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'this in't Good Will Hunting': *Londonstani* and the market for London's multicultural fictions

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<1> Writing barely a month after the novel's hardback launch, *The Observer*'s literary editor Robert McCrum declared Gautam Malkani's 2006 debut novel *Londonstani* the "sad" victim of a new literary culture -- a culture in thrall to the marketing departments of "big business" and driven by publicity hype. "If it had been published", he writes, "as its author once intended, as a teen novel, it might have found a secure place as a contemporary classroom cult." However,

> Once Fourth Estate, hungry to cash in on the *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* market, had paid an advance in excess of of £300,000, the die was cast. Thereafter, *Londonstani* had to be 'the literary novel of the year'. Like a Fiat Uno entered for Formula 1, after a squeal of brakes and a loud bang, *Londonstani* was reduced to a stain of grease, and some scraps of rubber and tin, on the race track of the 2006 spring publishing season. In Borders or Waterstone's, *Londonstani* is already being airbrushed from history. "

So, because *Londonstani* did not sell like *White Teeth* or *Brick Lane*, it is deemed to have failed. Is this then the first case of multiculturalism being mis-marketed? Frothy teen-lit masquerading as a 'literary' novel? I don't think so. Or rather, I think these are the wrong kind of questions to be asking.

<2> We need to look beyond the terms of McCrum's premature post-mortem and consider how the publishing industry's promotional culture -- in which pundits like McCrum are complicit, however much they protest their critical distance -- both anticipates and responds to wider changes in the cultural landscape. This article analyses the novel's promotion and reception in two such interrelated contexts. The first concerns what, following the success of Zadie Smith's debut *White Teeth* (2000), has become known as the 'marketing multiculturalism' debate. The second is the broader historical sweep of the 2000s, where growing anxiety over questions of Britishness has led not to the waning, but to the increasingly prescriptive role of official multiculturalism -- that is, as a regime of *assimilation* -- in everyday life.[1] Drawing on Andrew Wernick's (1991) discussion of promotional culture, I view these intersecting contexts in terms of ideological *disequilibrium*.

<3> Where once, from the ashes of Thatcher's free-market sponsored mono-culturalism seemed to spring the roses of Blair's free-market sponsored multi-culturalism (Panayi 2004), more recently has flowered a reactionary return to what Paul Gilroy (1987) described as the 'new racism' of that earlier period. Just as Britain at the beginning of the 21st century seemed to be coming to terms with its cultural and communal diversity, a succession of wars 'on terror', fought at home through the media and abroad in the bloody invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, have precipitated a regression into widespread xenophobia. Trading now in fear rather than aspiration,[2] politicians have adopted the assimilationist spirit of Tony Blair's 2006 'Shared British Values: The Duty to Integrate' speech as a provisional consensus. It signals the emergence of a dominant discourse in which the nation-building buzzwords of integration, citizenship and community-cohesion play a decisive -- but increasingly also *divisive* -- role. Yasmin-Alibhai, a newspaper columnist and writer known for speaking for multicultural Britain but against political multiculturalism, states the contradiction directly: "These petty patriots and narrow nationalists have successfully rebranded Powellism and made it cool, cool enough for New Labour, which of course, again surrenders its foundational principles." The political climate is such that it has once again become acceptable, on the supposed liberal-left as well as the right, to use immigration and national identity as vote-winning platforms (and for the supposedly political neutral BBC to conflate class and cultural difference with its 2008 'White Season'[3]). This is what is meant by describing the ideological situation of late 2000s Britain, the context in which *Londonstani* was published and is consumed, as an ideological *disequilibrium*.

<4> In his analysis of promotional culture and ideology, Andrew Wernick argues that subsequent to the rise of feminism in North America in the 1960s and 70s, "advertisers could no longer rely on the force of a taken for granted ideological consensus" with regard to their representations of gender. In response, they "had virtually to manufacture an ideological consensus, if only in the fictional world of their ads, in order to provide a symbolic setting within which their imaged products could be given stable identities and a focused appeal."(1991, 38-39) Substituting the promotional imperatives of the ad industry for those of the publishing industry, I want to suggest that something similar has happened in Britain since New Labour came into power in 1997, and that a further shift has taken place since the mid-2000s. It has become a promotional imperative to market fictional depictions of multicultural Britain that present symbolic solutions to the ideological disorientation of the middlebrow reading public. When Britain is portrayed by powerful agents in the media and Westminster to be undergoing fragmentation rather than integration, then the literary market is ripe for fictions that make different communities, and so therefore Britain as a community of communities, *knowable* once more.

<5> It is in relation to this most recent moment of ideological disorientation, and specifically to its influential analysis by the journalist and political commentator David Goodhart as 'the progressive dilemma', that I propose *Londonstani*'s promotion and reception be understood. For not only is David Goodhart one of Alibhai-Brown's 'progressive patriots and narrow nationalists', he also happens to be the first person to publish Malkani's fiction in Britain. It is only by contextualising the novel's publishing history in this way[4] that the extent of it's *extra-promotional* value might be established. This approach enables a comparative discussion of the way the experience of 'minority' communities are represented in fictions, the mainstream media and political discourse. More specifically, it reveals the different way in which *Londonstani* makes community knowable compared with other fictions positioned in the '*White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* market'. Despite the evidence that suggests -- in fact precisely because -- the non-realist narrative and linguistic techniques have made this novel unpalatable to this audience, I suggest it presents a valuable alternative vision of multiculturalist[5] society to that currently inscribed within the dominant discourse.

<6> *Londonstani* failed, McCrum argues, because it didn't sell. He positions the novel in a putative market for literary multicultural fiction despite acknowledging how the author had originally hoped it would engage a younger, more media-savvy, generation. Yet the novel's poor sales do not in any simple way stem from it being mis-marketed by its publishers. For all its youthful subject matter and stylistic irreverence, it is literary and does explore multicultural themes. The problem, rather, is that it is literary and explores multicultural society in a style that, whilst being endorsed by reviewers, does not appear to have matched the prevailing taste of this audience. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's analytical model 'the field of cultural production', we might say that there is a marked asymmetry in the promotion and the consumption of *Londonstani*'s symbolic value. The key here, then, is to explore how, exactly, it is not literary and multicultural in the same way as its more commercially successful putative competitors—McCrum's '*White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* market'. I discuss such differences in subsequent sections, but before that it is important to outline where McCrum's implied market for the multicultural novel comes from, and why *Londonstani* appears to have been sucked into its vortex.

<7> *Multiculturalism* is a relatively new addition to the lexicon of British publishing. As a literary subject matter, by contrast, multi-cultural society has a much longer heritage. Fictions exploring cultural and (especially) racial difference have been popular with British readers on a mass-scale at least since the vogue for colonial romance in the Victorian period. For the vast majority of these colonialist fictions, however, such differences often feature as dangerous and seductive forms of otherness. These elements were to be expelled from or at best assimilated to a dominant white English culture, typically in heroic quests abroad or gothic dramas at home (Boehmer, 13-57). It is only much more recently that cultural differences have been promoted *positively* to British, and increasingly also international, audiences (Feather, x). By the late 1990s, according to Graham Huggan's landmark study *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 'marketing the margins' had become structurally ingrained in

literary fiction publishing. Writing by postcolonial authors (such as V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie) or on colonial themes (such as Paul Scott and J.G. Farrell) was legitimised and, in the process, made eminently commodifiable by the Booker Prize during the 1970s and 1980s. What unites this diverse body of writing is its production and consumption under the sign of the exotic, be it filtered through nostalgia for the colonial past or celebrated through new migrant sensibilities in postcolonial contexts. "Contradictions abound here,' writes Huggan: "history, on the one hand, is retooled for mass consumption as a recognised series of easily packaged exotic myths; while on the other, it is upheld, despite its authors' fabrications, as a more or less transparent window onto verifiable past events."(115)

<8> Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), a Booker-winning novel about postcolonial India, exemplifies the postcolonial exotic, yet it is significant that his later novel *The Satanic Verses* (1986), much of which is set in a playfully re-imagined London, is better remembered for winning enemies rather than prizes (though this of course turbo-charged its exotic appeal, and as a consequence also its sales).[6] The difference is that the latter novel focused -- *feasted* is perhaps more apt -- on the exotic increasingly found in the centre rather than the margins of society. It exposed a Britain that had itself become unquestionably post-colonial: a nation composed of new, hybrid forms of identity; the cultural aristocracy of Englishness disrobed if not yet dethroned (Baucom). But it did so in a manner that precipitated a fierce and frequently retrograde debate about Islam and the role of official multiculturalism. The publishing industry had established a relatively large domestic audience for such exotic fictions, yet their taste belied the fact that many others, from across the social spectrum, were not yet ready to accept (or, more accurately, that ideological conditions were not yet conducive to) the larger reality of multicultural society that novels like *The Satanic Verses* gestured toward.

<9> That the 'Rushdie Affair' is self-consciously incorporated into Zadie Smith's best-selling debut novel about multicultural Britain, is an indicator of how far attitudes changed in the space of a decade or so. Where the scandalous wit of Rushdie's writing enthralled a generation of readers but also alienated everybody from liberal British Muslims to leftwing American literary critics,[7] *White Teeth* deploys its humour in a more measured tone. It makes its subject matter accessible in a style that, for a while at least, was almost universally celebrated. Such a reception is in no small way down to the way the novel seemed to encapsulate the emergence of a properly multicultural society. As Mark Stein puts it, the novel "possesses a Utopian quality that suggests the multicultural clock cannot be turned back."(xii) Dominic Head elaborates on this point:

> "Smith has found a way of harnessing the novel's capacity to embrace heterogeneity, and has used it to give convincing shape to her presentation of an evolving, and genuinely multicultural Britain ... [Yet] *White Teeth* does not avoid the fact of ethnic tension but, in its self-conscious mode of end-of-millennium *tour de force*, it presents the social problems of ethnicity as the shared problems of a diverse citizenship with a common home."(Head 107-108)

In a similar vein, Claire Squires lauds *White Teeth* for "presenting a largely optimistic view of multiculturalism, but not without satirizing the attitudes that would inform her reception."(180) For both, *White Teeth* is an important book, not simply for its commercial success, but for the way reflects on itself with a critical eye as a document of multicultural Britain but also of its commercialised promotion. Yet such claims have also been rebutted. Suzie Thomas has argued that it is *too* literary; that is, too intent on celebrating amorphous identities and hybrid subject positions, returning to the very form of marketable exoticism that formed the object of Huggan's original critique. Her criticisms already seemed to have been addressed by the marketplace, however. The best-selling 'multicultural' novels that followed *White Teeth*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, use more concretely realist modes to paint their pictures of Britain's multicultural society. Not without controversy, they portray minority communities with -- to use the media's favourite term -- a sense of authenticity.[8]

<10> It is this shift toward documentary realism in the market for multicultural fictions that *Londonstani* was forced to contend with -- unfairly, given its different concerns, according to Malkani himself:

> The authenticity hurdle that reviewers have required me to jump implies Thomas Harris should have been disqualified from writing *Silence of the Lambs* because he's not an authentic cannibal or serial killer. It also implies that there's a single authentic British Asian experience and that authentic experience can't be shared by someone who went to Cambridge and works for the FT ... Well, going back to the authenticity thing, the characters in Londonstani are basically defined by their differing levels of inauthenticity -- that's kind of the point, it's about performance and pretence -- so the whole authenticity test that the media kept applying to me becomes even more ridiculously meaningless.('Interview with Gautam Malkani')

These comments suggest that the author's own ethnicity played a decisive role in the novel being positioned -- more precisely, interpellated -- into the market for multicultural fiction. This, despite the fact that the hardback was heavily marketed, *in line with Malkani's conception of it*, as a literary novel tackling 'urban' themes ('On the launchpad').

<11> By mid-June 2006, a month and a half after its launch, the novel was among the top 30 bestsellers having sold 4,350 copies.[9] Though clearly disappointing given the publisher's high expectations,[10] these figures are far from negligible given the unpredictability of the literary hardback market. Furthermore, contrary to McCrum's belief that the novel had already been airbrushed from history in May 2006, *Londonstani* has, with some success, been redirected toward the very niche that he believed it had overshot. Malkani is still being invited to give readings and talks at festivals, schools and universities two years after the hardback publication and a nearly a year on from its paperback release.

<12> It would seem that word of mouth as well as planned promotional activities are keeping interest in the book alive, albeit without the same press noise that greeted the multi-media campaign behind the original hardback launch. In that respect, the paperback publication in April 2007 was not so much a re-launch as an exercise in re-branding. The publishers moved away from "the literary look of the hardback to appeal to a younger, urban audience" ('*Londonstani* gets urban redesign') with a renewed digital campaign and carefully positioned advertising in *Time Out*, *The Times* and *The Guardian Guide*. In addition to a vivid new cover, resplendent in new-rave, day-glo green, and featuring a cool-looking Asian youth and title-relief that presents a recognisably iconic 'London' skyline, Harper Perennial substituted their signature PS section for 'edgy' photos of Hounslow and created a MySpace page and Facebook group. All of this was clearly intended to develop a brand 'community' for the book. As of February 8th this year, however, *Londonstani* only had 390 MySpace 'friends'. It is faring better on Facebook, with 892 'friends', but from reading through the their forum posts most of the young people who have joined its group seem to have done so because they read the original hardback -- not the new paperback targeted explicitly at them. Despite finding the novel's niche it seems unlikely that this branding campaign will translate into anything approaching *White Teeth*-like sales.[11] But while sales figures (or increasingly, where a multi-book commission is concerned, brand equity) may be the bottom-line for the industry, they are neither an accurate nor a useful measure of the novel's wider cultural significance.

<13> It should be clear that McCrum's description of the "sad story" of the novel's impact on the '*White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*' market tells us very little about the book's actual subject or how it is explored. *Londonstani*'s challenging but ultimately positive social vision is ignored (this is particularly remarkable, given that it was published at the same time -- and has sold almost exactly the same amount of copies -- as Melanie Phillips' rabble-rousing attack on multiculturalism, Londonistan ('Londonistan Surprise')). *Londonstani* belongs to a tradition of picaresque fiction[12] where young characters use popular cultural forms for the *subcultural* performance, and potentially also the transformation, of given social identities. Moreover, it does so, I suggest, whilst showing an acutely self-conscious, or literary, awareness of what Graham Huggan calls the "practical limits" of a "postcolonial politics of performance."(104) It is the first novel to present the world of British Asian rudeboys to a mass-market audience.[13] It does so through the eyes of Jas, a teenager from Hounslow desperate to fit in with his peers. From the opening page we suspect that his narrative is in some way unreliable, but it is not until the closing pages that we learn he is white, throwing our assumptions about British Asian ethnicity into ironic relief. Subdivided into three sections, Paki, Sher and Desi, this narrative allegorises a broader shift in British Asian identity from the experience of prejudice and victimhood (Paki), through aggressive self-segregation (Sher), to active participation in the re-constitution of Britishness (Desi – meaning 'countryman'). In doing so, it also confronts its readers not with a narrative of British-Asian ethnicity, but with the emergence of a specifically *subcultural* identity: the desi rudeboy.[14] It is vital we appreciate the significance of this. The subculture as it is represented is some distance from the notion of a distinct ethnic, faith or racial *community* that official multiculturalism, and, by extension, novels marketed under the rubric 'multicultural', are charged with the task of making *knowable* to the British public.

<14> It is this different idea of communal identity that I want to focus on now. The discourse of community, especially its most recent formulation 'community cohesion', is familiar to us today as the political football in the increasingly heated multiculturalism debate. Since the 2005 London bombings, as Pathik Pathak, explains, the term community is "no longer a neutral reference to a group of people unified by a common defining characteristic," but a politicised reference "to a politically distinctive way

of behaving." A rash of reactionary legislation has been set in train, on everything from identity cards to the resumption of the 'SUS' laws, with the official intention of making individuals from minorities both recognise and be *recognised within* the national fabric. For this nationalitarian politics of community-cohesion to be viable, it is now imperative that individuals 'belong' to a community, regardless of how overdetermined their social affiliations might be. Minority communities, perforce, must become more transparent within -- in other words more *knowable* to -- the nation-as-community.

<15> The question then of what, exactly, constitutes a community, goes right to the heart of the debate. In his book *Rethinking Multiculturalism*,[15] Biku Parekh notes that the concept of multiculturalism is generally understood in relation to three different kinds of cultural diversity: *subcultural diversity*, which amounts to differences lived within the dominant culture, and includes everything from sexuality to lifestyle choices; *perspectival diversity*, such as Marxism or feminism, which represent "neither subcultures, for they often challenge the very basis of the existing culture, nor distinct cultural communities living by their values and views of the world, but intellectual perspectives on how the dominant culture should be reconstituted"; and *communal diversity*, which "springs from and is sustained by a plurality of long-established communities, each with its own long history and way of life which it wishes to preserve and transmit."(4). The current discourse of 'community cohesion' is rooted in the latter, communal diversity, which happens to be Parekh's preferred working definition of multiculturalism. As he puts it, "since communal diversity is logically distinct and raises questions that are unique to it, it constitutes a *coherent and self-contained object of investigation* ."(4) It is precisely this understanding of a complex society as a coherent and self-contained object of investigation, what Raymond Williams once called a "knowable community"(16) -- that *Londonstani* arguably militates against. It does so by showing how *subcultural* diversity constitutes new and dynamic forms of community that challenge conventional definitions of *multicultural* society -- and so demand a different kind of political response.

<16> Writing on the development of the novel in nineteenth century England, Raymond Williams argues that industrialisation and urbanisation created a "crisis of the knowable community"(16):

> We can see its obvious relation to the very rapidly increasing size and scale and complexity of communities: in the growth of towns and especially cities and of a metropolis; in the increasing division and complexity of labour; in the altered and critical relation between and within social classes. In these simple and general senses, any assumption of a knowable community -- a whole community, wholly knowable -- becomes harder and harder to sustain. (16)

The picture painted by a growing number of politicians and media commentators is that something like this crisis has returned to terrorise post-imperial, post-industrial -- and now globalised -- multicultural Britain.[16] Since the mid 2000s the politics of this new kind of 'complex' community -- or complex *of* communities -- have been complicated by the media-driven xenophobia and Islamaphobia in response to immigration and the 'war on terror', and the increasing social and cultural gap between the liberal urban professionals who dominate the multiculturalism debate and the disaffected urban youth with whom they share their cities.

<17> And so the crisis of the knowable community, a social phenomenon whose formal expression Williams identifies as first emerging in the nineteenth century novel, has arguably now become a central *political* challenge in twenty-first century Britain. At its simplest: how can the idea of a nation, a whole community, wholly knowable, be reconciled with the amorphous reality of the discrete and possibly disparate communities of which it is composed? For Williams the novel is the symptom of this crisis but also the exemplary means of understanding where it comes from, and what course, for better or worse, it might take. "Most novels are in some sense knowable communities"(14), he writes, and insofar as the novelist uses a "traditional method", meaning character-based realism, he or she "offers to show people and their relationships in essential and communicable ways."(14) It is only towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the early modernism of Conrad and Lawrence, that a split takes place between "knowable relationships and unknown, unknowable, overwhelming society."(15) As Williams later reminds us in *The Politics of Modernism*, the exploration of individual alienation became the dominant 'literary' mode of the twentieth century.[17] My argument here, however, is that in the period since *White Teeth*[18] was published the mainstream reading public has arguably developed a taste for a kind of 'multicultural' novel that reprises Williams' 'traditional method' of character-driven, 'authentic' realism.

<18> In 2008, as the noise surrounding *White Teeth* finally begins to die down, I want to suggest that an important element in the success of subsequent British 'multicultural novels', like *Brick Lane* and *Small Island*, is down to the way their realistic modes make minority identities knowable to a majoritarian audience. Which is to say: with a sense of authenticity. These novels grapple with what Williams calls "the problem of knowing a community -- of finding a position, a position convincingly experienced, from which community can begin to be known."(17)[19] While *Londonstani* also presents a minority identity to the same audience, the way it is presented *refuses* to command a *position convincingly experienced, from which community can begin to be known* . This is because *Londonstani* self-consciously mimics the way subculture is *performed*, rather than representing the way religious, racial or ethnically defined communities live. It does not claim to represent authentically a communal identity, especially one dependant on diasporic cultural memory, or an even more reified sense of tradition, for its internal cohesion. This stands in contrast to the way that both politicians and the marketers of multicultural fiction have come to understand the concept of community under multiculturalism, and the way these other novelists arguably make *knowable* in their fictions.

<19> *Londonstani* re-writes the dominant (and from Williams' account, quintessentially *English*) idea of community in two ways: through its narrative structure and its language. Firstly, the shifting ethnic registers of the novel's narrative arc -- Paki, Sher, Desi -- allegorises and conflates the narrative of post-war British-Asian settlement, but without attempting to represent it as being either universal or authentic.[20] Secondly, it does this through a carefully constructed, or as Malkani puts it, 'future-proof'[21] , urban creole. The language not so much reproduces as mimics the way certain subcultures resist or, to use Malkani's term, *disrespects* majoritarian culture by appropriating and reworking its proper linguistic codes.[22] This *doubled* linguistic performance is evident from book's opening sentences:

> -- Serve him right he got his muthafuckin face fuck'd, shudn't b callin me a Paki, innit.
> After spittin his words out Hardjit stopped for a second, like he expected us to write em down or someshit. Then he sticks in an exclamation mark by kickin the white kid in the face again. -- Shudn't b callin us Pakis, innit, u dirty gora.
> Again, punctuation came with a kick, but with his left foot this time so it was more like a semicolon. -- Call me or any ma bredrens a Paki again an I'ma mash u and yo family. In't dat da truth.(3)

While the subversive use of creolised language or dialect is by no means new to British fiction, Malkani's use of textspeak to amplify its visual effect is. More striking still is the self-conscious way Jas's narration conflates Hardjit's physical attack with his linguistic violence. This establishes two contrasting sub-themes: the coded semantics of communal identity and the ambiguity of Jas' narration. Here, the latter clearly questions the 'ghetto' authenticity projected in the former -- a point missed by most of the book's reviewers. Jas' exaggerated stylisation of the beating betrays the unreliablity of his narration in a way that sets the ironic, comic tone of what's to come.[23]

<20> When I interviewed Malkani about these themes he invariably returned to two key words: metropolitan and subculture. Writing the book he was preoccupied with the idea that London is a metropolitan space in which group identities, be they national, ethnic or religious, can become unmoored from the ballast of tradition and performed in new and hybrid subcultural forms -- particularly so for a generation of British youth hooked in to a globalised world dominated by the image and its promise of alternative identities. The specifically linguistic mechanisms that Malkani uses to explore these themes perform the very kind of disruptive (disrespectful, even) subcultural articulations he is interested in. Combined with the way the plot-twist deliberately frustrates a clear-cut understanding of ethnic identity or cultural community, this different kind of community is integrative -- but not in the assimilationist idiom which I have argued has gained political consensus since Tony Blair's 'The Duty to Integrate' speech in 2006. As Malkani puts it in an article for *The Financial Times* on the eve of the novel's publication, "the more demotic desi subculture gives kids a more porous identity. It is derivative in a positive sense that fosters social cohesion and inclusiveness."('What's right with Asian boys')

<21> Despite this explicitly progressive engagement with the discourse of multiculturalism in Malkani's promotion of *Londonstani*, the novel itself is arguably more challenging of the liberal consensus that frames the debate. "This aint *Good Will Hunting* ... Why'd I wanna give a shit bout politics n shit?" the leader of the rudeboys, Hardjit, says to their teacher, the novel's voice of liberal conscience, Mr Ashwood, as he attempts to instil in them the value of education and the institutional role of the BBC as the nation's 'cultural glue': "-- It's not irrelevant. Have you watched the news? Are you familiar with the debate on multiculturalism? Asylum policy? US foreign policy?"(130) In spite of his protestations they are aware of his well-intentioned designs for their collective destiny, but they also refuse to let their experience become an

exemplary, feel-good story of the marginalised making good in the mainstream.

<22> Rather than embody the progressive values of liberal humanism, the characters are unswervingly materialistic. Their relationships are dominated by a fiercely exaggerated masculinity. They are part of "the first subculture to celebrate rather than counter conspicuous consumerism"('What's Right With Asian Boys'), deriving more from African-American cultural forms, such as hip-hip, than British pop culture. At their extreme these traits and values are antithetical to those of McCrum's *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* audience. Despite the endorsements of reasonably high profile black-British figures, proclaiming the book's fidelity to contemporary black urban youth culture,[24] the novel represents a kind of caricatured globalised blackness that simply is not to the taste of the majority of consumers of multicultural fiction. In this way *Londonstani* challenges the liberal proponents of multiculturalism -- be they politicians, publishers or the implied audience of their 'multicultural novel' -- rather than reinforcing their ideological preconceptions. It quite deliberately engages with what David Goodhart has called 'the progressive dilemma'.

<23> In his notorious essay, 'Too Diverse?' (reprinted in *The Guardian* as 'Discomfort of Strangers'), David Goodhart argued that "in developed societies … [the progressive common values of] sharing and solidarity can conflict with [those of] diversity." He identifies the pressures immigration places on the welfare state to illustrate how Britain, as a community of communities but also citizens, coheres but is also on the brink of collapse. In respect of this, it is no coincidence that tax fraud -- swindling the state -- features as the main subplot in *Londonstani*. Jas and his friends make money by fencing stolen mobile phones but are unaware they are participating in a carousel fraud racket. Their unwitting participation in the larger crime is symptomatic of a broader culture of tax resistance and evasion to which they are exposed by families and friends. As Ravi's father explains to Jas:

> -- No, rakhi it is a different type of duty, he says, before spendin like a-whole-nother hour talkin bout tax. -- But better to pay your sisters and your in-laws. Why to pay the government? For what? So they can dig up the roads and give me traffic jam? So they can pay dole money to lazy people who call my family Pakis when they come into my brother's shop to spend their dole money on beer and cigarettes? They get lung cancer and I pay for their hospital. Bhanchods. NHS? Hah! I work like dog for private health, Indian food is better there. Defence? Bloody fool Americans should pay for it. Education? Fat lump of good it is, our beitas keep failing the A-levels. Anyway, I pay enough taxes. I pay bloody licence fee for bloody BBC and what do I get? Bhanchod Ferreira family on *Eastenders* kissing with white kurhiyaan in the street ... (181-182)

From this and numerous other episodes Malkani demonstrates a clear awareness of the 'progressive dilemma', probably even as Goodhart frames it in his essay, and *Londonstani* should be seen as the attempt to present a radically progressive solution to the dilemma, rather than simply being a symptom of it.[25] It is a book about transformative subcultural diversity rather than rigid cultural communities. "This view of Britain." Malkani writes in *The Financial Times* essay,

> might require some oversimplification, but it is surely a view worth entertaining given that it is conducive to both multiculturalism and social cohesion -- instead of setting up a trade-off between the two. And while popular culture may not seem particularly politically empowering, it gives me and other British Asians a sense of real, constructive participation in whatever it is that constitutes Britishness.

To conclude, I have argued that *Londonstani* anticipates many of the judgements it has encountered by virtue of being promoted as the next big 'multicultural novel'. While it may not escape this albatross in the long run, this should not blind us to its cultural significance now. It asks searching questions of the way everyone from politicians to the readers of literary fiction view our multicultural society. And in giving the lie to the marketers of multicultural fiction, *Londonstani* also presents a way of thinking beyond the 'progressive dilemma' of official multiculturalism.

Endnotes

[1] See, for a discussion of this anxiety and how both politicians and the media are falling back into xenophobic and racist modes of debate and analysis, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown 'Powell's Rivers of Blood are back again'. [^]

[2] This point forms the main argument and is outlined in much more detail in Pathik Pathak's *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2008). [^]

[3] The irony here is that the 'White Season' was criticised in some quarters for not going *far enough* -- for "hanging on the coat-tails of this dramatic paradigm shift. Or, at least, is pretending to", according to Rod Liddle in The Spectator. His chillingly laconic description of this 'paradigm-shift', championed, as he says, by the far-right BNP, is further evidence of its influence in the mainstream media: "These days, the stuff that was considered beyond the pale and racist even three years ago is now uttered, ope -faced, by the boss of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and by inner-city Labour MPs. Multiculturalism has ceased to be the unchallengeable paradigm; it is now dead in the water. Partly this is down to the astonishing success of those very politicians who dared to stick up for the working-class whites: the British National Party now holds ten seats on Barking and Dagenham Council. The political class saw that there was a quiet revolution in the air and swung 90 degrees to the right." [^]

[4] Reading, this time, *against* Wernick's (1993) totalizing analysis of promotional culture. [^]

[5] See Bikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2004) for the important distinction between multicultural and multiculturalist societies. [^]

[6] It was Booker short-listed and won the Whitbread Novel Award. [^]

[7] For a discussion of this see Aamir Mufti 'Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics' (1991) and chapter 10 of Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism*. [^]

[8] See, for example, Paul Lewis' account of the debate between Salman Rushdie and Germaine Greer in *The Guardian* about Ali's depiction of the Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi 'community'. [^]

[9] The Bookseller report '*Londonstani* gets urban redesign' indicates that hardback sales had reached 6,825 copies by February 2007. [^]

[10] Fourth Estate's head of marketing, Iain Chapple, was quoted as saying it was "one of the biggest books for us in recent years" ('On the launchpad'), [^]

[11] The MySpace page includes links to various podcasts and related video material available on YouTube. When I accessed the 'Remi / Rough at work on *Londonstani*' video on YouTube on February 8th 2008, a year after its posting, it had only received 2,065 clicks -- roughly one quarter of the amount of hardback copies sold. The original *Londonstani* trailer (the subject of much comment by media pundits) had been viewed 7,962 times (so roughly one view per copy sold) and attracted 20 comments, ranging from positive responses to, alarmingly, abusive racist slurs. [^]

[12] Here I'm thinking of the early fiction of Irvine Welsh, Hanif Kureishi and, from a previous generation, Colin MacInnes. [^]

[13] In interview, Malkani said that the British-Asian 'rudeboy' could be found in work published before his own: in *White Teeth* and, more prominently, in the fiction of Bali Rai. In the former they are marginal characters, however, and the latter is specifically marketed at a teenage audience. [^]

[14] There does seem to be a difference between Malkani's almost utopian idea of an emergant *desi* subculture he references in articles and interviews to promote the book, and the much more prosaic representation of *rudeboys* in the book. This confusion (or perhaps, more generously, conflation) seems to stem from a number of influences in Malkani's university education. The emphasis he places on transformative aspects of subculture indicates a debt to 1970s and 80s British cultural studies (Dick Hebdige's work on subculture, particularly 'Reggae, Rastas and Rudies', springs to mind); and on his website he also directs readers to the work of American sociologist Erving Goffman for his understanding of subcultural performance and symbolic interaction. [^]

[15] Published around the same time as the Parekh-chaired report on *The Future of Mutli-Ethnic Britain* , this text can be viewed as the theoretical bedrock to the pre-9/11 emergent discourse of multiculturalism. [^]

[16] Since Tony Blair's speech 'The Duty To Integrate: Shared British Values' in December 2006, something like a cross-party consensus has emerged on this topic: a) that there is a critical situation, if not yet full-scale 'crisis' that needs to be addressed, and b) that this critical situation needs to be resolved at the interrelated levels citizenship and community. [^]

[17] The postcolonial modernism -- what others might call the magical realism -- of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) set the tone for a generation of black and Asian British writers. Graham Huggan argues that cultural difference was fetishised and then institutionalized in the "sponsored multiculturalism" of the Booker Prize during the 80s and 90s, amounting to "a levelling out of different histories, and aestheticized celebration of diversity thiat disguises the lack of sociohistorical change"(117) [^]

[18] Which is not to say that *White Teeth* was the cause of this change. A range of other factors, beyond the scope of this paper to analyse, are clearly also involved. Not least of which being the inexorable rise in influence on the literary field of production by 'The Richard and Judy Book Club' since its introduction to their daily talk show in 2004. [^]

[19] This speculation was at least partly confirmed when I put it to Andrea Levy at the 'On Whose Terms? Critical Negotiations in Black British Literature and the Arts' conference (Goldsmiths, University of London, March 14 2008). Previously, in conversation with Blake Morrison, Levy commented on the changing market for 'realist' novels -- a term she was proud to apply to her own work. Starting out in the early nineties she struggled to get published in a climate where magical-realist fiction dominated. The growing take-up of her subsequent novels since the late 1990s, culminating in the national and international success of *Small Island* in 2004, indicates a significant change in how publishers' marketing departments view the demand for realist, as opposed to magical-realist, literary fiction -- especially multicultural fiction. Reading from *Small Island* Levy chose a passage where Gilbert, one of the books four first-person narrators, poignantly¬ and comically laments his lack of recognition. He arrived knowing Britain, but Britain did not know him. I put it to Levy, and she agreed, that *Small Island*'s multivocal narrative works to right that wrong. It makes the beginnings of the post-war black (but also *multicultural*) British community knowable to a contemporary audience. [^]

[20] This is vital to note, for while *Londonstani* will probably be criticised by some materialist critics for what seems to be an unequicoval celebration of performance and hybridity in the youths' everyday lives (see, for such an example, Susie Thomas' critique of *White Teeth*), it does not propose them to be any more authentic or definitively concrete kinds of experience than traditionally understood categories of race, class, gender and so on. [^]

[21] See www.gautammalkani.com [^]

[22] In an unconventional gesture, Malkani has made a linguistic guide ('Londonstani style guide') available on his website. This says as much about his fastidiously self-conscious engagement with the semantics of communal identity as it does the promotional role of this online resource. [^]

[23] In interview, Malkani elaborates on this exaggeration: "I think of it as sports commenting. He's commenting on sports and he's really enthusiastic, and you know sometimes when you watch players just fumbling around with the ball and the commentator makes it sound so much more elegant? It's contrived and that's what Jas is doing with the violence. He's describing it as a real bloodbath but you're supposed to see through that ..." [^]

[24] In his otherwise generous review ('West side stories'), Rageh Omaar unwittingly reveals he did not finish reading the novel. He makes no mention of the plot-twist and ends by arguing that the novel "intends, above all, to show one thing: that being a young British Asian or African -- whether you are Muslim, Hindu or Sikh -- is not about having a completely westernised identity and set of aspirations." [^]

[25] David Goodhart is cited in the acknowledgements to both hardback and paperback editions of *Londonstani*. As editor of *Prospect* magazine, Goodhart was instrumental in securing *Londonstani* pre-release publicity by printing the first chapter under the title 'Paki' in the November 2005 edition. Of less relevance but still worth noting: Goodhart was also, until 1995, a senior correspondent at *The Financial Times* -— the same paper that Malkani has worked for since 1999; in his piece 'what's right with Asian boys', Malkani describes the role of the BBC (as 'cultural glue') in the almost exact same terms as Goodhart at the end of 'Discomfort of Strangers' (where it is described as a 'social glue'). [^]

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The result is Multicultural London English: a new variety of English that remains quite variable but that contains a core of innovative phonetic, grammatical and discourse features. Although our focus here is on London, similar developments are reported in other cities in the UK (Manchester, for example; see Drummond 2016, who introduces the term Multicultural Urban British English) as well as for other languages spoken in multilingual cities elsewhere in Europe and beyond. Linguistic characteristics of MLE.

In this volume, Graham investigates the relation between land and nationalism in South African and Zimbabwean fiction from the 1960s to the present. This comparative study, the first of its kind, discusses a wide range of writing against more. In this volume, Graham investigates the relation between land and nationalism in South African and Zimbabwean fiction from the 1960s to the present. This comparative study, the first of its kind, discusses a wide range of writing against a backdrop of regional decolonization, including novels by the prize-winning authors J.M Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, ...Â

• â€˜this inâ€™t Good Will Huntingâ€™: Londonstani and the market for Londonâ€™s multicultural fictions more. by James Graham. Research Interests