seoul that is known today for its large foreign population). After she orders several dishes and one item that is off the menu, the waiter tells her that he is impressed by her knowledge of Bangladeshi cuisine, to which she replies that she has a “friend.”

During the final shot, which rolls over the closing credits, Min-seo is sitting alone, staring at the food that is spread out before her. She begins—perhaps as a tribute to her friend—by scooping up some rice and curry with her right hand before switching over to a fork. Although we have no idea why she is nicely dressed or what she has been doing since Karim’s departure, all we know is that this friendship has left an indelible mark on her life and that, thanks to Karim, she is more worldly in her outlook.

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The title, Bandhobi, a Bangladeshi term for “female friend” and the last word spoken in the film, is a reminder of how the notion of friendship remains not only
loosely defined but has the potential to transcend the categorical “fault lines” of class, culture, religion, gender and ethnicity. Such a relationship, as Sandra Lynch argues, is able to develop, despite its fragility, despite our ‘fundamental separation’ from the other and the potential for enmity. [...] It may require being prepared to tolerate difference, to allow for change or to accept conflict. Friendship is a relation which demands sacrifice. The balance between identity and difference upon which it depends is never simply given and the tension between these two concepts must be continually worked out via our generosity, courage, sensitivity, perceptiveness, and honesty.

Therefore, the notion of what I describe here as “cosmopolitan friendship”—that is, a friendship that transcends the confines of race, culture, religion and nationality—forces us to consider an “ethics” of alterity in which the figure of the friend is to be viewed as not just “another self” (à la Aristotle) or “congeneric double.” Rather, such a relationship is “nonpredicative” in that it “resists both representation and conceptualization.” According to Giorgio Agamben, friends “do not share something (birth, law, place, taste)” in so much as they are “shared by the experience of friendship.” In other words,

[t]o recognize someone as a friend means not being able to recognize him as a “something.” Calling someone “friend” is not the same as calling him “white,” “Italian,” or “hot,” since friendship is neither a property nor a quality

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While this may be true in the Western context, in Korea, the practice of making friends is still largely determined by age, class and gender, and is reflected in the distinction between formal (jeondaemal) and informal (banmal) language, which is why it is uncommon to find close friends who do not belong to the same peer group. However, in Kim Dong-hyun’s Hello, Stranger (Cheoeum mannan saramdeul, 2007), we see such conventions being challenged and perhaps subverted in the name of cosmopolitan friendship, which brings together individuals who otherwise have very little in common.

The first, Jin-wook (Park In-soo), is a refugee from North Korea who is also new to city life, having lived most of his life in a small village near the Chinese border. Because of his lack of familiarity with Seoul, he is unable to make his way around the city. When he leaves his apartment to go buy a blanket, he becomes totally disoriented by the time he reaches a local intersection, lacking any sense of what the urban planner Kevin Lynch described as “legibility,” which is vital to how one cognitively “maps” the city. This sense of disorientation is also reinforced by his lack of knowledge about the deep structure of South Korean society and its capitalist way of life. When he tries looking for the nearest “market” (shijang), he winds up at a large retail store that lacks any resemblance to what he was used to down north. While strolling through the aisles, he is amazed by the variety of products for sale. When he finds piles of rice sacks that are sorted by brand name, the
woeful look on his face suggests that he is thinking about the people he left behind, who would kill for such lavishness.

To make matters worse, once he leaves the store, Jin-wook is unable to find his way back home. Having memorized the number of his apartment but not the name or address of the building, he is forced to wander the streets and, after seeing how all the buildings look alike, realizes that his search is all but futile. Feeling cold, lonely and tired, Jin-wook finds temporary shelter in a taxicab driven by Hye-jeong (Choi Hee-jin), who has become leery of the male passengers she picks up (many of whom are not shy about flaunting their misogyny). Hye-jeong, as we learn, drives a company cab (yeongeop taekssi), which brings in far less revenue than what a self-employed driver would normally make, and this puts her in the same company as other female low-wage earners like Min-seo, who work for long hours at low wages.

After Hye-jeong picks him up, she realizes that he is not like all the others and during the course of their long ride, which winds up costing Jin-wook a small fortune, Hye-jeong reveals that she, too, is from North Korea and arrived to Seoul many years ago. Feeling sorry for her fellow refugee, she offers him some frank advice about surviving in the city and leaves him with her phone number just in case he needs to contact someone and to let her know how he is doing. This token of friendship, as the film implies, would be less likely to occur among South Koreans, especially in the city, and in the film’s cheerful conclusion we see Hye-jeong receiving a call from Jin-wook shortly after he arrives to Busan to visit a friend who is also a defector.
On the way there, however, Jin-wook runs into Ting Yoon (Quang Su), a penniless illegal immigrant from Vietnam who arrived to Korea to find his girlfriend, Li Tian, who is living in Buan, a small rural town in North Jeolla. Having no money, Ting Yoon lands a job at a factory in Seoul but quits after the owner refuses to pay him. Once he finds out his girlfriend’s address, he decides to rob a taxi and uses the money to buy a bus ticket to Buan but instead boards a bus heading to Busan, which is where he runs into Jin-wook, who out of pity helps Ting Yoon find his way to Buan while picking up the tab along the way. What is so odd about their relationship is that neither can speak the other’s language and, despite their frequent miscommunications (which provide a few comical moments in the film), they somehow seem to understand one another.

But once they arrive to Buan, things take a turn for the worse after they discover that Li Tian is married to a local farmer and is visibly pregnant with his child. While the news comes as a shock to Ting Yoon, it is less of a surprise to Jin-wook who in a prior scene saw a banner advertising for matchmaking services with Vietnamese “virgins” (cheonyeo). In fact, foreign brides like Li Tian have become increasingly common throughout the Korean countryside. Many come from Southeast Asia and are married to farmers or blue-collar workers who are otherwise unable to find partners and are forced to travel to countries as far away as Vietnam, the Philippines or Uzbekistan, which is featured in the 2005 film *The Wedding Campaign* (*Na'eui Gyeolhon Weonjeonggi*).44
It is ironically the shift to urbanization that is in many ways responsible for the lack of single females in the countryside, who have not only migrated to the city in large numbers, but have no desire to settle down with someone who is not a salaryman. Viewed from this broader perspective, Ting Yoon represents one of the many victims who have been trampled under the wheel of Korea’s urbanization.45

While the city beckons for many Koreans, for Ting Yoon, it represents a nightmare, a place where compassion is like money: hard to come by. Other than Jin-wook, the only other character who shows sympathy for the plight of illegal migrants is a female shopkeeper who is interviewed by a detective looking for Ting Yoon and mentions how she is appalled by the way that the local factory owner treats his workers.

After learning of Li Tian’s fate, Ting Yoon is unable to bear the thought of returning to Seoul alone and decides to kill himself but is saved at the last moment by his North Korean comrade. Later on, when they are drinking soju in a motel room and spending their last night together, Jin-wook scolds his friend for trying to take his life since he still has the option of returning home and starting over, something that Jin-wook can only dream about. Despite their inability to communicate, both men are able to bond over the hardship they’ve suffered in this foreign land that has brought them together. In other words, they speak in the language of loss and exile.

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The final film I would to discuss is Sim Sang-kook’s Where Is Ronny?
(Ronireul chajaseo, 2008) which, unlike two previous films, involves a Korean middle-aged man (ajeossi) who learns to overcome his fear and hatred of the other by becoming friends with a younger migrant worker from Bangladesh.

The film begins with an overhead shot of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Inho, a Korean man in his late thirties, wanders the crowded streets before riding a train that is jam-packed with commuters. As he looks out from his window, we see rows upon rows of shanties passing by, which seamlessly cuts to a shot of the Han River with the iconic 63 Building shimmering in the background (perhaps serving as a reminder of how not too long ago Korea was in the same economic boat as Bangladesh). 46

Having jumped back in time, we see Inho sitting in a subway car on his way to Ansan, a city that lies south of Seoul and is home to a large migrant population from the Global South. 47 However, as we soon find out, not all the residents there are happy about Ansan’s status as a “special multicultural district.” 48 When Inho runs into one of the Korean locals, he is forced to attend a community meeting organized by a small circle of business owners who want to discuss the “problem” of Ansan’s foreign population, which makes them feel quite uneasy (one man complains about the indignity of his daughter having to run into such people on her way home every night).

When a local politician allocates money for a neighborhood watch program, Inho, a full-time Taekwondo instructor with his own studio, is one of the first to be
recruited. One night, while on patrol with two other men, he encounters Ronny, a young Bangladeshi man, who is selling cheap jewelry at an outdoor stand. As he approaches him, Ronny smiles and offers a trinket, but is viciously attacked by one of the other men who tears down his stand while Inho stands by and watches. Inho’s complicity in this senseless act of violence comes to haunt him later on when he hosts a showcase for his struggling studio and is challenged to a fight by Ronny, who knocks him out with a single blow and thereby shatters his reputation.

Vowing retaliation, Inho wanders the city in search of Ronny but is only able to find his friend Duhin, who was on hand that day to witness his humiliation and served as Ronny’s translator. Duhin, who is homeless and carries all his belongings in a large knapsack, accompanies Inho on his quest to find Ronny. Despite his peppy personality and overfriendly disposition, which is reinforced by his tendency to speak only in banmal and make friends with every Korean he meets regardless of their age, Inho at first rejects his overtures of friendship and has nothing but contempt for this “bastard” who was Ronny’s accomplice.

With Inho’s business in decline, it is not long before other parts of his life start to unravel as well. When the two other watchmen, including the one who beat up Ronny, ask him to sell his studio so that they can turn it into a PC room, Inho feels betrayed and realizes that all their talk about sticking together was nothing but words. After beating one of the men up, he spends the night in jail and returns home to find a note from his wife, telling him that she has taken their daughter and moved back to
her mother’s. Having lost all that matters to him—his wife, family and job—Inho begins to sense what it is like to live as a poor migrant in Korea. In other words, he comes to see how this other lives and acquires a sense of compassion that had been previously absent. After a long night of drinking in which Inho and Duhin finally bond and become friends, Inho also experiences what it’s like to be discriminated against when Duhin takes him to a restaurant owned and operated by Bangladeshis, who tell him that they don’t want him bringing around a Korean. But when Duhin insists that Inho is his “friend,” the others just laugh and force the pair to leave the restaurant. Feeling hurt and humiliated by Duhin’s friends, Inho tries to have them deported by reporting them to the immigration authorities. However, this petty act of revenge backfires and leads to the expulsion of his one and only true friend. Later on, after learning that Ronny had left the country and moved back to Bangladesh, Inho, who has signed away his studio, decides to make the same return trip that Ronny, Duhin and so many others were forced to take.

In the final scene of the film, we are taken back to Bangladesh. After a long train ride, Inho arrives at a small village and knocks on the front door of a nondescript house. As the door opens, we see Inho smiling, a reflection of the same smile that Ronny gave right before he was brutally attacked by Inho’s friend. However, instead of the hand of violence, Inho has come to offer the hand of friendship and apology, which he was unable to find in the streets of Korea, where multiculturalism is more of a legislative policy than a day-to-day reality.
Despite the various initiatives to make the city more “foreign friendly,” Seoul remains far behind London and New York in terms of its level of openness, diversity, and tolerance for the Other. That said, the future of cities and their role in providing “a sense of place and identity” that is “substantially divorced from their national contexts” may lie more in New Asian Cities like Seoul, which have been traditionally viewed as “monocultural” and have only recently confronted the “problem” of difference.\textsuperscript{50} How well these places adapt to this challenge and whether or not they allow “foreigners” to become a vital part of their “lived space” will determine the fate of cosmopolitanism 3.0 in the new century and beyond.\textsuperscript{51}
Notes—Chapter 4

1 The title of this chapter refers to a project by Seoul officials launched last year to make the city “a better place” for its foreign residents, “where nationals and foreigners may be equally happy.” Bae Hyun-jung, “Seoul Reaches out to Foreign Residents,” The Korea Herald (April 26, 2010). Part of this chapter was presented at the Pacific Seminar at UC Santa Cruz on June 25, 2009. Many thanks to Christine Hong, who organized the conference and invited me to participate.


3 Timothy C. Lim, “The Changing Face of South Korea: The Emergence of Korea as a ‘Land of Immigration,’” The Korea Society Quarterly (Summer-Fall 2002), 17. The irregular worker is defined here as one who lacks regular employment and can be rehired or dismissed after his/her contract expires.

4 Rob Wilson, “Killer Capitalism on the Pacific Rim: Theorizing Major and Minor Modes of the Korean Global,” boundary 2 34.1 (2007), 119. The Konglish term “minor” is also used by Koreans to describe films that have been only seen by smaller audiences.

5 Ibid. According to a recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, less than 40 percent of Koreans “agreed to the coexistence of various cultures in the country.” Kim Rahn, “We Are Unkind Hosts to Foreigners,” The Korea Times (April 18, 2012).

6 Quoted in Park Si-soo, “Immigration Office to Polish Image of Korea,” The Korea Herald (April 13, 2009).


8 As Earl Jackson has pointed out to me, by having a comedian host this type of program, the producers have limited its potential to tackle controversial issues in a serious manner.

9 One silly controversy related to the show involved a panelist who described males under the height of 180 cm as “losers.” C.f. Cho Jae-hyon, “Internet Hot Over 'Misuda' Guest’s 'Loser' Remark,” The Korea Times (November 11, 2009).


11 Compare this to 1994, when the number of resident aliens in Seoul was less than 40,000.

12 Currently, the Seoul Metropolitan Area accounts for over 60% of the foreign population. Do Je-Hae, “1.1 Million Foreigners Live in Korea,” The Korea Times (August 05, 2009).

13 Kim Hyun Mee, “The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of ‘Multicultural Families’ in Contemporary Korea,” Korea Journal 47.4 (Winter 2007). In fact, North Korea has been critical of Korean multiculturalism, arguing that “South Korea is denying its national race and its 5,000-year history by professing to be a multiracial
nation. Such moves will Americanize Korea, ruin its past history and weaken the power to combat dominative U.S. forces.” Quoted in Shin Hae-in, “Korea Greets New Era of Multiculturalism,” The Korea Herald (August 03, 2006).


15 Ibid.


17 Aaron Koh, “‘Heteroglossic’ Discourse on Globalization: A View from the ‘East,’” Globalizations 2.2 (2005), 231. Similarly, Aihwa Ong argues that “[s]cholarly discussions of cities tend to downplay the role of the state in shaping the urban territory and field of possibilities for and against citizenship. The tendency has been to consider the big city as a denationalized space, a site of universal rights for all newcomers.” Hence, she “propose[s] an alternate concept of the city as a national site that activates neoliberal desires for foreign experts whose presence puts into question equality of access to rights and entitlements.” Aihwa Ong, “Please Stay: Pied-a-Terre Subjects in the Megacity,” Citizenship Studies 11.1 (February 2007), 84.


21 Kim Tae-jong, “Global Seoul Means Friendlier City for Foreigners,” The Korea Times (October 31, 2008). During the writing of this chapter, Oh, after losing a referendum on a controversial school lunch initiative, abruptly resigned his post.

22 Tourism in recent years has become a boon to the Korean economy thanks to the flood of Japanese and Chinese tourists who have come to Seoul, hoping to catch a glimpse of their favorite Korean actor or actress from one of the many popular dramas that have aired throughout Asia.

23 Peter Underwood, “Multiculturalism in Korea,” JoongAng Daily (August 26, 2010). Underwood is also part of the famous American missionary clan that founded Yonsei University.
The foreign population, which is said to be growing by 20 to 30 percent annually, will in the future take on more responsibilities as Korea becomes an “aged society” thanks to its alarmingly low birthrate.

Prior to the Olympics, Korea’s foreign population largely consisted of older Chinese settlers and American military personnel. Not counting a few travelers, businessmen, and English teachers, foreigners were considered not so long ago a “rare sight in the streets of Seoul.” Yeong-hyun Kim in “Seoul: Complementing Economic Success with Games,” World Cities Beyond the West: Globalization, Development, and Inequality, ed. Josef Gugler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74.


The name of the hagwon on the shuttle reads “MB,” one of the many playful jabs the film takes at Lee Myung-bak, the current president whose visage is also compared to that of a rat.


Derek Elley, “Review of Bandhobi,” Variety (November 02, 2009). According to So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann, many Koreans suffer from “a veritable English language mania. The size of the English education market in South Korea is estimated at over 4 trillion won per year (about $3,333 million) and the expenditures on English study abroad adds an additional trillion won (about $833 million).” Also, by 1997 “already 70% of children in Seoul were participating in the English education market.” So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann, “Class and Cosmopolitan Striving: Mothers’ Management of English Education in South Korea,” Anthropological Quarterly 77.4 (2004), 646.

The term baeksu literally means “white hand,” but refers to someone, typically a man, who has no job and, in most cases, relies on his parents for financial assistance. His hands are described as “white” because he does not engage in any real labor.

Lee Hyo-sik, “Employment Polarization Deepening,” The Korea Times (January 24, 2010). Moreover, opportunities for advancement in the workplace are severely limited and many women still face a very visible glass ceiling. Also see “Women In Korea: Glass
Half Full or Empty?" *Wall Street Journal* (March 06, 2012).

34 Rob Wilson, “Killer Capitalism on the Pacific Rim,” 130.


40 Ibid., 36.

41 Ibid., 31.


43 Traditionally, regardless of where one is located, one always refers to the Korean capital in terms of going “up.”

44 Norimitsu Onishi, “Wed to Strangers, Vietnamese Wives Build Korean Lives,” *New York Times* (March 30, 2008). This is not to imply that such marriages always turn out for the best. In fact, since marriages have become popular and brought over 100,000 foreign brides to the country, there have been a number of reported cases of domestic abuse or wives being kicked out of their homes. See Ju-min Park, “A Shelter for South Korea’s Foreign Brides,” *Los Angeles Times* (January 14, 2010).


47 In fact, one area in particular, Wongok-dong, which is also known as the Borderless Village, is home to over 60,000 foreigners from 56 countries. See Kwon Mee-yoo, “Ansan City to Build Town for Foreigners,” *The Korea Times* (May 04, 2009).

48 Kwon Mee-yoo, “Ansan City to Build Town for Foreigners.”

49 Later on, Duhin reveals to Inho that the reason why he came to Korea was because of his obsession with the song “My Love My Side” (*Nae sarang nae gyeotae*) by the late Kim Hyun Sik.

The notion of “lived space” refers to the work of Henri Lefebvre. Lived space “represents a person’s actual experience of space in everyday life. [It] is not just a passive stage on which social life unfolds, but represents a constituent elements of social life.” Mark Purcell, “Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics,” *GeoJournal* 58 (2002), 102.
Epilogue

Cosmopolis Now

The World as City

[I]t was daring to dream of a new kind of cosmopolis—not a melting pot, [...] but a mosaic.
—Pico Iyer

All around the world, the city remains what Louis Wirth described as “a loose dense permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals.” However, in the age of global migration, this description of urban life appears to be all the more the case now that the city is becoming “by definition, a city of foreigners.” Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to show how in the last several decades the arrival of new migrants to London, New York, Berlin and Seoul has influenced the way that certain writers and filmmakers imagine these cities along with the types of stories and characters that appear in their work. While the role of the city, according to Phil Hubbard, has often been reduced to “the status of a container or backdrop for human activities,” it has also served as a site for “global/local interconnections” that are responsible for “producing a multiplicity of social, cultural, political and economic spaces and forms.”

Originally, I set out to situate cosmopolitanism by linking its discourse and practice to a particular site (as opposed to viewing it in terms of some transcendent ideal). I began with the notion of “city identification,” which, as I demonstrate
Throughout the first two chapters, provides a sense of affiliation that is not simply determined by the real and imaginary parameters of the nation state. Throughout my reading of various migrant writers (all of whom share some connection to another country or culture), I have shown how the practice of city identification is not only linked to a broader engagement with popular culture, psychoanalysis, cricket and flânerie but also reflects the reality of “living in a mixed-up world and having a mixed-up self.” To quote Jeremy Waldron, anyone familiar with the streets of cities like London or New York “cannot but be aware of a diversity of culture, a diversity of human practices and experiences, indeed a diversity of languages clamoring for his [sic] attention.” This awareness of difference and its role in the daily life of urban inhabitants is central to the revival of cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century (which I refer to as cosmopolitanism 3.0) and, as I argue with respect to Fury and Netherland, forces us to consider a way of reading literature outside the traditional framework of the nation and/or empire.

Yet, beyond the notion of identification (which is best suited for subjects who are privileged in terms of their class), there is also the city’s sense of propinquity, which brings together a wide range of people who would otherwise have nothing to do with each other and creates the conditions for what Paul Gilroy describes as “conviviality,” i.e., “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life” in many cities, regardless of whatever role their governments have played in promoting multiculturalism. This is what
makes the city—a social, economic, political, and cultural institution that is rife with many shortcomings—a space for utopian possibility, which in the final chapter is explored through the idea of cosmopolitan friendship.

Moreover, because the city “arises as a collective settlement of people previously foreign to the place,” it has upended the traditional distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, which assumed that a sense of community and social cohesion was “less evident” in the city. Since the city allows individuals to “escape from the bonds of kinship and community that often condemned them to particular social roles or identities,” it has tended to appeal to women and other subgroups or minorities who have felt ostracized by the peculiarities of rural or small-town life. Likewise, the idea that “the individual could melt into the crowd, [and] yet conversely use this sense of anonymity to develop a new sense of freedom” accounts for why the city creates “the possibilities for meetings and mismeetings” as observed in many of the texts discussed in this dissertation. While lacking a sense of close-knitness that one might find in the vanishing rural communities, the city nonetheless offers a sense of identity and belonging that is more open and democratic in terms of its possibilities, which have yet to be fully realized in “the spectacular rise of cities throughout Asia.” In short, today’s manifestation of cosmopolis “allows us to forge new identities unburdened by our histories and biographies.” Ultimately, this is what makes the city not only worth living in but also investigating as an object of study.
Notes—Epilogue


5 I must thank Chris Connery for suggesting this term to me.


7 Ibid.


9 The first quote is attributed Jini Kim Watson’s “Seoul and Singapore as ‘New Asian Cities,’” 195; the second is from Phil Hubbard’s *The City*, 15.

10 Hubbard, 20.


12 Ibid.
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