Postmigrant Revisions of Hybridity, Belonging, and Race in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*

Sten Pultz Moslund

Abstract: This article argues that black British and British Asian literature has changed faster than the postcolonial/migratory theories through which it is often read and has entered an "indigene period" (Osborne 3). The ways in which ideas like hybridity, belonging, and race are usually employed are no longer useful for analysing this literature, mainly because they originate in binary conceptualisations of migrant and non-migrant identities that are increasingly disappearing in the literary works themselves. The concepts remain relevant but need revision. To contribute to this work, the article explores the emerging concept of "postmigration." Postmigration breaks away from the migrant/non-migrant binary by arguing that migration and cultural and racial heterogeneity are no longer exceptional phenomena. They have become the norm in European societies and are now ordinary features of everyday life that affect all citizens, regardless of background. The article focuses on the postmigrant idea that in order to normalize migration as integral to everyday social reality, migration must no longer be positioned as an object of research but should instead become its point of departure. This transformation requires two shifts: research on non-white European art and culture needs to be "de-migratized," while European social and cultural studies need to undergo a general "migratization" (Römhild 44). The article then shows how concepts like hybridity, belonging, and race signify differently in black British and British Asian novels when "de-migratized" by a postmigrant perspective. The article provides a reading of Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* that demonstrates how the postmigrant perspective develops as an analytical tool in conjunction with the literary works it explores.

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I. Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium the critical narrative about black British and British Asian literature has been changing: scholars describe such works as slowly moving from the periphery to the centre of what is commonly understood as British literature.[1] The noted change pertains not so much to the popular reception of the literature as to its depiction of black and brown lives and its treatment of central themes like belonging, race, and othering. Deidre Osborne describes black British and British Asian literature as having moved through a "migratory" and "arriviste" period (1940s-1960s), a "settler" period (1970s-1980s), and a contemporary "indigene" period (1990s-2000s)—although this timeline is to be taken like any such chronology as a non-teleological description with lots of exceptions, contradictions, and throughlines (Osborne 3).[2]

Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) is an example of a British Asian novel written during the "indigene" period. It is a coming-of-age story set in the multicoloured and culturally diverse London suburb of Hounslow. Readers are let into the lives of a group of adolescents—Hardjit, Davinder, Ravi, Amit, Arun, and Jas—who style themselves as "Desi Rudeboys." The boys embody an anti-establishment and antisocial Indo-English "gangsta" subculture that involves petty crime, racist violence, misogynist and homophobic aggression, and a strong (and easily inflamed) assertion of ethnic exceptionality, which is overtly demonstrated in the form of cherry-picked cultural symbols and beliefs. Jas, the first-person narrator, is a latecomer to the gang, a shy and stammering bookie with braces who hankers to reinvent himself as a Desi Rudeboy. He struggles to adapt to the gang's use of complex Desi street lingo, intricate identity codes, and macho views on women and homosexuals. Above all, the novel plays with the notion of authenticity by gradually disclosing how the gang's Desi identity is a staged performance that rests on the members' ability to downplay their

fairly dull middle-class background. As it turns out, the "gangstas" are retaking their A-levels in order to qualify for university. In a surprising twist at the end of the novel, it also turns out that Jas is short for Jason and that the character is white.

Recent scholarship on black British and British Asian literature (which focuses on the work of writers like Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith, Bernardine Evaristo, Hari Kunzru, and Nadeem Aslam) suggests that four general and overlapping ideas have been gaining momentum over the course of the 2000s—each of which is instructive in terms of how we might appreciate or read for indigeneity in a novel like *Londonstani*. First, critics such as Osborne, Sara Upstone, and Mark Stein note a growing confidence in the representation of black and brown identities and new and heterogeneous ways of being British. Such confidence is apparent in the lack of anxieties about difference and unbelonging that characterize earlier periods of black British and British Asian literature. Upstone proposes Darcus Howe's phrase "ease of presence" as way of describing this feature (88).

Secondly, issues specific to black and brown experiences increasingly blend into a greater variety of other and sometimes more central themes (troubled domestic relationships, aging, ghosts, time and space, etc.), just as many writers (who happen to be black or brown) are less concerned with what has come to be known as the obligation of representation and choose to write about themes that have very little or nothing to do with racialization or cultural differences. Instead, black and brown characters with various cultural backgrounds are offered in representations of everyday life in Britain (and the complexities of life in general) and are no less universal in this regard than the habitually taken-for-granted white character with an (equally unmarked) Anglo-Saxon background.[3]

Thirdly, critics suggest that the spectacular postcolonial/migrant drama of border-crossing hybrid heroes and the nomadic migrant double-visions that characterize some of the most popular and influential works from the late twentieth century (and, to an even greater extent, the mood of literary criticism at the time) have largely disappeared.[4] Critics such as Upstone and David Marcus sometimes—a little misleadingly—characterize this shift as a turn to realism. Since a lot of black British

and British Asian literature never turned away from realism,[5] we may instead speak of a general de-aesthetization of themes of migration, immigration, and marginalization.

Finally, critics use terms such as "post-ethnicity," and "post-race" (Upstone 39–43, 21; Stein 112–35; McLeod, "Extra Dimensions" 46–49)[6] to refer to black and brown authors writing about subjects other than race and ethnic differences as well as the confidence with which black and brown lives are depicted as no less indigenous to Britain than those of white characters.[7] The latter element is sometimes expressed in a greater ease of presence enjoyed by characters of different skin colours in social spaces where racial and ethnic identifications (and self-identifications) occasionally vanish or lose the decisive significance they once had (although Hanif Kureishi was writing this way already in the 1990s). The terms "post-race" and "post-ethnicity" can also be used to describe literary texts that mix racial issues into a complexity of other issues (work, maturing, abortion, the fiscal crisis, homosexuality, etc.) that shape the development of social subjects. As such, "post-race" and "post-ethnicity" refer to a condition in which skin colour or cultural differences are not necessarily defining features of the identities of characters and do not necessarily dominate their consciousnesses.[8] Or, as Jacob Ross puts it in his introduction to *Closure*, the 2015 anthology of new black British short stories,

> [t]here is less of an attempt by writers—overtly or through their characters—to self-define. "Black Britishness" is what it is—a lived reality that is like air or breath or blood: important but hardly at the forefront of one's consciousness except in moments of confrontation or self-assertion, and even then, it is not always recognised as such. (11)

Terms like "post-race" and "post-ethnic" (and "post-black," which is also circulating) put a lot of pressure on the continued use of descriptors like black British and British Asian literature. Why not refute these vague and doubtful terms and call it all British literature? My concern, however, is not whether to discard such categorisations. The sticking point is whether black British and British Asian fiction,

when identified as such, is read as exceptional or marginal rather than central and intrinsic to the shared history and collective imaginary of the British Isles. An implicit point throughout this article in this regard is that "black" and "British Asian" are, in fact, no longer terms pointing to marginality or thematic singularity. Rather, literature that is typically read under the sign of black British and British Asian literature increasingly assumes generic and ever more pressing relevance insofar as it upsets the automatic associations of white with the word "British" and more obviously reflects the growing social reality of cultural difference, multiplicity, migration, and multicoloured cohabitation than is often the case in otherwise unmarked British literature.[9] Osborne observes that "for over sixty years, British black and Asian writers have claimed their cultural citizenship in the face of social and cultural disregard, and transformed the English language itself, to better equip it as a vehicle for rendering the multiple, multicultural viewpoints in contemporary British society" (2). For this reason, "black British" and "British Asian" presently work as labels for a kind of literature that, in my view, is generally more in tune with and reflective of a European condition in which plurality and mixing are growing into the social norm. Even so, however, I still understand the terms as disputable, provisional, and makeshift descriptors that are entirely irrelevant in many readings—as when Helen Oyeyemi insists that her novel *The Icarus Girl* be read as a doppelgänger story (Osborne 9).[10]

Although concepts like "ease of presence," "post-race," "post-ethnicity," and de-aestheticizations of migration already seem to be establishing new ways of reading, Upstone is right to suggest that a "distinctive theoretical framework" (8–9) needs to be developed for new writings where theories engendered in connection with earlier, primarily postcolonial migration literature and "posed-ethnic" or "posed-racial" (Stein 135; Upstone 39–47) literature no longer fully apply. The new concept of "postmigration" and the emerging theoretical perspectives that spring from it may offer some of what Upstone is asking for. The concept is not attached to a pre-packaged theoretical framework but is amassing a series of new analytical approaches similar to the ones that have been underway in Britain since the millennial turn.

II. The Concept of Postmigration

The term postmigration was coined in Berlin in the 2000s when a number of artists, weary of being categorized as "minority" or "migrant" voices, began to provocatively refer to themselves and their art as "postmigrant" to signal an end to their categorical exclusion from the presumed norm of a born-and-bred indigenous culture, art, and literature. Shermin Langhoff, director of the Berlin theatre Ballhaus Naunynstraße, popularized the term in 2006 by launching a series of plays she referred to as "Postmigrantische Theater." Since then, "postmigrant" has become a central term in German social studies. It is sometimes used to describe descendants of immigrants but has also acquired a far wider meaning in theories that use it to understand society as a whole. In the latter case the prefix does not mark an end to migration. On the contrary, it marks an end to the exceptionalization of migration: the "post" marks the crossing of an empirical, social, epistemological, and theoretical threshold after which migration is no longer seen as a historical, social, cultural, or political exception to a presumed non-migratory norm. Naika Foroutan writes that postmigration describes a historical condition in which migration is central to the reality of modern nations (which manifests itself in many forms): "as demographic necessity (utilitarianism), everyday reality (multiculturalism), alienation and doomsday scenario (populism) or a diversity democratization strategy (pluralism)" (231; my translation).

Arguably, postmigration shares much with Paul Gilroy's idea of conviviality, inspired as it is by "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" (Gilroy xi). Anticipating a crucial postmigrant point, Gilroy writes that conviviality "does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance" (xi), only their re-setting within the "messy complexity of social life" (6) and the "subversive ordinariness" (xi) of a multicoloured and multicultural reality in which the "mechanisms of identification" (xi) have become unpredictable and the metaphysical categories of race and ethnicity are always contested and destabilized.

The "post" in "postmigration" marks a historical condition as well as a critical and theoretical distancing from (some tendencies in) established migration studies, which are criticized by, for instance, Regina Römhild for maintaining an outdated view of the relationship between society and migration by reiterating the perception of migration as an exception to the norm. Römhild, another leading figure in the (emergent) postmigrant turn in Germany, argues that the persistent and rigorous focus in migration studies on (mostly non-white) migrants or immigrants creates a "migrantology" that is incapable of overcoming binary perceptions of migrant and non-migrant identities (39). Once again, intersections with Gilroy's conviviality are clear. According to Gilroy, "[t]he figure of the immigrant is part of the very intellectual mechanism that holds us . . . hostage. . . . [W]e need to conjure up a future in which black and brown Europeans stop being seen as migrants" while simultaneously reconsidering "the figure of the migrant" as "part of Europe's history rather than its contemporary geography" (165). Like postmigrant scholars, Gilroy sees the incessant description of black and brown people as figures of immigration as an obstruction to their being unambiguously perceived in academic and public discourse as European subjects, born and bred, while at the same time, he, too, urges everyone to recognize migration as the norm, not the exception, that has given shape to Europe throughout history.

Postmigrant theory may be seen as a comprehensive and sustained frame of exploration driven by modes of analysis similar to Gilroy's suggestions fifteen years ago. It differs most pointedly from migration studies by refusing clear distinctions between immigrants and non-immigrants and viewing the "postmigrant condition" not as a matter of minority politics but a historical condition that involves the entire population of a country. Römhild identifies two important shifts introduced by the postmigrant revision of migration studies: first, research on migration needs to be "de-migratized" (*entmigrantisiert*) in order to "normalize" migration and allow migratory issues to be analysed as an integral part of everyday social reality (39). Second, social and cultural studies (and, I suggest, the study of history) need to undergo a "migratization" (*migrantisierung*) (39). In this manner, Römhild argues,

scholars arrive at a research perspective in which migration is no longer the object of research but is instead its point of departure (44)—where migratory movement, multiculturalism, and hybridity, for example, are no longer exceptions defined from the point of view of a supposedly homogeneous and homegrown majority culture but are themselves central and defining features of society's majority culture.[11]

Römhild's point about "de-migratization" is particularly applicable to works of art that thematize historical and social change caused by migration, which I will illustrate in a reading of Malkani's *Londonstani*. Migration as a major factor in shaping British (or London) society is conspicuously manifest in the novel's depiction of reality, which creates a vivid image of the postmigrant condition. Cultural differences and hybridizations are ubiquitous in the novel's landscape, for instance, and they play a central part in all of the interhuman relations described by the characters and their actions. Unsurprisingly, *Londonstani* is often received as a novel that is specifically about im/migration and integration or diasporic South Asian ethnicities,[12] yet it is much more than that. In fact, Malkani's own reading of his novel may be described as "postmigrant" insofar as he does not frame or treat his characters as diasporic or immigrant Others (whether first, second, or third generation); nor does he contrast them with a non-immigrant (white Anglo-Saxon) norm. To him the novel draws a picture of a Desi subculture that is "as British as punk rock and . . . is embraced as such by British institutions such as the BBC" ("About *Londonstani*"). Nor is the novel even intended to be specifically about hybridity, racialization, and ethnic differences, he says, despite their omnipresence in the book. In Malkani's explanation *Londonstani* is primarily about hypermasculinity and misogyny in Desi culture and provides a critical satire of its "hyper-materialism"—that is, its grim obsession with exclusive consumer products and gadgets ("About *Londonstani*").

It is in a context like this that the usual cluster of concepts used to analyse contemporary multicultural literature—e.g., identity, integration, belonging, roots, othering, hybridity—are crucially challenged. As long as they remain primarily informed by immigrant/non-immigrant or equivalent binarisms, such analytical entry points risk con-

tributing to the perception of migration and diversity as exceptional phenomena, even if the characters in such literature, like Malkani's, are not immigrants at all. Similarly, references to skin colour, in a European context, remain a highly migratized phenomenon. James Procter observes that "black" is often used as a "diasporic signifier" even in academic studies (*Dwelling Places* 5). He and others such as Leon Wainwright ascribe this tendency, in part, to the conflation of black/brown experience with migration in the "diaspora aesthetic" that dominated postcolonial studies in the 1990s (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 12). The gist of a postmigrant reading, however, is that it de-migratizes the usual concepts used to interpret literature like *Londonstani*: both the way they work (or are made to work) and the scope of their application changes (e.g., they may now apply to all characters regardless of colour or background). This redeployment of core analytical concepts rests on and engenders a greater sensitivity to the "indigene" features of black and British Asian literature while at the same immersing it within a wider understanding of society as fundamentally and historically shaped by migration.

III. Cultural Hybridity in a Postmigrant Perspective

The launch of cultural hybridity studies in postwar migrant literature as an integral part of the "diaspora aesthetic" (consider Homi K. Bhabha's seminal reading of *The Satanic Verses* in *The Location of Culture*) ties the concept quite strongly to the practice of migratory exceptionalization. In the context of migrant literature hybridity has been celebrated as an experience of loss and displacement turned into the intellectual asset of exceptional critical insightfulness: the double vision of the (usually black or brown) migrant who belongs to two cultures, if not nowhere and everywhere. Accordingly, by engaging with hybridity in European literature scholars already run the risk of reproducing the idea that non-white Europeans are (im)migrants, postcolonial others, and distinct from sedentary white European subjects. Rasheed Araeen critiques the concept by describing Bhabha's hybrid in-betweenness as "a separate space specified by the cultural difference of non-white peoples" (341). A novel like *Londonstani* invites a break from this pattern.

Hybridity is a prevalent feature in *Londonstani*, but it is both de-migratized and deracialized. Cultural mixing is not tied to the experience of a (non-white) migrant character crossing the border from one (monadic) cultural semisphere into another, nor is it restricted to characters with recent immigration backgrounds (or postcolonial master/subject backgrounds). Hybridity does not create a unique and separate "third space" of signification, either. It is ubiquitous and commonplace, to the point of being trivial and unremarkable. And it is homegrown: something that unfolds from within the complex social spaces in Hounslow where cultural differences have been reshaped by decades of coexistence. Jas and his friends grow up in homes that are generally characterized by an unorthodox and heterogeneous blend of Sikh and Hindu culture and feature wall posters of Van Gogh and Monet paintings, Buddha statues, and plastic Christmas trees (Malkani, *Londonstani* 51, 56–57, 79–81). The surprise of the final twist is kept intact by descriptions of Jas' house as smelling of home-cooked biryani and his mother as someone who always wears pashminas: "Fuckin pashmina shawls. She's got eight a them. . . . [B]ought them one time when Amit's mum came back from Bombay" (33).

The composite landscape of such trivial cultural plurality and intermixture in itself resists the conceptualization of cultural hybridity as a fusion of binaries (like "Indian-English") or an exceptional migratory "third space" that calls critical attention to itself as different than a space of supposed sedentary cultural homogeneity. Hybridity is everywhere in multiple and increasingly opaque forms: everything is always-already hybrid, and, rather than the old mix of two cultures, it is produced by the messy blending of a lot. There are noticeable reiterations of cultural particularity within this space of cultural hybridization, though, which manifest themselves in no-mixing rules, displays of cultural symbols, and parental concern that their children do not become "too westrenized [*sic*]" (266). Ideas of cultural purity are entertained by the various youth gangs that set themselves up through stereotyped East versus West (and Sikh/Hindu versus Muslim) demarcations. However, as with the inclusion of Jas in the Desi gang, they are all inconsistent, contradictory, and porous.

Still, to the hybridity analyst, the conspicuous nature of Desi hybridity may call critical attention to itself as a particularly frantic and creative mixture of heterogeneous cultural influences when compared with the everyday intercultural complexity in which it is immersed. Desi hybridity is a creative, spontaneous, confused, and fast-changing jumble of multiple amputated and re-interpreted cultural bits and pieces from across the world. It mixes parts of Sikh and Hindu culture with Afro-American ghetto culture, hip hop, reggae, gangster rap and cultural fads from fashion, MTV, Bollywood, and Hollywood movies. Likewise, the Desi street lingo, which is an omnipresent phenomenon in the novel, is an extraordinary linguistic blend of Cockney (the incessant "innit"), British English, Caribbean English, South Asian English, African-American vernacular, Hindi, Urdu, and Panjabi.[13] For this reason, *Londonstani* may still be read as containing the disruptive performativity envisioned for postcolonial hybridity. Like postcolonial hybridity theory, the novel is also profoundly engaged in challenging essentialism and authenticity with disclosures of inauthenticity. It clarifies how the appearance of identity is maintained only through an imitative performance of shared images of identity, i.e., the mimicking of codes and symbolic capital and reiterations of established cultural practices and interpretations of reality. At one point Jas uses the film *The Matrix* to make an elaborate analysis of tradition, culture, and caste as a mainframe of pre-programmed illusions that everyone, and conservative parents in particular, is plugged into: "All them customs, they're just invented to protect their power" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 238). He suggests that freeing oneself means "be[ing] unplugged back into reality" (238). Accordingly, hybridizations in the novel may shed light on all identities as malleable constructions, and Jas, as a hybrid figure, effects a particularly spectacular disruption of any rigid identity categories on the reader's part when preconceived notions about culture and skin colour are suddenly unsettled.[14]

Yet, although Desi hybridization quite clearly exposes the constructedness of identity, it is muddled in a number of ways that taint its presumed transparency in celebrations of hybridity as a special language against all kinds of authenticity and purity discourses. First of all, hy-

bridity is not intentionally summoned in the novel as a critical language or reality perspective, neither formally nor on the level of storied events. Malkani's characters are not at all conscious of themselves as hybrids or of their hybridized language as a challenge to essentialism or purity. They are not visibly framed as such in the book by any of the aesthetic ploys (e.g., narrative or symbolic orchestrations) used to celebrate the border-crossing hybrid heroes in multicultural classics like *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and *White Teeth* (2000). Secondly, the Desi hybridization of various cultural elements does not result in any inclusive expansion of epistemological horizons or a liberation of possible becomings. Almost the opposite is true. In contrast to postcolonial hybridity discourse, the Desi lifestyle, for all its hybridity, is antagonistic and antisocial. It attacks women ("bitches," "hos"), "goras" (white people), "batty boys" (homosexuals), "coconuts," Somalis, and Muslims. As Sarah Brouillette rightly observes, the Desi lifestyle is "determinedly two-dimensional" (9) and "its modes of belonging present deliberate barriers to outsiders, who are meant to find it hard to relate to or sympathize with" (10). Upstone, who reads hybridization in *Londonstani* and the twist at the end as an example of post-ethnicity in new British Asian fiction, concludes that the novel presents "a largely dystopic post-ethnic reality" (215): the exhilaration Malkani may cause readers to feel with his destabilization of ethnic (and, as I show, racial) identifications is "undercut by the vacant, empty lives of his central protagonists" and the new positions of hegemony and dominance they establish (216).

On the other hand, *Londonstani*'s depiction of the world includes performances and representations of cultural hybridity that may inform a change of perspective in working with hybridity as an analytical concept. Shifting away from the grand binary dramas of hybridity versus homogeneity or East blending with West, hybridity changes from a meta-narrative and aesthetic (or rhetorical) ploy to become part of the description of the ordinary instead: as one factor in the endless complexity and heterogeneity of the lived experience of everyday life in the postmigrant condition, which is not necessarily liberating or the opposite. The shift to a hybrid ordinariness ties in with the general disturbance of any easy predictability of cultural or ethnic (or

racial) identity in the novel. The attention that *Londonstani*'s central characters constantly direct to authentic cultural identities and ethnic particularities is always-already contradicted by their unorthodox and haphazard blending of references, symbols, and beliefs as well as the general messiness of identities, positions, and contradictions in the surrounding environment where cultural differences and the no-mixing rules of ethnic and religious orthodoxy shift from being surprisingly irrelevant in some contexts to decisive in others. Arun and his girlfriend can marry although they are not of the same caste, yet Arun's mother drives the family (and Arun in particular) into a deep crisis by insisting that the future in-laws still behave like her inferiors in the old-fashioned way. Jas is thrown out of the gang, not because he is a white boy with an Anglo-Saxon background but because he starts dating the (feminist) Muslim girl Samira Ahmed. Samira's father has no problem with his daughter dating a non-Muslim white boy, but his fundamentalist sons, "them hardcore Muslim kids who keep tellin their parents what it says in the Koran" (81), are infuriated.[15]

The unpredictability of cultural and ethnic behaviour in the novel further dilutes or demythologizes the notion of cultural and ethnic authenticity. Part of the sitcom feel of the novel's depiction of the parent generation—Amit and Arun's mother, for example, asserts that it is the "custom that we follow the traditions" (266)—springs from the fact that their reification of ethnic identity mostly manifests in their consumption of Indian soap operas and the cultural and religious symbols that are distributed around their houses among all kinds of middle-class furniture, conveniences, and appliances. The depth and weight of ethnicity is in this way somehow drained from cultural signifiers and everyday practices. As Dave Gunning observes, ethnicity's "code of behaviour" is no longer "inevitably lived as a consequence of one's identity. . . . All ethnic identities . . . seem here to possess only a symbolic dimension and lack the historical ballast that might make them more morally meaningful than any other lifestyle choice" (123). Malkani notes that he wanted the novel to illustrate how ethnic or cultural identity is no longer a matter of inheritance or something intrinsic, prescribed, or even ascribed (in any consistent way). It is all

"changeable" and, especially for new generations, a matter of choice (Malkani, "Interview"). Even the pathos of rediscovered authenticity that Hardjit (the gang leader) attributes to Desi self-identification is contradicted by the picture of reality that gradually emerges. Although Hardjit rails against cultural dilution among the parent generation, Desi identity in the novel is not informed by any deeply ingrained cultural heritage. It is staged, forged, copied, adopted, and adapted from popular, mass-produced mediations of cultural specificity: "Hardjit might pretend that he's sourcing his identity from his ethnic roots or whatever, but he's not. He's sourcing it from Hollywood, Bollywood, MTV Base and ads for designer fashion brands" (Malkani, "Interview"). Consequently, it is not only cultural hybridity in the novel that, as Michael Perfect writes, is repeatedly portrayed "as a commodity" and is thus "bound up in late-capitalist consumerism" (153), but also the very "constituents of ethnicity" (Gunning 122).[16]

Culture, ethnicity, and hybridity are all concepts, along with race, that have played a key part in migrant theorizations and analyses of identity and belonging in multicultural or black and British Asian literature. As I will show, in a postmigrant analysis of belonging, these concepts are de-migratized insofar as it causes them to enter into a complex relationship with additional vectors of identity and belonging—such as gender, age, and class—and their heterogeneous, shifting, and situational significance. In the process, the migratory over-emphasis on metaphors of roots and uprooting in questions of belonging shifts to a less metaphysical and more composite engagement with everyday subjectivity and lived experience. *Londonstani* both invites and inspires such a shift of perspective.

IV. Belonging in a Postmigrant Perspective

Some readers draw a connection between the boys' violent assertion of Desi identity and their struggle for belonging. Sara Schotland highlights Michael Halliday's observation that members of criminal groups develop an "anti-language" that reflects "a need for secrecy" as well as a need "to retain group solidarity under intense pressure" (Halliday qtd. in Schotland). Reading the Rudeboys' "anti-language" and antisocial

behaviour as a defensive response to an "intense pressure" like social discrimination or exclusion may explain the gang's behaviour, but only to a certain extent.

The gang's violent and abusive language is sometimes directed against other violent languages of racist and cultural exclusion, such as the word "Paki," which is used by other groups and individuals. The gang affirms their identity (or difference) in relentless opposition to the forces of assimilation that are commonly associated with white Anglo-Saxon nationalism and the history of colonial oppression. The Desi Rudeboys will never stoop to kiss "the white man's butt" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 23) and their contempt for "coconuts" is as strong as their contempt for any trait—like a "poncey Angrez accent" (21), for example—that connotes imperial arrogance and its attendant racial and cultural hierarchies. Apart from his English accent, Jas has to unlearn his academic vocabulary (including "poncey words" like "homophobic" and "misogynist" [45–46]) and all the cultural references he has been schooled in, like *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare. Desi aggression may be understood, accordingly, as an act of violently cutting out a space of belonging within a hostile "space of whiteness" (Ahmed 156)—a structure that persists within and despite their hybrid and multicultural environment—where, pace Sara Ahmed, they are repeatedly confronted with their skin colour as something that never goes unnoticed (156). In one of the novel's strongest assertions of the boys' experience of feeling questioned about their full and natural inclusion as self-evident indigenous British citizens, Ravi says, "We didn't fuckin come here, innit. . . . [W]e was fuckin born here" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 127).

Yet the Rudeboys' aggressive self-marginalization is contradicted by the surprising absence of the things they rage against—or, if not exactly the absence of the "intense pressure" of whiteness (culturally and racially), then at least the relative disappearance of its social significance within a multitude of other dynamics in the shared spaces of social life. The group's self-definition and their "anti-language" appear inflated and borrowed, often comically, as it increasingly comes to light that the gang is mostly imitating something they have no direct experience with themselves. They imitate the violence, rage, and suffering of

the black urban experience in the 1970s and 1980s, but the days of "Paki-bashing skinheads" (47) are gone and they have to stir up racial violence and abuse themselves (as in the contrived revenge beating of a small and timid white boy in the novel's opening scene). Likewise, the assumed pressure on the Desi boys to assimilate into a white monocultural norm is also relative. Their teacher, Mr. Ashwood, is worried about their "anti-integration" and "anti-assimilation" attitudes (126), but, contrary to expectations, the jargon he uses does not refer to their socialization into a homogenous white culture. Instead, Mr. Ashwood is concerned with the boys' opposition to diversity. He encourages the gang to exercise tolerance and reintegrate with their "mainstream multicultural society" (128). Granted, the status of this utterance within the novel as a whole is ambiguous. For all his good intentions, Mr. Ashwood seems a parody of the duplicity of white liberalism and its blindness to the continuation of structures and codes of othering, as when he admonishes the boys to remember how hard their parents had to work to be accepted in Britain (126). Yet his utterance still resonates with the novel's depiction of a complex social space in which the symbolic order of old forms of assimilation may not have entirely disappeared but is competing for its existence within a general messiness of multiplicity, difference, and constant negotiations about identity. Expressions of (demographic and cultural) diversity via the colours of faces and bodies, the facades of houses, clothing, food, language, and everyday practices are pervasive and appear not as uneasy deviations from a majority culture of sameness but as a multiplicity that exists in its own right.

As in many other contemporary black British and British Asian novels, *Londonstani*'s exploration of belonging seems focused on the many ways in which feelings of belonging are produced (or thwarted)—including income and class, gender, sexuality, family relations, age, and upbringing—rather than the sole question of cultural belonging (and its impairments by marginalization and discrimination). In another context,[17] I argue that such change calls on a postmigrant de-migratization of analyses of belonging, and, borrowing two metaphors from Roger Bromley, I propose a shift from a "vertical" to a "horizontal"

analytical orientation. A vertical analysis is a highly migratized approach. It is preoccupied with feelings about distant homelands and mytho-poetic images of rootedness, uprooting, and re-rooting (national, ethnic, and racial). Root metaphors and vertical root thinking are common in literature, public discourse, and migration studies, but in a novel like *Londonstani* readers may note how, eventually, the question of roots fills up the characters' consciousnesses no more than it does in anyone else's everyday interactions within the heterogeneity that is social reality. That is to say, the more or less finite implications inherent in the notion of "cultural roots" are muddled by a simultaneous—or horizontal—complexity of other structural and contingent conditions of belonging (like class, age, and sexuality) along with individual, everyday modes by which identity and multiple, contradictory, and contextually shifting feelings of belonging and unbelonging are continually (re)produced and (re)shaped.

Whereas feelings of unbelonging produced by cultural difference and racialization are vocalized (and, to a large extent, staged) through the gang's self-marginalizing behaviour, a more complex state of belonging and emplacement emerges in the novel through the unarticulated sense of ease that generally distinguishes the lives of the central characters. The boys' everyday reality and their future life paths are deeply but unthinkingly entrenched in middle-class commodity culture, privilege, and self-sufficiency. While retaking their A-levels in order to move on to college, they are comfortably ensconced within a reality shaped by the luxury of high-tech homes equipped with microwaves, thinkpads, chaimakers, stereos, dishwashers, Nintendo game stations, DVDs, plasma TVs, and surround-sound systems, all provided by fathers with their own businesses or well-paid white-collar jobs and doting, domestic mothers. In this light, the Desi revolt against the parent generation (which only takes place outside their homes and is courteously shoed-off on the front door mats) is only a radicalized (adolescent) variation of a self-righteous middle-class view of the world, shaped by reactionary feelings toward gender, class, family, and sexuality and an unquestioning belief in both individual opportunity and materialist gain. This is where the novel's main social criticism is concentrated, along with its criticism

of misogyny, homophobia, and hypermasculinity: in the complacent and parochial lack of self-reflection and the superficial, unreflective, and narcissistic consumerism—or "hyper-materialism"—that fills up the late capitalist minds of the novel's characters, young and old (Malkani, *Londonstani* 250). The criticism manifests in, for instance, the parody of the anti-social theory of "Bling-Bling Economics" entertained by Sanjay, a former investment banker who recruits and exploits the gang as pawns in a major value-added tax (VAT) fraud:

> The word bling has made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary* precisely because it isn't some passing phase, boys. This life-style, these material possessions, this is how you big yourself up, as they say. You will forever be judged and judge yourselves by your luxury consumerist aspirations, your nice stuff. . . . [Y]ou won't one day wake up and say, I know, I want to be less comfortable, less well off. (Malkani, *Londonstani* 167–71)[18]

Although they are ensconced in middle-class privilege, it would be wrong to say that *Londonstani*'s characters maintain a seamless and unproblematic relationship with their social and cultural environment. Arun is tragically pushed to suicide by his mother, who is hysterically upset by her future in-laws' non-submissive behaviour. Rather than migratizing Arun's story by framing it as a tragedy of diasporic deracination, however, the novel weaves Arun and Jas' intimate friendship into its main concern: the vulnerable and searching teenage insecurity that is shared by all of the young characters. The novel obliterates the immigrant/non-immigrant binary through Jas' story, too. As with Arun, Jas' social attachments involve juggling a multiplicity of cultural practices, signs, and codes that are now indigenous to the experience of growing up and feeling at home in Britain, or, at least, in places like Hounslow. Of all the novel's characters, Jas is the one who appears to work the hardest to belong, which I address below. His development illustrates how concepts formerly used to study (im)migrant identities—hybridity, belonging, and racialization—become relevant to literature's depiction of all members of society in the postmigrant condition, regardless of personal background.

V. Race through a Postmigrant Lens

Ahmed offers a "phenomenology of whiteness" to show "how whiteness is lived as a background to experience" (150). Social spaces become white, she argues, by their unarticulated assumption of whiteness as an understood bodily norm (154–56). Consequently, the whiteness of social space is a deep, habitual, and ingrained experience that determines "what bodies can do" (152); it "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (150). If you are white you are blind to the whiteness of social space because your skin colour is invisible. It does not pose a problem or obstruct your movement. If you are not white, you become body-conscious. You are made aware of your colour and come to feel that it stands out as an embodiment of social difference (and distance), obstructing the possibility of easy social interaction and mobility. No longer a subject "extended by the spaces you inhabit" (163), you come to experience yourself as an object. A sense of unbelonging ensues.

The hidden structures of whiteness have not disappeared in *Londonstani*. Ravi's protestation that they "was fuckin born here" testifies to the experience of black/brown objectifications in white space, just as the inheritance of whiteness reveals itself, to some extent, in an institution like the school and, perhaps, in the gang's "coconut" taunts. Yet social space in *Londonstani* is more complex than that. The whiteness of social space loses its totality in several ways—and not only through the Desi refusal to accept its racialized orientations. "[H]ow does whiteness hold its place?" Ahmed asks (156). Her answer is that it upholds itself through likeness and habits: the proximity of people who look alike or strive to act alike in accordance with "the habitual actions of bodies" (154) routinized by "the contours" of social space (156). Yet, the teenagers in *Londonstani* inherit the proximity (or likeness) not of a dense whiteness but of many colours, cultures, forms of cultural intermixture, and social habits (although middle-class life dominates them all).[19] Accordingly, Malkani's brown characters mostly move about without being reminded of their skin colour by structures of whiteness or internalizing a white gaze on brown skin. In fact, in Jas' case, the tables are turned.

Jas reverses the struggle of a brown or black person to pass as someone who belongs in a white social space: he is "almost the same but not quite" (to reuse Bhabha's famous line)—"almost the same" but not brown (Bhabha 127). Alone in front of the mirror, Jas works to convince himself that he can pass as a light brown person. He decides on an interior vision of himself as a "cross between Andy Garcia an Shah Rukh Khan" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 149). In the novel, white skin has become visible and Jas takes pains to become a "natural" part of a particular Desi in-habitance of social space; that is, he works hard to be able to handle its codes with the ease of a "native." Jas joins the Desi denunciation of whiteness, but he also needs to continually direct attention away from his own skin colour and the social significance that is ascribed to it by his friends.

The inverted visibility of whiteness assumes a psychological dimension that becomes apparent only upon a second reading of the novel. The text's silence about Jas' skin colour in the lead-up to the twist ending reads the second time as an intricate formal performance of racial anxiety and the socio-psychological strategies that result from it, as described in Frantz Fanon's studies of the everyday racialization suffered by black bodies. Fanon vividly outlines how a person will writhe in social space to shrink away from the visibility of blackness, anxiously (but hopelessly) struggling to eschew the racial judgment of a battery of harmful preconceptions (113–16). Once *Londonstani*'s readers know about Jas' skin colour, his silence about it reads as a comparable attempt to shrink away from the negative visibility of it. It doubles the voice of Jas' narrative. Like an added tone, race hovers as the uncomfortable reason below all the other reasons he gives as to why he is always in the backseat of the car, why Hardjit would think him a possible "liability" as a gang member (Malkani, *Londonstani* 26), and why he has to struggle so hard to "attain the right level of rudeboy authenticity" (6). Amassing all these other reasons—being "a skinny wimp" who wears "crap clothes" (26); using "batty" language and "poncey words" like "attain" and "authenticity" (6)—is a way of circumventing the most uncomfortable reason for his inadequacies. Similarly, Jas' eager regurgitations of Desi ethnic-racial indignation

and the gang's shaming of coconuts come to read doubly as an anxious display of commitment and an attempt to divert any attention that might be paid to his own supposed combinations of white and brown. When a brown person pulls up in the lane next to the gang in a Peugeot 305, wearing "grungy clothes" and listening to a Coldplay album, a note of brown skin envy is added in the second reading: "So white he was inside his brown skin, he probably talked like those gorafied desis who read the news on TV. . . . It in't as if he had to be such a gorafied bhanchod: God gave him brown skin an so he could be a proper desi if he wanted to" (20–23).

On the other hand, and in contradiction to Rudeboy discourse and Jas' anxieties, skin colour—white, brown, or black—also ceases to be an issue in most of Jas' interaction with his friends as well as most of the everyday contexts shared by the novel's characters. In fact, as much as race identifications are brought to consciousness by Desi collisions with the people around them, racialized self-consciousness disappears almost entirely in the novel's dramatization of adolescent life. The significance of skin colour largely disappears in the novel's depiction of common adolescent issues such as unease about being a virgin, concerns about looks and sexual appeal, and the constant invention and reinvention of the self to keep up with shifting relations to others. Conflicts about Indian traditions and change, for example, are routinely scorned in Desi lingo as "complicated family-related shit," but they are also de-ethnified and de-racialized insofar as "complicated family-related shit" is trivialized as just another version of the generational clashes typically suffered by young people: "Arun's pre-marital trouble was getting to be like watchin the same episode a *EastEnders* again and again" (189). In this sense, the novel may be described as post-racial and understood as, to a certain extent, answering Gilroy's call for "more complex and challenging narratives" to counter "the exaggerated dimensions of racial difference" (131).

Another way in which narrative complexity disturbs the exaggeration of racial identification in questions of belonging results quite subtly from the novel's representations of space. The Desi vocalization and denunciation of whiteness and Jas' anxieties are signs of the continued

operation of racialization in social space. At a more intricate level of the novel's representation of reality, however, a mute poetics of space "in-habits" (Ahmed 156) Jas' narrative. Intimate knowledge and familiarity of place emerge in Jas' descriptions of his surroundings in terms of sounds, smells, tactility, and sights as well as bodily orientations and routines, particularly through the frequent references to familiar smells of biryani, daal, subjhi, and samosas. This level of embodied sensations is not told but shown in the novel; it also is not tied to a particularly "white" cultural experience. Like the body's nonverbal sensations of reality, it discloses itself only silently to readers. Theorizing the source of a deep, unarticulated sense of belonging, Ahmed observes that the "intimacy" of a shared dwelling surrounds its inhabitants "like a skin"; it "shapes the very form" of their being and becoming (155). Bodily and sensuous interactions with the environment, like smells of Indian cooking, suggest the existence of a phenomenology of belonging or emplacement that takes occurs silently in the novel. They manifest a mute, bodily "background" integration of the characters with their surroundings, like a form-giving "skin," that is not determined by a white Anglo-Saxon cultural experience.

Readers may trace a similar mode of emplacement emerging from the sociocultural rhythms that structure or in-habit the silently shared experience of time and space in the novel, which is governed by the festive seasons of Diwali, Christmas, and Eid. Silent organizations of spatiotemporal knowledge, or embodied in-habitations of time and space, create a bodily generated feeling of local emplacement. But more than that, they develop into a subliminal frame of experience through which the rest of the world is compared, sensed, and understood. The latter is only exteriorized by the language Jas uses (his similes and metaphors) to describe new events and the wider world outside Hounslow. At one point, for example, he describes a fighting scene as a "Diwali firework display in someone's back garden" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 99), using the terms of the spatiotemporal experience he has grown up with. Ahmed argues that embodied spatiotemporal emplacement becomes "'the point' from which we see" (158). Very subtly, the novel

disrupts the phenomenology of whiteness in such ways. It expresses a phenomenology of multiplicity that (at least partially) overwrites the embodied epistemology of white emplacement or, perhaps, exists in complex simultaneity with it.

Finally, there is the question of race as raised by the novel's surprising twist. In a first reading, race identifications and confrontations (brown people, goras, black people, coconuts) are pumped up throughout the novel by the Desi outlook on reality only to be deflated by a dramatic post-racial surprise attack that contradicts and seriously questions the depth of the gang's segregationist and racialized attitudes. Yet readers may consider whether the surprising twist actually backfires and defeats the novel's overall post-racial drive and intention. Does the reveal of Jas' skin colour not cause race identification to come tumbling back with a vengeance, and, in the second reading, would it not mean that Jas' anxiety is now lifted into a full-blown crisis? Has Jas been able to completely reinvent his identity except for the remaining fact of skin colour as an inescapable instance of social identification? Is everything malleable, everything potentially a choice except for the visible fact of Jas' colour as a final and unchangeable marker of social difference and distance? The twist may be read that way, but it does not lay all interpretations to rest.

The novel exploits the power of its literary medium to the fullest: the core of its post-racial gesture lies in the fact that readers cannot see the colours of the characters and they may discover themselves to have been tricked by their own constructions of racial identities solely by language and habitualized assumptions. In this light, it is not the natural fact of race that returns with a vengeance but the fact of race as a construction—as a social practice of racialization that readers may have participated in unwittingly by connecting the descriptions of Desi identity with an image of Jas as a brown character with an immigrant background. The novel's twist slices through any presumptions of fixed connections between skin colour and background or automatic expectations of skin colour as a marker of significant cultural difference. This disruption lends power to all of the other post-racial gestures in the novel, including the disappearance of skin colour as a signifier of attrib-

uted social difference whenever other relative markers of identity and indigeneity are foregrounded.

The twist may also catch readers by surprise when it comes to the novel's representation of lived social space. The reorganisation of embodied space that readers may have led themselves initially to perceive as the particularity of a non-white and immigrant mode of re-emplacement (e.g., the Diwali metaphor connected to an inner vision of Jas as a brown character) is in fact a post-racial and postmigrant reorganisation of lived and imagined space. The transcultural appearances of lived, felt, sensed, and imagined social spaces in the novel turn out to be mutely shared by all of its characters regardless of background or skin colour. When read in this way, the novel does not depict Upstone's suggestion of a dystopic image of multicultural society (Upstone 215). "It is the novel's twist," Perfect agrees, "that renders it an ultimately optimistic portrayal of multicultural London" (146). Yet he also writes, "if the novel optimistically suggests that a process of the subcultural becoming increasingly accessible and inclusive is underway, it refuses to offer any kind of indication as to what stage such a process might be at" (151). Toward the end of the text, Jas is beaten up by a group of hooded assailants who may be his former friends, Samira's brothers, or Sanjay's minions (for messing up the gang's steady supply of stolen phones to his business). Malkani explains in an interview that it is up to readers to decide who the assailants might be and, depending on their choice, the novel will yield different degrees of optimism about multicultural Britain ("Interview"). Interestingly, when Jas is recovering from the assault at the hospital in the novel's closing scenes and is confronted with the fact of his skin colour by his father and a medical record—"Look, he says. It says your name here on the medical chart: Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, aged nineteen, white, male" (Malkani, *Londonstani* 340)—Jas' only response is a sullen silence: "I just carry on ignoring em" (341). The narrator's silence about his skin colour continues even after the revelation, but this time without any anxiety. With complete indifference to the insistence around him on racial appellations, Jas simply throws his attention on the next attractive object in the room, the fit nurse on the ward who he decides to butter up with Panjabi charm.

VI. Conclusion

In a way, the popular reception of *Londonstani* illustrates some of the differences between a postmigrant reading and readings that rest on migrant or diasporic conceptualizations of black British and British Asian literature. The novel was a disappointment to critics because it did not turn out to be the new *White Teeth* or *Brick Lane* it was anticipated to be; nor did it read as a realistic "ghetto" novel or a novel about Islamic fundamentalism (Perfect 138–43). Expectations of multicultural or black and British Asian literature (on the part of the publishing business and the commercial market of readers) remain geared toward a migratized exoticization of "ethnic minorities," "racial difference," and what Tom Cheesman refers to as the "cult of hybridity" or "diaspora chic"[20]—none of which apply to Malkani's novel. *Londonstani* does not make for an easy or comfortable reading of clear-cut ethnic or racialized identities and hybrid heroes. Nor does it fit easily within the usual interpretative register of roots and uprooting or homogenous versus heterogeneous cultures. It is not the kind of novel that makes an "immigrant" community "knowable," to use James Graham's fine explanation of the disappointed "middlebrow reading public." It is truly an unsatisfactory and confusing mess of all sorts of dis-identifications in these regards.

Yet in a postmigrant reading it is precisely the mess—and the unknowability—that is interesting. It is the mess that calls attention to changing representations of migration, ethnicity, race, and identity and inspires new analytical approaches to engage with black British and British Asian literature. Viewed through a postmigrant lens, concepts like hybridity, belonging, and race are de-migratized as they are incorporated into the complexity of (changing) structural and everyday factors that constantly shape and reshape individual subjectivities, including other (incomplete and shifting) constituents of identification like gender, age, class, and sexuality as well as a host of different circumstances such as coincidence, chance, and the particular psychology of the individual. At the same time, society is migratized in a postmigrant perspective insofar as diversity, cultural hybridity, issues of belonging, and racial identifications are no longer issues specific to an "othered" (im)migrant

minority, but issues that relate to all members of a society—as in Jas' case. From a postmigrant perspective, any white European character may be analysed as a hybrid figure engaged in a constant and manifold process of sociocultural belonging. All of the above engenders changing collective images and narratives of indigeneity and hybrid identity along with an analytical sensibility to changing modes and shapes of belonging.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 See, for example, Dawes, Nasta, Ross, Stein, Upstone, Procter's *Dwelling Places*, and McLeod's "Extra Dimensions" and "Fantasy Relationships."

2 For similar chronologies, see McLeod's "Extra Dimensions" as well as Dawes, Upstone, Ross, and Stein.

3 See Osborne 9, Dawes 23, Upstone 40, and Procter's "'The Ghost of Other Stories'" 43.

4 See Childs and Green 98, Upstone 18, and Procter's *Dwelling Places* 117–18.

5 See Procter's *Dwelling Places* 9.

6 The terms "race" and "ethnicity" often run side by side in readings of black and British Asian literature, but it is of course important to distinguish between the two. In this article, race refers to the essential categorisation of humans based on visible differences—physical phenotypes like skin colour, hair texture, facial and bodily shapes, etc.—which are believed to represent essentially different and genetically inherited behavioural, psychological, and moral and cognitive predispositions. Building on the work of scholars like Fanon, Gilroy, and Ahmed, I suggest race exists as a social construction with real and damaging social consequences, although it enjoys no transcendent truth and has no biological grounding. Ethnicity is understood as a sociocultural categorisation— or imagined community—based on beliefs in a common origin and heritage as regards language, blood kinship (often racial), religious devotions, and cultural customs and practices. See Cornell and Hartmann 15–40.

7 See also Gilroy's use of "post-race" (37, 42, and 132).

8 See such implications of "post-race" in M. Phillips 32.

9 See, for instance, C. Phillips' "Kingdom of the Blind" on the surprising absence of black and brown characters and multicultural reality in literature by established "white writers and playwrights." For a similar point, see also Smith, to whom "[t]he non-white subject is still the bad conscience of the contemporary novel." ("Two Directions for a Novel" 87).

10 For problematisations of "black" and "British Asian" categorisations, see D'Aguiar, Nasta, Osborne 2–10, Stein 9–18, M. Phillips, and McLeod's "Fantasy Relationships."

11 Social scientist Vertovec's notion of "super-diversity" is another concept that, like Gilroy's conviviality, clearly overlaps with what is understood by a "postmigrant" perspective on multicultural society and its representations in the arts and literature. In "Super-Diversity and Its Implications," Vertovec defines super-diversity as "a multidimensional perspective on diversity . . . [achieved] by appreciating the coalescence of factors which condition people's lives" (1026), i.e., "not just in terms of bringing more ethnicities and countries of origin, but also with respect to a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live" (1025). Although he acknowledges the "need for more and better qualitative studies of super-diversity" (1045), Vertovec draws an image of it mainly with quantitative categories, such as the proliferation and dynamic interplay of variables like ethnicity, language, religion, types of migrant, immigration status and gender and age profile (1024–25). Vertovec also predominantly connects super-diversity with im/migrants and "migrant communities," distinguishing them from "the settled population" (1049). Migration tends to figure more as the object of his research than its point of departure (on this point, see Römhild). Yet in "'Diversity' and the Social Imaginary," his focus shifts to locate the migratory and super-diversity as inner dynamics within society at large and its processes of self-imaging. Vertovec suggests that diversity increasingly penetrates "the social imaginary" (306). The idea "that everyone manifests 'difference' in . . . multiple ways" is a fact that has "begun to take hold of the ways people perceive others. Ethnicity/race, gender, age, sexuality and disability are now categories that people are arguably more aware of, alongside other axes of difference right down to outlooks and experiences" (306). Thus, super-diversity is transforming the "presumptions that people have about their collective social life" and "gradually becomes a background understanding" or part of the taken-for-grantedness of normative ideas and images and the social sensibilities and practices that follow (305–06). Like Gilroy and postmigrant research, Vertovec observes a dawning everyday "banality" of diversity as an indication that diversity is turning into a commonsensical part of "social expectations" (306).

12 See in particular Albertazzi, Goh, Liao, and Ranasinha.

13 For a tracing of some of the linguistic sources of Rudeboy lingo in Malkani's work, see Mitchell and Schotland.

14 Malkani has said that "there's nothing inherent or intrinsic about the kind of identity the characters in the book have, because they are performing their identity and reinventing their identity and making it up as they go along" ("Interview").

15 My book *Migration Literature and Hybridity* (2010) may offer another possible entrance to exploring migratizations and de-migratizations of hybridity. The book differentiates between several forms and modes of hybridization. It describes Bhabha's postcolonial-migratory notion of a "third space" as a case of "intentional hybridity" that highlights hybridization as a critical discourse of cultural difference and instability. In Römhild's terms, Bhabha's "intentional hybridity" translates as a deliberate migratization of the concept to challenge essentialist presumptions of cultural rootedness, stability, and homogeneity. Alongside intentional hybridity, the book develops Bakhtin's notion of "organic hybridity" (and related theories) as a conceptual tool with which to make visible a slow and inconspicuous form of intercultural change that keeps disappearing into the experience of everyday life.

16 To a great extent, the depiction of life in *Londonstani* is in this way similar to the depiction of suburban life in novels like Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996), where culture and ethnicity have been flattened by the unsophisticated bend of middle-class consumerism: in the semidetached five-bedroom Hounslow homes, the "clarity" of cultural particularity has been reduced to "ethnic paraphernalia" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 149) scattered among an accumulated heap of commodities and trademarks through which the characters superficially identify themselves and their values (compare Procter's analysis of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 145).

17 See my "Towards a Postmigrant Reading of Literature: An Analysis of Zadie Smith's *NW*."

18 As an example of a migratizing reading of *Londonstani*, Ranasinha explains Desi hyper-materialism as a diasporic trait inherited from the immigrant parent generation:

> While 'bling' culture is located as part of a wider, pervasive consumerism, *Londonstani* also hints that the young Asian men are asserting the hyper-materialism of those first-generation Asian migrants who display the badge of material success as a symbol of immigrant success: 'we have made it in the West'. The novel details the first-generation immigrants' flaunting of their wealth, Mercedes Benz cars, and competition amongst their peers. (301–02)

19 Ahmed ties "coconut" subjectifications very tightly to social mobility: "Becoming white . . . is closely related to the vertical promise of class mobility: you can move up only by approximating the habitus of the white bourgeois body . . . or at least approximating its style" (160). Yet, if we understand this rigidly it would mean that any upward social mobility of non-white people all over the

world would somehow be judged as an act of disloyalty to some implicit and unspecified expectations of a black or brown cultural identity. To soften the argument, a differentiation of kinds of whiteness may be needed as well as a closer study of the possibility of a large variety of black and brown middle-class cultures. Secondly, it might be fruitful not to refute the problem of middle-class whiteness (and racial discrimination as an obstruction to social mobility), but to supplement such criticism with a more fundamental criticism of other reductive elements involved in the matrix of social mobility and middle-class life: e.g. a criticism of liberal capitalism and late modernity's professionalization and objectification of human life, which, even if originating in the West, have become socio-economic forces that not only erode non-white cultures but cut and shape humans in violent ways everywhere and regardless of skin colour.

20　See also Sethi and Graham.

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