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POST-MIGRATION STUDIES AND THE CITY: THE CASE OF LONDON

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Abstract

The city has always played a pivotal role in human history because, as Henry Lefebvre reminds us, the physical structure of the urban place is not just a neutral container of social and historical events, but it acts as a sort of dialogic dimension based on symbols, sets of values, and customs,[1] in which people can give order to their reality, anchoring their identity in a sort of collective memory, and in a network of reciprocal human bonds: a community. For this reason, the city has always been at the heart of narrations, starting from mythological tales, as well as of philosophical and scientific studies. Despite the vast theoretical background and narrative tradition, the enormous changes that the urban dimension underwent over the last century have brought new challenges and the necessity for new theorizations to the fore.

This dissertation aims to offer a glimpse of such a complex contemporary challenge, particularly narrowing the focus on the relationship between the city and the post-multicultural society, taking into consideration the particular case of London. The choice to focus the research on London is based on the fact that the English capital provides a unique example of a post-multicultural city, where particular historical, social and urban conditions have given, and continue to give, rise to intercultural spaces, which are increasingly fostering the urge for a reconfiguration of the idea of citizenship, Britishness and identity.

The study specifically looks into how the concrete local dimension of the city interacts with the complexity of a transcultural and transnational society, whose heterogeneity exponentially increased in the last century, imposing a pervasive condition of superdiversity, as Steven Vertovec defined it. Given this peculiar condition, the study endeavours to investigate, on one hand, how the idea of citizenship and community changes together with the question of "who is the alien?", and, on the

[1] Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'Espace* (1974), (Paris: Edition Anthropos, 1986)

other hand, how urban narrations influence the way people live and perceive such changes.

The research method employed is based on an interdisciplinary approach, which aims to combine a historical overview with the philosophical and scientific perspective of urban studies, and the sociological points of view of post-multicultural studies. Theoretical evidence provided by the different disciplines is integrated into the literary analysis of three contemporary narrative works. Literature is the fundamental core of this dissertation, first because, as described in detail in the first chapter, it is impossible to analyse the urban reality without considering its narrative dimension, second because literature has the peculiar ability to provide a wider and more organic view able to comprehend and incorporate all the various theoretical issues proposed by the individual disciplines, giving voice to human experience and conscience.

The first chapter outlines the concept of *city* from an etymological, historical, philosophical and literary point of view. This overview explores several aspects: why the 'city' or community was the first place where humanity grew and developed; why it is the place that gave rise to the semantics of culture, social and political organisation, the idea of community, partnership and belonging; why belonging to the same city gave people a particular identity, with particular symbols and customs; and finally, how the idea of city has changed together with its conformation, function, and rhythm as a unique organic system, following the evolution of historical and human changes.

The second chapter deals with contemporary post-migration societies, specifically that of London, looking into the most important processes and theoretical reconfigurations at stake such as the idea of citizenship, integration, Britishness and identity. After retrieving the main historical and social stages that marked the passage from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism, the analysis will focus on the term citizenship from both philosophical and political/ historical points of view. Then, the chapter will further develop the idea of the city as the place where local and

universal meet, creating new conditions for shaping new identities and cultural bonds based on one's physical participation in a community regulated by universally shared values.

Together with these theoretical discussions on citizenship and Britishness, in an effort to define a more coherent idea of urban community, the topic will take into consideration the literary perspective, by offering a selection of the literary production of new British citizens who are shaping the new hybrid and super-diverse London by narrating the birth of a new Britishness.

The third chapter will open the literary analysis of this dissertation by presenting Kamal Ahmed's work *The Life and Times of a Very British Man*.[2] The Anglo-Sudanese British journalist Kamal Ahmed -editorial director of BBC News and group director of Communications for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in London- sheds light not only on the present condition of contemporary post-multicultural London, but also investigates the facts and narrations that modern London is rooted in and which still have an influence on the way the urban society imagines itself.

In the fourth chapter the focus will shift to post-multicultural London seen as a gigantic economic machine, through the analysis of John Lanchester's novel *Capital*.[3] The aim is to describe how the increasing commodification of the city has influenced the idea of community and citizenship by taking into account the relationships among inhabitants and those between inhabitants and the place where they live: a relationship profoundly characterised by obliviousness and disconnectedness.

The fifth chapter will discuss these questions by narrowing the focus on how the transformation of the contemporary city into a negotiable commodity and the passage from the idea of citizen to that of city user and from community to society influence people's perception of the self and the city, leading to a progressive alienation of its inhabitants.

[2] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
[3] John Lanchester, *Capital*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

Tibor Fischer's Voyage to the End of the Room4 particularly problematises the idea of the 'alien,' by dealing with the problem of self-alienation, which seems increasingly to affect a large part of urban inhabitants.

[4] Tibor Fischer, *Voyage to the End of The Room*, (London: Vintage, 2004).

Contents

Introduction

The city has always played a pivotal role in human history because, as Henry Lefebvre reminds us, the physical structure of the urban place is not just a neutral container of social and historical events, but it acts as a sort of dialogic dimension based on symbols, sets of values, and customs,[5] in which people can give order to their reality, anchoring their identity in a sort of collective memory, and in a network of reciprocal human bonds: a community. For this reason, the city has always been at the heart of narrations, starting from mythological tales, as well as of philosophical and scientific studies. Despite the vast theoretical background and narrative tradition, the enormous changes that the urban dimension underwent over the last century have brought new challenges and the necessity for new theorizations to the fore.

This dissertation aims to offer a glimpse of such a complex contemporary challenge, particularly narrowing the focus on the relationship between the city and the post-multicultural society, taking into consideration the particular case of London. The choice to focus the research on London is based on the fact that the English capital provides a unique example of a post-multicultural city, where particular historical, social and urban conditions have given, and continue to give, rise to intercultural spaces, which are increasingly fostering the urge for a reconfiguration of the idea of citizenship, Britishness and identity. Indeed, after a long tradition of ethnical and cultural merging, from the Roman presence among the British tribes to the post-colonial immigration waves,

> New, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups have hardly gained attention or a place on the public agenda. Yet it is the growth of exactly these sorts of groups that has in recent years radically transformed the social landscape in Britain. The time has come to re-evaluate – in social scientific study as well as policy – the nature of diversity in Britain today.[6]

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[5] Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'Espace* (1974), (Paris: Edition Anthropos, 1986)

[6] Steven Vertovec, "The Emergence of Superdiversity In Britain", *Centre on Migration, Policy And Society*, 2006, n. 25.

The study specifically looks into how the concrete local dimension of the city interacts with the complexity of a transcultural and transnational society, whose heterogeneity exponentially increased in the last century, imposing a pervasive condition of superdiversity, as Steven Vertovec defined it. Given this peculiar condition, the study endeavours to investigate, on one hand, how the idea of citizenship and community changes together with the question of "who is the alien?", and, on the other hand, how urban narrations influence the way people live and perceive such changes.

The research method employed is based on an interdisciplinary approach, which aims to combine a historical overview with the philosophical and scientific perspective of urban studies, and the sociological points of view of post-multicultural studies. Theoretical evidence provided by the different disciplines is integrated into the literary analysis of three contemporary narrative works. Literature is the fundamental core of this dissertation, first because, as described in detail in the first chapter, it is impossible to analyse the urban reality without considering its narrative dimension, second because literature has the peculiar ability to provide a wider and more organic view able to comprehend and incorporate all the various theoretical issues proposed by the individual disciplines, giving voice to human experience and conscience.

Therefore, in the first part of the thesis, the discussion will focus on the theoretical premises, while the second part, the last three chapters, focuses on the analyses of three works of literature that will become the lens through which to verify and implement the former theoretical contributions. In particular, the first chapter outlines the concept of *city* from an etymological, historical, philosophical and literary point of view. This overview explores several aspects: why the 'city' or community was the first place where humanity grew and developed; why it is the place that gave rise to the semantics of culture, social and political organisation, the idea of community, partnership and belonging; why belonging to the same city gave people a particular identity, with particular symbols and customs; and finally, how the idea of city has changed together with its conformation, function, and rhythm as a unique organic system, following the evolution of historical and human changes.

The first step in this historical and ontological investigation consisted of retrieving mythological stories about early cities like Eridu in Mesopotamia and stories narrated by Egyptian hieroglyphics in order to discover how strong the bond between human beings and their communities were. Originated from an instinctive need for protection,

and evolved beyond the practical urgency to survive, cities acquired a symbolic, almost transcendental, and ontological role over the centuries. The ontological dimension of the urban space will be one of the key pillars of this thesis. From the Greek root "*on, ontos*," being, existence, essence, and "*logia*" meaning discourse, the ontology is the "metaphysical science or study of being and the original essence of things."[7] Therefore, referring to the ontological nature of the city means recognizing the fact that human beings originally attributed to their urban space a generative and nurturing role, so much so that in Egyptian hieroglyphics a house or town were also symbols for mother;[8] and the Romans coined the term "metropolis" from the etymological root "mater." This physical and metaphysical, or symbolic, urban dimension has been considered the site of cultural, social and political identity.

The historical section includes an analysis of the Greek and Roman period; it backtracks to the origins of the political and civic dimension of the "polis" and of those subjects that interacted within it. The analysis of the Middle Ages, characterised by the vertical structure of cathedrals, will shed light on the transcendental role of the city, which had to remind human beings of the "city of God", citing quotes by St Augustine. The Industrial Revolution and the technical innovations of the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly regarding large-scale production and transport, produced a significant break from the traditional idea of city, turning it into a "negotiable commodity." Industrial towns were "dark hives, busily puffing, clanking, screeching, smoking for twelve and fourteen hours a day."[9]

This was the historical and economic turning point which opened the way to a fast, radical and almost shocking transformation of western cities, whose dimensions and lives will never be the same. Significant urban transformations occurred in the 19th century; and then again in the 20th century, the idea of metropolis evolved to the "megacities" of the 1970s, the "global cities" according to American sociologist Saskia Sassen. The "megalopoles"[10] -as defined by Jean Gottman- and finally the de-located

[7] https://www.etymonline.com/word/ontology, last accessed April, 2020.

[8] Lewis Mumford, *City in History*, (New York, London: Harvest Book, 1961)13

[9] Mumford, *City in History*, 446

[10] Jean Gottman, *Megalopolis. The Urbanized Northeastern Seabord of The United States*. (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961).

and fluid dimension of the "metacities"[11] will provide the necessary basis to understand the considerable advent of critical studies and theories concerning the city in the last century.

Following the historical analysis, the next chapter will focus on the most significant schools of thought, which have reasoned on such changes, providing them with philosophical definitions and analysing their implications in human society. The first prominent example will be that of the "Chicago school," one of the most influential theoretic schools that originated in the early years of the twentieth century and the first to specialise in urban sociology. The ecologist view of the Chicago school will present the city as an ecosystem - "an expression of mankind in general and specifically of the social relations generated by territoriality."[12] Another perspective on the city will be provided by the French theorist Michel De Certau,[13] who defined the city as a constantly evolving cultural interface, being continuously modified and mediated by the citizens' urban experience. "Its (a city's) present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future."[14] A theoretical discussion will follow, which takes into consideration the perspective of urban semiotics, according to which space is the social product of the interaction of several actors who are, to a considerable extent, formally organized as groups and institutions. Among the theorists of this approach are Roland Barthes, according to whom "human space has always been a signifying space,"[15] Umberto Eco, Mark Gottdiener, Kevin Lynch, and, last but not least, Henry Lefebvre, who proposed the novel and revolutionary definition of "right to the city," [16] further developed by the British economic geographer and anthropologist David Harvey. An analysis of Lefebvre's view will particularly shed light on the increasing risks of the post-modern capitalistic urban space affected by a progressive process of

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[11] McGrath, Pickett "The Metacity: a Conceptual Framework for Integrating Ecology and Urban Design, 70.

[12] R. Park, E. Burgess, *The City*, 9.

[13] Michel de Certau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (California: University of California Press, 1988).

[14] de Certau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

[15] Roland Barthes, "Semiology and Urbanism", in Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, (London, New York: Routledge,1997), 413.

[16] Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville,* (Paris: Editions Anthropos 1968).

commodification, a de-humanization caused by capitalistic industrialization, which reduced everything in the city to a marketable commodity. As Ferdinand Toennies' studies will show, the new urban condition highlighted by Lefebvre deeply influenced a radical change also in the nature of the community that risks being reduced to a mass of strangers. The relevance of these theoretical studies has been demonstrated by the recent UN-HABITAT and UNESCO efforts to conceptualise the right to the city as part of a broader agenda for human rights (UNESCO, 2006; UN-HABITAT, 2010; Sugranyes & Mathivet, 2010). The goal is to encourage urban policies that promote justice, sustainability and inclusion in cities by developing charters that articulate a right to the city, such as the World Charter for the Right to the City, the *European Charter for Human Rights in the City*, and the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. Strictly connected to the commodification of urban space and the de-humanization of the social community, the psychological-literary approach of psychogeography makes a significant contribution to the research. Psychogeography was defined by Guy Debord in 1955 as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."[17] This approach will point out the strict connection between the city and the psychological sphere of the human being by shedding light on the importance of the relationship between urban space and its inhabitants. The relevance of such a relationship will be further investigated by exploring how the fragmentation of territories, the violent and rapid changing of landscapes, and the increase in sprawling peripheries with no centre cause individual and social diseases like "territorial distress" or "dysmorphia," schizophrenia and alienation.

The second chapter deals with contemporary post-migration societies, specifically that of London, looking into the most important processes and theoretical reconfigurations at stake such as the idea of citizenship, integration, Britishness and identity.

The study initially retrieves the main historical and social stages that marked the passage from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism, to understand why

[17] Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* in *Les Lèvres Nues*, 6, (September *1955*), https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html

multicultural theories and policies have turned out to be no longer sufficient to comprehend and manage contemporary challenges posed by the unprecedented transcultural and 'super-diverse' societies, using Steven Vertovec's definition. The relevance of this study has been demonstrated by the failure of multicultural policies, not only in Europe but also in traditionally migrant-receiving countries like Canada and Australia.[18] As far as Britain is concerned, it has been shown by the *Parekh Report*, the product of the Commission for the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, which depicted Britain as marked by significant cultural hybridity and a conception of Britishness that is constantly evolving.[19] Considering this new social and political condition, Vertovec[20] and Kymlicka's[21] theoretical works will be discussed, which introduce the term 'post-multiculturalism.'

The next aspects covered by this research will be the theoretical implications of the passage from the multicultural to the post-multicultural era, mainly the reshaping of the idea of citizenship, which comes to be the term chosen to replace "multiculturalism" in several official documents.[22] The thesis will analyse the term citizenship from both philosophical and political/ historical points of view. On one hand, the etymological nature of citizenship based on sharing values, partnership, and moral ties, going beyond ethnical bonds, perfectly combines a universal cultural condition and the local inscription of the subject within the urban reality. This analysis will further develop the idea of the city as the place where local and universal meet, creating new conditions for shaping new identities and cultural bonds based on one's physical participation in a community regulated by universally shared values. Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglas Klusmeyer (2002) offer this definition of citizenship: "Citizenship denotes membership of an intergenerational project, committed to

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[18] Roger Chapman, *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints and Voices*, (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010).

[19] Bikhu Parekh, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).

[20] Steve Vertovec, "Towards Post-multiculturalism? Changing Communities, Conditions and Contexts of Diversity", *International Social Science Journal* 61(199): 83–95.

[21] Will Kymlicka, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies", in Steve Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf (eds) *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*. (London: Routledge, 2010).

[22] Heba Batainah, Mary Walsh, "From Multiculturalism to Citizenship", in C. Aulich and R.Wettenhall (eds) *Howard's Fourth Government*. (Sydney: University of New South WalesPress), 2008.

knowing a past and promoting a better future for generations to follow."[23] On the other hand, particularly due to the high relevance of citizenship and its importance in defining a community, it has been historically used to trace boundaries between members and outsiders, considering geographical and territorial coverage as a parameter, according to specific political interests. Indeed, historically, citizenship has been an instrument of expansion and control for several empires. Therefore, the discussion will aim to answer the question whether the recognition of citizenship is a condition exclusively imposed from higher-up or whether it can be considered a pragmatic category originated by social practice. The discussion will particularly focus on contemporary authors like Seyla Benhabib,[24] who proposed the idea of democratic iterations to reconcile rights claims from various kinds of belonging and membership; and Saskia Sassen and Janice Ho, who particularly propose citizenship as a discursive and narrative frame[25] similarly to the idea of Britishness. Even this last concept required a new theoretical reconfiguration in the last century. Indeed, the New Year Conference on 14 January 2006 of the Fabian society,[26] a democratically governed socialist society affiliated with the Labour party and one of its original founders**,** focused on the importance of developing a more coherent notion of Britishness.

Together with these theoretical discussions on citizenship and Britishness, in an effort to define a more coherent idea of urban community, the topic will take into consideration the literary perspective, beginning with the idea of Benedict Anderson according to whom "communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[27] Self-imagination, which implies self-narration, is intrinsically a part of one's identity. Therefore, the last section of the second chapter will focus on a selection of the literary production of

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[23] Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglas Klusmeyer, *Citizenship policies for an age of migration*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

[24] Benhabib Seyla, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[25] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2015), 8.

[26] https://fabians.org.uk/about-us/, last accessed November 2019.

[27] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Original and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

new British citizens who are shaping the new hybrid and super-diverse London by narrating the birth of a new Britishness. This short overview will focus particularly on three contemporary exponents: Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*[28] and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.[29] Kureishi belongs among those "pioneers" of the new generations of Londoners. Through his works, he realized he had to find his place in a changing society, looking for a new language to describe a growing new reality. Smith's works include a wide range of protagonists, stories, sensibilities and ideologies, providing an insight on the complexity of Londoners' super-diversity, hybrid nature and multi-layered experiences. Finally, Ali's novel focuses on the description of a wide array of feelings and relationships that bind the characters to London and to different ideas of Britishness, depicting the physical urban space and social practices as means of freedom, which enable self-reimagination and identity reconfiguration.

The third chapter will open the literary analysis of this dissertation by presenting Kamal Ahmed's work *The Life and Times of a Very British Man*.[30] The Anglo-Sudanese British journalist Kamal Ahmed -editorial director of BBC News and group director of Communications for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in London- sheds light not only on the present condition of contemporary post-multicultural London, but also investigates the facts and narrations that modern London is rooted in and which still have an influence on the way the urban society imagines itself. To this purpose, Ahmed's work will highlight how far the way people have lived and perceived the enormous changes that the city of London has undergone over the past 70 years has been influenced by a sort of "single story" about migration and Britishness, which is not able to accurately portray contemporary reality. Ahmed's story will shed light on the contemporary super-diversity and hybridity that characterises modern London and transcends the reassuring framework usually employed to categorize people and situations. He engages in a sort of ideal dialogue with one of the most effective sources of traditional narrations about the fear of the immigrant and the defense of the purity of British values: Enoch Powell's speech, known as "Rivers of Blood." Not only will the author demolish Powell's ideological speech by unveiling the truth about certain social events that Powell quoted to support

[28] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Vintage, 2001).

[29] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, (New York: Simon, 2003).

[30] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

his ideas, but he will also recount his personal story, and that of his parents, as an irrefutable and concrete example of how Britishness goes beyond ethnical boundaries. Besides, his biographical narration aims to show how the concrete participation in social interactions and institutions like school or public jobs, together with the familiarity that every-day-life entails, are able to create new perfectly integrated and mixed identities that find their home within the city of London. Ahmed's narration does not simply offer a static description of his mixed-race Britain, but it is an engaging account of the transformations that gradually took place in London and gives voice to those identities and relationships that increasingly became a part of the urban environment, inhabiting the streets, neighbourhood, shops and schools, becoming real, irrefutable realities.

Together with this new idea of citizenship and Britishness, which have been taking place and reshaping London for more than 50 years, Kamal Ahmed also takes into consideration those cultural discourses and narrations that influence urban life - the way inhabitants perceive each other, regulate their relationships, identify in and out groups and, consequently, how they orient their choices and actions. Indeed, as pointed out in the second chapter,

> The sum of the narration, which intertwines among community members as it represents their lives, gives voice to their experiences and depicts the troubles they are struggling with, creating a sort of meta-city - a virtual, yet real, urban dimension inhabited by ideas and feelings. This literary urban location is the experienced city, the place where identity is negotiated and forged.[31]

Ahmed's book will show how the narrative experience together with conversations and contacts may be the way through which a crisis, meant as a moment of profound change, might create the perfect conditions to trigger an evolutionary process of interaction, adaptation and reshaping.[32] Moreover, Ahmed points out how the

[31] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Original and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

[32] See Robert Park, Peter Burgess, *The City*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967)

metropolis may be considered a sort of verbal dispositive,[33] as Giorgio Agamben, influenced by the Foucauldian idea of dispositive,[34] defined it.[35]

In the fourth chapter the focus will shift to post-multicultural London seen as a gigantic economic machine, through the analysis of John Lanchester's novel *Capital.*[36] The aim is to describe how the increasing commodification of the city has influenced the idea of community and citizenship by taking into account the relationships among inhabitants and those between inhabitants and the place where they live: a relationship profoundly characterised by obliviousness and disconnectedness. Indeed, Lanchester's fictional narration challenges the idea of a geographical community rooted in an urban space which functions as an ontological narrative dispositive. Lanchester defines London as the "capital," not only in the political sense, but mainly in an economic sense: the city is a negotiable commodity, a vital part of a huge business machine. Therefore, the traditional sense of community intended as a group of people closely interconnected through a sense of public responsibility and commitment, is undermined by a consumeristic way of life and view of the city. In order to emphasise this new impoverished and de-humanized nature of London, Lanchester chooses to describe it at the time of a huge international credit crunch that threw the whole consumeristic urban machine into a crisis, giving the characters the possibility to experience a change in their perception of urban life and community. This narrative strategy will provide the author, on one hand, with the possibility to tackle the most important problematic issues of contemporary urban London, like the home-as-asset and isolation problems, disconnectedness, obliviousness of inhabitants and the spreading of "non-places" around the city, which is now depicted as a chaotic and fluid dimension, hosting a mass of strangers. On the other hand, however, it offers an

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[33] Alberto Abruzzese, "Introduction", in Valeria Giordano (Ed.), *Linguaggi della metropoli*, (Napoli, Liguori, 2002).

[34] Michel Foucault, "The confession of the Flesh" in C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other writings 1972–1977 by Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon Books), 194-228.

[35] Indeed, Agamben calls dispositive "anything that owns the capacity to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, model, control and assure the gesture, conducts, opinions and discourses of living beings.", Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?,* (Roma, Nottetempo, 2006), 2.

[36] John Lanchester, *Capital*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

opportunity to envision a sort of rediscovery of the lost human dimension and the original importance of the concept of community.

Lanchester's novel is significant to understand the contemporary situation since the author's journalistic background leads him to concentrate on the main social, economic and political urban changes that occurred during the 20th century. At that time, the increasing complexity and dimensions of metropoles, characterized by a core and wide fringes, generated new urban subjects born of the breach between dwellings and work places - the commuters, "exploiting" the city just as a workplace. This phenomenon highly contributed to the process of commodification of urban spaces.

In particular, Lanchester's analysis of a commodified London, in which he presents the failure of any possibility for cohesiveness among the inhabitants of his fictitious road, challenging also the idea of neighbourhood as a cohesive element for a community, will put forward fundamental questions for the post-multicultural society: Is it really possible to speak about integration, citizenship and a new kind of Britishness, without being part of a real community which shares civic and moral values, reciprocal commitment and a general sense of partnership? Is it possible for a commodified urban dimension, which functions as a competitive capitalistic machine, totally deprived of its role as symbolic and narrative dispositive, to host the birth of new hybrid identities maintaining its original nurturing and generative role for human society?

The fifth chapter will discuss these questions by narrowing the focus on how the transformation of the contemporary city into a negotiable commodity and the passage from the idea of citizen to that of city user and from community to society influence people's perception of the self and the city, leading to a progressive alienation of its inhabitants.

Tibor Fischer's *Voyage to the End of the Room*[37] particularly problematises the idea of the 'alien,' by dealing with the problem of self-alienation, which seems increasingly to affect a large part of urban inhabitants. In this sense, Fischer's narration adds a further fundamental question to our research by showing the inexistence of an urban community and the perception of the city as a hostile place with its frenetic, chaotic and sometimes absurd consumeristic way of life. This perception does not only hinder

[37] Tibor Fischer, *Voyage to the End of The Room*, (London: Vintage, 2004).

the possibility of integration and hybridization, but they increasingly lead to a sort of inverted process: that of voluntary estrangement from the urban society as a refusal to one's own right to the city because of the dehumanization of the urban community and the transformation of the city into a commodity.

According to Mizruchi, the process of self-alienation is fostered by fast and continuous change, which produces instability and fear.[38] Therefore, the process of self-alienation, which Simmel describes as the suppression of one's needs thereby turning the self into an object and a projection of over-involvement in and identification with society,[39] will turn out to be a sort of self-defense mechanism that leads people to progressively detach from a reality that is perceived as a threat. Therefore, one of the fundamental questions Fisher's novel confronts is that concerning the nature of the stranger. Who is the stranger within a city that is no longer perceived as a mother figure but an enemy? How can one feel rooted and part of a community when the physical place of the urban dimension has become a sort of "delocated space" due to increasing technological advancement, which is fostering the virtual and dematerialized dimension of the metacity? And how can integration take place when the city ends up no longer being a safe place and strangers are no longer just the foreigners but all those inhabitants who feel lost and powerless within the city? These questions will offer an occasion to stress again the importance of a physical urban space, able to act as an orienting dispositive and collective memory in providing people with a real community able to make them feel included, not lost, but part of a new evolving cultural and civic identity.

[38] Mizruchi, H. "Romanticism, urbanism, and small town in mass society: an exploratory analysis." In P. Meadows and H. Mizruchi (eds.), *Urbanism, Urbanizaton, and Change: Comparative Perspectives*, (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing,1969) pp. 243-251.

[39] *Ibid.*

1. Theories on the City.

"We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us."
Winston Churchill 1943

1.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I will outline the concept of *city* from etymological, historical, philosophical and literary points of view. Through this outline we will see that a city is the principal place where humanity grows and develops. It is an ontological space that gives rise to the semantics of culture; where each person's identity is shaped through their relationship with the community. As Maurice Halbwachs wrote in *La Memoire Collective*, this kind of relationship is reciprocal not only between each person and the community but also between people and their environment. Indeed, "When a group is introduced into a part of space, it transforms it to its image, but at the same time, it yields and adapts itself to certain material things which resist it. It encloses itself in the framework that it has constructed."[40] As Lefebvre explains in his seminal work, *La Production de l'Espace* (1974), space is not just a neutral container which hosts human beings and provides them with physical coordinates for their human activities, but it is the outcome of human relationships that weave together and invest physical places with a high symbolic value. The production of meaningful relations between people and their city engender the idea of space as both the product and the means of production of a cultural and political dimension.[41]

These social relations produced within a city trigger a process of identification and self-awareness made possible by the fact that people can be recognized as an active part of a community, which shares the same spaces, and reading the city as if it were a text characterized by its own language and its own memory. More precisely, one can say that a city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locum of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes a city's

[40] Maurice Halbwachs, La Mémoire Collective, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 170.

[41] Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l'Espace (1974), (Paris: Edition Anthropos, 1986).

predominant image, of both architecture and landscape, and as certain artefacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge. In this entirely positive sense, great ideas flow through the history of a city and give shape to it.[42]

Therefore, we can affirm that people living in a city share reference points, shaped by the same symbols and semiotics. These are the pivotal features of the "experienced space" theorized by Lefebvre. Indeed, Lefebvre distinguishes between perceived space (the spatial reality of a materially constructed environment), conceived space (that is represented by planners, administrators, scientists and technocrats), and experienced space, which is formed when the space is supplied with images and symbols by the ordinary users of urban space.[43] By supplying their living space with images and symbols, human beings try to order and give meaning to their reality - the space they inhabit and the relationships they build. Bollnow discusses this in *The Ordering of Space*, by explaining that

> Ordering space means that, with conscious deliberation, I assign a place in a space or container to every object. This ordering must be done appropriately. Thus, human ordering always gives a strange sense of satisfaction, because here the world, in the ordered area in question, has become clearly comprehensible and manageable […]. The process of new ordering is a very significant one […] We are re-creating space for ourselves.[44]

Our articulations of space, both as memorials to the past and combinatorial affordances for the future, teach us not only about ourselves but also about those around us. They orient us.[45] Indeed, the urban framework helped people to become accustomed to norms and values,[46] and to negotiate their role within the community. Lewis Mumford, quoting the Elizabethan historian John Stow, analyses the urban

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[42] Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1982), 130.

[43] Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l'Espace.

[44] Otto F. Bollnow, Human space, (London: Hyphen Press, 1963), 196.

[45] Cory Benavente, "City as Interface: A Discourse on the Semiological Significance of Contemporary Urban Spaces", in Media Theory and Digital Culture, Spring 2013, https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/cctp-748-spring2013/2013/05/06/city-as-interface-a-discourse-on-the-semiological-significance-of-the-contemporary-urban-spaces/, last access April 2019.

[46] Otto F. Bollnow, Human space, 200.

process of the Elizabethan London, by highlighting that

> Men are congregated into cities and commonwealths for honesty and utility's sake, these shortly be the commodities that do come by cities, commonalities and corporations. The first people who came by this nearness of conversation are withdrawn from barbarous behavior* and forced to assume certain mildness of manners and move toward humaneness and justice… Good behaviour is called *urbanitas* because it is found in cities rather than elsewhere. […] Whereas commonwealths and kingdoms cannot have, after God, any surer foundation than the love and goodwill of one man towards another, which is also closely bred and maintained in cities, where men by mutual society and companying together grow toward alliances, commonalities, and corporations.[47]

The orientation that human beings find within a city gives them with the possibility to be "creative" and express their abilities and ideas. Indeed,

> with the city came a centralized state, the hierarchy of social classes, the division of labour, organized religion, monumental building, civil engineering, writing, literature, sculpture, art, music, education, mathematics and law, not to mention a vast array of new inventions and discoveries from items as basic as wheeled vehicles and sailing boats to the potter's kiln, metallurgy and the creation of synthetic materials. And on top of all that was the huge collection of notions and ideas so fundamental to our way of looking at the world, like the concept of numbers, or weight, quite independent of actual items counted or weighed – the number ten, or one kilo – that we have long forgotten that they had to be discovered or invented[48]

Moreover, as Mumford points out, not only does the city foster art but it is art itself; as well, it is the theatre *par excellence*, where social action takes place.

> It is in the city, the city as theatre, that man's more purposeful activities are focused on and worked out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, and groups, into more significant culminations. […] The physical organization of a city may deflate

[47] Lewis Mumford, "What is a City", Architectural Record, LXXXI, 1937, 58-62, 93.

[48] Paul Kriwaczek, Babylon: Mesopotamia and the Birth of Civilization. (Thomas Dunne Books, 2010), 20.

> this drama or make it frustrated; or it may, through deliberate efforts of art, politics, and education, make the drama more richly significant, as a well-designed stage set intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play.[49]

> Because of the opportunity it offers, particularly to exceptional and abnormal types of men, a great city tends to spread out and lay bare to the public view in a massive manner all the human characteristics and traits that are ordinarily obscured and suppressed in smaller communities. A city, in short, shows the good and evil of human nature to an excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other, that justifies the view that would make the city a laboratory or clinic where human nature and social processes may be conveniently and profitably studied.[50]

In other words, the city is not merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature.[51] Therefore trying to analyze and understand a city, by retrieving its origin, retracing its evolution, and interpreting its heart through the words of philosophers and writers means trying to understand humanity and its deepest tensions and feelings.

For this reason, this chapter will focus on a few historical and literary cases which may be taken as *exempla* to understand the main conceptual issues at the core of urban culture in the western world. Alongside the historical and philosophical overview of the most important urban changes, the discussion will focus on the description of the contemporary city and its theorists, through the humanizing lens of literature.

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[49] Lewis Mumford, "What is a City", 93.

[50] Robert, E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, The City, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 46.

[51] R. Park, E. Burgess, The City, 2.

1.2 The historical origins of the city.

When it comes to documenting and exploring the origins of the first towns, the border between myth and reality blurs. Therefore, it would be difficult to report historical events without taking into account myths and literary texts, which were the soul of the first urban centres. Historians date the birth of the first cities back to two main facts: the discovery of writing and the surplus of food. The abundance of food enabled men to settle permanently in a particular place and form a community, which needed to be organised and governed. Members of the same tribe felt the need to feel protected, to bury their dead and worship nature, which was the fundamental centre of their lives.[52] The primordial stage of urban culture was characterized by the coexistence of a spiritual and a material dimension. The *city* was the core of the relationship between man and nature, because urban space was that safe place where human beings thanked nature for its gifts and, more importantly, started erecting buildings that concretely represented, through symbols and writings, what they owed their life to. The historian Helen Chapin Metz wrote,

> The civilized life that emerged at Sumer was shaped by two conflicting factors: the unpredictability of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which at any time could unleash devastating floods that wiped out entire peoples, and the extreme fertility of the river valleys due to centuries of deposits of soil. Thus, while the river valleys of southern Mesopotamia attracted migrations of neighbouring peoples and made possible, for the first time in history, the cultivation of surplus food, the volatility of the rivers necessitated a form of collective management to protect the marshy, low-lying land from flooding. As surplus production increased and as collective management became more advanced, a process of urbanization evolved and Sumerian civilization took root.[53]

Babylon, which had most of the features of the Sumerian cities, had the temple at its center and the king was the highest priest who lived in a palace first within the temple

[52] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, (California: University of California Press,1998), 14.

[53] Anca Carrington, Iraq: Issues, Historical Background, Bibliography, (New York: Nova Science Publisher, 2003), 133.

and then beneath it. The temple dedicated to the god Marduk (the Esagila) included the ziggurat, a high-stepped tower (which may have given rise to the famous Biblical account of the Tower of Babylon). The Babylon temple celebrated a dependence on natural elements, ritualized the fertility myths that reveled the animistic relationship between man and nature. Moreover, the rite that marked the end of the year and the arrival of the new one consisted in the king humiliating and praying to the god of the city, Marduk, who was believed to die and rise again, marking the end of harvest and the beginning of new planting.[54] Religious activities, such as festivals, were the main social events of the time and those occasions were often used to distribute surplus food and supplies to the citizens. Clear enough, not only did the *city* act like an umbilical cord that connected the people to their land through a vital bond, but it regulated the passing of time and the way people related to each other.

> The embryonic structure of the city already existed: house, shrine, cistern, public way, agora – not yet a specialized market- all first took place in a village, with inventions and organic differentiations waiting to be developed further into the more complex structure of a city. What holds true for the general structure of the village also holds true for its institutions. The beginnings of organized morality, government, law, and justice existed in the Council of Elders. Thorkild Jacobsen demonstrated that this representative group, the repository of tradition, the censor of morals, and the judges of right and wrong, was already discernible in the fourth millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia.[55]

Thus, it seems self-evident that a community or village was the primitive place of existence for human beings. Within urban boundaries, natural or artificial, people were able to define their own boundaries, their own identity. In addition, together with an increasing self-awareness, the assembly of people within an enclosed and fixed space also engendered the necessity to share a common morality, a common way of living according to rules that bound the inhabitants to one another. Therefore, not only was Aristotle right when he defined man as a "zoon politikon" - a living being that spontaneously looks for other human beings to live with - but the history of the city demonstrates that men naturally seek justice and morality, bequeathed by traditions.

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[54] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 14.

[55] Mumford, City in History, 19.

So important was the concept of *city* to the people of Mesopotamia that they believed the city of Eridu to be the birthplace of humanity instead of a garden like the Garden of Eden as described in the Book of Genesis.[56] This generative role is also documented in Egyptian hieroglyphics, where "*house* or *town* are also symbols for *mother*, as if to confirm the similarity of the individual and the collective nurturing function."[57] This life-giving nature of the city is also demonstrated by the etymology of the term "metropolis," which is the Latin compound of meter (mother) and polis (city).

1.2.1 The Greek City

The Greek city, differently from those developed in Mesopotamia and Egypt which were characterized by huge, monumental buildings like ziggurats and the pyramids, was "cut closer to the human measure,"[58] and its "real strength was being neither too rich nor too poor, neither too small nor too big."[59] The human-scale principle was theorized by Aristotle's discussions on the ideal city in "Politics." Indeed,
"Aristotle properly applied to human fabrications like the city the important lesson he had learned from the organic world: the lesson of controlled city. In every biological species there is a limit to size."[60] In an attempt to define what the proper limits of a city are, he points out that it is not a matter of building walls, but it is a matter of culture. Indeed, according to Aristotle, what defines a city is the common interest in justice and that of pursuing the good life, which depends on intimacy and small numbers.

Even the historian Lewis Mumford stressed the concept of the human scale and at the same time he called attention to the dangerous Promethean daring in man's nature - his desire to break out of his narrow condition and to better the gods.[61]

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[56] Mark, J. J., "The Ancient City" in Ancient History Encyclopedia. Retrieved from https://www.ancient.eu/city, last access April 2019.

[57] Mumford, City in History, 13.

[58] Ibidem,124.

[59] Ibidem,148.

[60] Ibidem.

[61] John Friedmann, "The City in History", The Town Planning Review, vol 33, n1, 1962, 73-80, 80.

The typical Greek city had a rectilinear plan without walls but a site with natural defences and proximity to a harbour. Public buildings and places were located within the blocks: an acropolis and an urban community were one and the same. The plan and buildings of the Hellenistic city were a display of "elegant petrification."[62] At the centre

> the temple that kept alive the old cult, with its nearby quarters for priest and priestess. […] As for the village meeting place, the agora or market, it was often situated at the base of the citadel. […] As the house of the city's god, the temple took the form of the traditional palatial mansion. […] In the larger cities, unlike those of the Christian Middle Ages, the temple was never big enough to house at one time any considerable part of the community: that was far from its purpose. […] though Athens offers most of the ready examples of the deification of the polis, the spirit itself prevailed everywhere. God, city, and citizens became one compact manifestation of ego. […] The dynamic center of the Greek city: agora. […] If in the fifth economy the agora can be properly called a marketplace, its oldest and most persistent function was that of a communal meeting place. [63]

Athens represents the first clear example of the science of urban artifacts; it embodies the passage from nature to culture; and this passage, at the very heart of urban artifacts, is conveyed to us by myth. When myth becomes a material fact in the building of the temple, the logical principle of the city has already emerged from its relationship with nature and becomes the experience which is transmitted.[64] Indeed, according to mythology, Athena and Poseidon confronted one another to decide who would own and protect the city. "Poseidon, the first to arrive in Attica, caused a sea (the Erechtheus) to well up in a hollow of the acropolis; then, on the order of Athena, the olive tree broke forth from the sacred rock. A court of justice, brought together by Zeus, settled the dispute. Cecrops, the native king, half man, half serpent, already human but still connected to monstrous creatures from the primordial Earth, is present as a witness. Poseidon is defeated and the era of civilization began for the Athenian

[62] Mumford, City in History, 196.

[63] Ibidem,144-148.

[64] Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City, 134

city." [65] Clear enough, at the core of this mythic narration lies the relationship between man and nature as the nurturing mother and the gods. This relationship is the fundamental basis of ancient cities and conveys some primordial human desires: the search for transcendence, the need for nature and its fruits, and finally the urge to belong to a place able to define, protect and mirror them. This need for belonging meets its fulfillment in the physical organization of symbols and infrastructures. The physical elements of urban architecture had such a profound and emotional impact on the inhabitants that they also became the mnemonic framework of an extensive narration. For instance, this is the case of *Tabulae Ilicae*, a series of reliefs, probably used as a student's book, which represents the city of Troy surrounded by high walls with war scenes inside. This was not the faithful representation of a real city but it is the city described in minimum terms: the external wall, and the internal spaces: a framework within which to anchor scenes to be remembered. Therefore, urban architecture is a privileged window on the world, it organizes the memory of the community, creates hierarchies, establishes values and imprints even the narration of myths.[66]

Greek mythology introduced another urban artifact that epitomizes and embodies an important feature of the urban soul - the labyrinth. Due to its complex structure that escapes human comprehension, it represents the unfathomable nature of both human life and the human soul. Significantly, the physical structure of the city, made up of intersecting streets, corners, bifurcations and curves along the path, resembles the pattern of a labyrinth. The myth of Theseus and the labyrinth associates the image of the labyrinth with the monstrous presence of the Minotaur, who, being half-man and half-bull, transcends the human realm and embodies the threat to human society. Indeed, according to the myth of Theseus, every seven years the Minotaur devoured seven Athenian men and girls.[67] Interestingly enough,

> Several Greek myths suggest that human sacrifices may have been offered to Dyonisus, who was also identified with a god in the form of bull-man in Crete. […] Dyonisus embodied both a desire for the continuity of nature and a concept of the

[65] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 18.

[66] Salvatore Settis, Architettura e Democrazia. Paesaggio, città, diritti civili.,(Torino: Einaudi Editore, 2017), 52.

[67] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History.

> human personality as an organism deeply rooted in the non-rational forces of the cosmos.[68]

Therefore, the image of the maze reflects an irrational dimension, the subconscious, and the unknown, which lies below the surface of the city as well as below that of the human mind. Indeed, the threat of repression that emerges from the heart of the city disguised as a violent and dangerous force against the established order became a recurrent theme of world literature.

1.2.2 The Roman City

Urban planning during the Roman Empire took after the Hellenistic towns. The Roman town ideally had a rectilinear wall, intersecting axes, and a central forum on the site of the sacred relics (acropolis and agora in one). In the days of Imperial Rome, urban settlements spread widely; they were not walled and had wide streets with large public buildings. Before 1,000 A.D., people would casually assemble in various widely scattered locations.[69] The linear and perfectly geometrical structure of the Roman cities aimed at providing inhabitants with an ordinary framework able to harmonize with the cosmic order. The gridiron plan was based on two principal streets, the *cardo*, which followed the vertical axis and the *decumano*, which followed the horizontal axis. These two main streets crossed at right angles near the centre, where the forum was usually established.[70]

Around the fifth century, the forum ceased its activities as a marketplace, a function that had been fundamental to it, and became a true square, almost according to the dictum of Aristotle, who was writing his *Politics* about this time.[71] The public area of the forum was supposed to be the place where people could cultivate and give voice to their humanity; therefore, it had to be protected from the process of commodification, which the presence of the market inevitably would have led to.

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[68] Ibidem.

[69] Mumford, City in History.

[70] Ibidem, 207

[71] Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City.

> Precisely during this period, the Forum was being filled with statues, temples, and monuments. Thus, the valley that once had been full of local springs, sacred places, markets, and taverns now became rich with basilicas, temples, and arches, and furrowed by two great streets, the Ara Sacra and the Via Nova, which were accessible from small alleys.[72]

The Forum was the place where people could just pass through without any specific purposes. Being present in the forum meant being an active member of the city.

> It was like modern cities, where the man in the crowd, the idler, participated in the dynamics of the city without knowing it, sharing only in its image. The Forum epitomized Rome; it was part of Rome and was the sum of its monuments; at the same time its uniqueness was stronger than its single monuments. It was the expression of a specific design or at least of a specific vision of the world of forms, the classical view; yet its design was also more ancient, as persistent and pre-existent as the valley where the shepherds of the primitive hills gathered.[73]

The disintegration of Rome was the ultimate result of its over-growth, which resulted in a collapse of functionality and a loss of control over economic factors and human agents.[74] According to St. Augustine, the real cause of the fall of the Roman Empire was its moral decadence. As a matter of fact, St. Augustine in his "City of God" put forward the idea that the city of man must relate to the city of God as the body relates to the soul. Consequently, when the city of man promotes justice and peace, it is in harmony with the spiritual love of the city of God. The two cities originated in human society from the birth of Cain, who belonged to the city of man, and his brother Abel, who belonged to the city of God. Augustine seems to have made a revision of Cicero's idea of *Res Publica*[75], the belief that a community is defined by a common acknowledgment of law and interest. Augustine believed that fallen men were incapable of such urban harmony.

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[72] Ibidem.

[73] Ibidem,122-123

[74] Mumford, City in History, 239

[75] Cicero: De Re Publica ed. J. E. G. Zetzel (1995) Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Moreover, Augustine broke with the traditional concept of the cyclical time of myth, postulating the linear idea of time starting from creation and heading to the manifestation of the spirit in the city of God. St. Augustine's ideas of progress anticipated the idea of civilization typical of the Renaissance. Indeed, the word civilization was an "enlightenment term that suggested the movement of history toward what ought to be," the act of making something lawful, part of the city. From a barbarian status to a civic one.[76]

After the Roman Empire fell in 410 AD, cities witnessed a general decay, which lasted until the end of the Middle Ages. Indeed, mediaeval feudalism depended precisely on the lack of central power. [77] However, Lewis Mumford states that

> one lacks a clue of the new urban form if one overlooks the role of monasticism. […] The monastery was in fact a new kind of *polis* - an association, or rather a close brotherhood of likeminded people, not coming together just for occasional ceremonies but for permanent cohabitation. […] The monastic colony became the new citadel, a religious holding point that kept a general retreat from turning into a rout. […] Whatever the confusions of the outer world, the monastery established within its walls a pool of order and serenity.[78]

Not only did monasteries perform the role of a city by maintaining the idea of order and community, but they also assumed the same generative principle of the city, by saving and perpetrating human culture and the arts. Indeed, monks transcribed books of classic literature, and they spoke Latin. Besides, monasteries contributed to hospitals and sanatoriums, which, due to the Christian attention to suffering, were brought to the centre of the city and were no longer set apart from the community.[79]

Gradually, an economic rebirth and development brought new life to cities. Indeed, "late medieval cities became true centres of commerce, culture and community. It was the economic function of the great trading towns that inevitably led to their growing power and political independence. Having used their wealth to win

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[76] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 24

[77] Ibidem, 24

[78] Mumford, City in History, 247

[79] Ibidem, 267

the right to self-government from the barons, the medieval towns became islands of freedom in a sea of feudal obligation."[80] Consistent with this change, merchant guilds became a "general body, organizing and controlling the economic life of the town as a whole and it found expression in the city in the Town Hall or Market Hall."[81]

Cathedrals, guildhouses, charitable institutions, universities, and colourful marketplaces were all typical medieval institutions. The profile of the buildings, with their steep gables, sharp roof lines, pinnacles, towers, and traceries marked deep changes in feeling and separated them from the "great Romanesque buildings, as solid as fortresses, as solemn as plaint chant."[82] The mediaeval city seemed to incarnate the thought of Augustine by functioning as a space that not only lived in harmony with the City of God but helped men to achieve it. Indeed, "the towers of the churches and bell towers raised the eyes to heaven […] From almost any part of the city, the admonitory fingers of the spires, archangelic swords, tipped with gold, were visible. […] the short approaches to the great buildings, the blocked vistas, increase the effect of verticality: one looks, not to the right or left over a wide panorama, but skyward."[83]

Regarding urban planning, the mediaeval cities were characterized by so-called organic planning, based on the adaptation to nature's contours instead of degrading them. Therefore, cities during the Middle Ages were typically irregular and had a radio-concentric system that resembled a spider web. Indeed, the central elements were continuous, curving streets converging toward the centre. "Hosted in such a stage "the medieval mind took comfort in a universe of sharp definitions, solid walls, and limited views."[84]

1.2.3 From the 15th to the 18th Centuries

A new urban complex took shape between the 15th and 18th centuries, a period that Mumford called the Baroque, as an extension of the more limited architectural

[80] Richard LeGates, Frederic Stout, The City Reader, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 17

[81] Mumford, City in History, 271

[82] Ibidem, 278

[83] Ibidem, 278-279

[84] Ibidem, 304

connotation. Commerce, which increased in this period, deeply changed society, which proceeded from a landed economy to a capitalistic one. Daniel Defoe wrote in the complete *English Tradesman* (1726) "our merchants are princes, greater and higher and more powerful than some sovereign princes."[85] This marked "a new political framework, mainly that of centralized despotism or oligarchy, usually embodied in a national state, and a new ideological form, that derived from mechanistic physics."[86] Mumford defined the early post-medieval towns as being characterized by the period of renascence, which was the period of re-establishment of the dignity of men but it was also a great age of "city building and intellectual triumph."[87]

The signs of this new movement were straight streets, the unbroken horizontal roof lines, the round arch, and the repetition of uniform elements - cornices, lintels, windows, and columns - on the façade.[88] Alberti suggested that streets would be rendered much more noble if the doors were all built after the same model, and the houses on each side stand on an even line, and none higher than the other.[89]

In the seventeenth century, the concept of the Baroque reached its culmination, while holding in itself two contradictory aspects of the age.

> First, the abstract mathematical and methodical side, expressed to perfection in its rigorous street plans, formal city layouts, and geometrically ordered gardens and landscape designs. At the same time, in the painting and sculpture of the period, it embraces the sensuous, rebellious, extravagant, anti-classical, anti-mechanical side, expressed in its clothes. In this respect, one might regard the early renascent forms, in their purity, as proto-Baroque, and neo-Classic forms, from Versailles to St. Petersburg, as 'late' Baroque, while even the careless uncontrolled romanticism of the eighteenth-century Gothic revivalists might be considered, paradoxically, as a phase of Baroque caprice.[90]

As far as city architecture is concerned, the abstract interests of money and power, which characterized the new capitalism, led to a new conception of space. "It was one

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[85] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 29

[86] Mumford, City in History, 345

[87] Ibidem,345

[88] Ibidem,348

[89] Alberti Leone Battista, Ten Book on Architecture, trans. James Leoni, (London: Tiranti, 1955).

[90] Mumford, City in History, 351

of the great triumphs of the Baroque mind to organize space, make it continuous, reduce it to measure and order, and to extend the limits of magnitude. […] The study of perspective demolished the closed vista and lengthened the distance. This was an aesthetic preface to the grand avenues of Baroque design, which at most have an obelisk, an arch, or a single building to terminate the converging rays of the cornice lines."[91]

The mechanistic thought of the seventeenth century progressively reduced experience to everything that could be scientifically analysed and measured, because, on the contrary, what couldn't be rationally proved as real was not worth expressing.[92] The new order empowered by the physical sciences brought a reversal to medieval values. This breach with the past is perfectly epitomized by the plans that Christopher Wren prepared for the rebuilding of London that had burned for five days. The project design envisaged the new city with the Royal Exchange at its center and built around the East India House, the Bank of England and the Royal Stock Exchange. This was the ideal of the new commercial London where wealth and trade supplanted spirituality and the sense of sacredness of the urban place.

The new optimism shared by the Enlightenment was deeply rooted in the city, based on the idea that it could control nature.[93] The relationship between the urban world and nature became increasingly problematic mainly because men did not limited themselves to controlling the laws of nature but they also wanted to subvert and manipulate them. Therefore, as Mary Shelley epitomized in her novel *Frankenstein*, the city became the place where horror was generated - where man, powerful administrator of the urban world, seen as a sort of microcosm, wanted to overcome the laws of God. However,

> the new order established in the physical sciences was far too limited to describe or interpret social facts. Real men and women, real corporations and cities were treated in law and government as if they were imaginary bodies; whilst artful pragmatic fictions like divine right, absolute rule, the state, and sovereignty were treated as if they were realities. Freed from his sense of dependence upon corporations and neighborhood, the

[91] Ibidem, 365

[92] Ibidem,366

[93] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 34

emancipated individual was dissociated and delocalized: an atom of power, ruthlessly seeking whatever power commands. With the quest for financial and political power, the notion of limits disappeared.[94]

1.2.4 The 18th and 19TH Centuries

The Industrial Revolution and the technical innovations of the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly regarding large-scale production and transport, produced a significant break from the traditional idea of city, turning it into a "negotiable commodity." Industrial towns, whose generating agents were mines, factories and the railroad, were "dark hives, busily puffing, clanking, screeching, smoking for twelve and fourteen hours a day."[95] Another typical phenomenon that affected the industrial city was the inundation of immigrants from foreign countries and rural populations that moved to the cities that led to overpopulation and consequently to massive migration flows overseas.

The archetypical city produced by industrialisation, the principal constitutive force of the 18th and 19th centuries, is that described by Charles Dickens. In Dicken's *Dombey and Son* (1848), the commercial city has been further transformed by the rise of new industries. This story is told against the backdrop of London that is being transformed by the railroad, which in turn is changing the scale within which the city works. It is a portrait of a man whose life is ruined by commercial greed and focuses on the way the new city had been taken over by commerce and technology- by the forces of money and industry- and so clearly shows how these influences can deaden the heart and create machines of human destruction. Dickens saw the city as using up the land and creating a wasteland, a system of physical debris and human dereliction.[96]

However, Dicken's city was both a lure and a trap: a lure to those who were drawn to it as if by a magnet, because only the city offers the means of realizing a heightened conception of self; a trap in its workings, which lead to human corruption. Dicken's city is a corrupted place, but also the physical space where redemption can

[94] Mumford, City in History, 366

[95] Ibidem,446

[96] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 41

happen. Dickens tries to humanize the city by reshaping it according to human proportions. Indeed, in *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson, with her kind heart, embodies the sentimental heroine whose sense of the good can soften the sufferance and poverty she finds around her.[97] In *Bleak House*, Dickens presents another possibility of redemption for the city: Inspector Bucket of the new detective force. He manages to disentangle the city maze by cutting through the anonymity, mysteries and secrets of the city and using this information for the good.[98] It is not by chance that the moment the urban labyrinth became more obscure, chaotic and threatening, from both a physical and moral point of view, the scientific culture of the time, a by-product of the Enlightenment, conceived a new and perfectly fit literary genre: detective fiction.

The epitome of the rational detective is Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who perfectly epitomizes the rational detective, able to restore order and security in Victorian London.

> Knowing the city by heart, Holmes can follow the streets ad squares when he and Dr. Watson are taken to the outskirts for a secret meeting. Watson cannot follow the maze of the streets, but he provides impressions of late Victorian London lighted by gas lamps as the fog rolls in on an autumn evening (a basic literary way of seeing the city from Baudelaire to Elliot; that is, a sense of the mysterious, of vagueness, something that can't be grasped, something that escapes human understanding, whether it is rational or emotional). We see a mind recording its impressions of the city, with fog, muddy streets reflected in muddy clouds, the pale and yellow light from shop windows, the sad and glad faces of the crowd absorbed by the surrounding gloom. The effect is a setting beset with apprehension and nervousness, hinted by a sense of the eerie and ghostlike- the uncanny. [99]

This same Dionysian element, which conveys a sense of the uncanny within rationalistic Victorian London, emerges also in fantasy literature of the late Victorian period. Particularly significant is the image of the vampire presented by Bram Stocker. Dracula is the irrational element, a modern embodiment of Dionysus, representing the

[97] Ibidem.

[98] Ibidem,41-47

[99] Ibidem,89

principle of chaos within the city, which is, on the contrary, a system of supposed order. Interestingly enough, Dracula is determined to find his own place within the city; he wants to purchase an estate in East London, from which he plans to build a vampire empire. Like the *flaneur*, Dracula wants to be both part of and separate from the crowd. He tells Harker that he longs "to go through the crowded streets of… mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is."[100]

The clash between unconscious forces and the rational urban world, which is the core of Stoker's novel, also epitomizes the growing fear of a reverse imperialism. The threat from outsiders that menaces imperial London starts to surface and like the Freudian repressed will burst out in the following years.

Therefore, general urban entropy features the urban life of the 18th and 19th centuries.[101] The city plunged into a vortex of brisk transformation made up of up-building and un-building, together with the extension of both its horizontal limits - expansion towards the country including the suburbs - and its vertical limits, both downward and upward. As far as the downward direction is concerned, neo-technical means allowed the creation of the underground city. An example was Coketown, whose "transportation and shelter have been widely replaced, its underground network has prospered and proliferated. […] the underground railroad, the motor car tunnel, and the underground lavatory have been augmented by underground shops and stores, and finally by the underground air raid shelter. […] The underground city is a new kind of environment made possible by artificial light and artificial ventilation."[102]

Regarding upward urban expansion, between 1884 and 1885, the world's first skyscraper was erected in Chicago.

> It is big, overpowering and spectacular, but with the increase in such gigantic buildings the setting became less and less observable. As the matter of fact, the mind does not get its impression of a skyscraper through the eye in a direct, effortless way, but from a laborious assembly of remembered scenes, a portion of façade at the end of a street, the close-up of an ostensibly supporting base, the crest of a tower balanced five hundred or

[100] Bram Stoker, Dracula, (London: Archibald Constable and Company (UK), 1897), 31

[101] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 41

[102] Mumford, City in History, 479-480

> a thousand feet directly above one's head. In a very true sense, and with but little exaggeration, it can be said that no one has ever seen a skyscraper. […] Modern thoroughfares, organized for movement, not for immobility, are unsuitable places for quiet reflection.[103]

That is how cities began to overcome human dimension, because the focus of urban planning was no longer on the social necessities of the community but on the seek for a continuous growth. The urban hugeness became the epitome of the fast economic and technical development.

1.2.5 The 20th Century

The expansion of cities that exploded during the 19th century continued to grow and intensify so fast that it formed a homogeneous, ever-increasing continuum over the years. In particular, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century overlap and blend one within the other, perfectly described and questioned by modernism. Following the structural evolution of the city, it is fundamental to understand also the cultural, literary and psychological evolution of human societies.

During the 20th century, starting in the USA, metropoles spread all over the world. They were characterized by a core and wide fringes from which commuters, new urban subjects born out of the breach between dwellings and work places, moved to city centres. "In 1950, there were only two megacities,[104] London and New York, with populations of more than 8 million. Tokyo joined them a decade later. This trio formed the core of what Saskia Sassen, the American sociologist, called the "global cities" – urban centres that asserted their power not through empire but through economic influence. The wealth of the world passed through these cities – even if

[103] John Irwin Bright, The City, The American Magazine of Art, 2, 1932, pp. 139-142, p. 140

[104] The term "megacities," was originally coined in the 1970s to define urban settlements of eight million inhabitants or more, and later revised to ten million, https://www.mdpi.com/2078-1547/2/4/55/htm, last access April 2019

often only on paper – and they expanded rapidly as people crowded in for a share of the opportunity."[105]

These huge urban masses are connected to each other by great urbanized corridors like the BOWASH, which connects Boston and Washington, and the Tokyo-Yokohama. These new, huge metropolitan settlements, with at least 20 million inhabitants, have been defined by Jean Gottman as "Megalopoles"[106] referring to the concept introduced by the philosopher from Alexandria Philo Judeaus. According to Gottman, there is a great city of ideas that predetermines and commands the material world in which we live, and this greater city of ideas Philo called Megalopolis. Megalopolis, outcomes of the Industrial Revolution, have been shaped by mass migration and mass consumption and by a

> philosophy of abundance founded on the unlimited resourcefulness of hard-working people with a Promethean drive that could lead to large-scale urban growth and expansion. […] For at least a century, and possibly longer, the megalopolis has been at the forefront of the progress and refinement of the urban economy. Its successful expansion suggests that its dynamics have thus rightly followed the basic principles of any urban growth. There is in the mechanics of the city the need for the production of surplus, for a great fluidity in the balance of need and resources, as well as enough fluidity.[107]

Since a megalopolis considers space as an economic resource, the urge of commodification[108] leads to stretching the urban territory both horizontally and vertically even more. One of the side effects of such a process is the creation of internal boundaries through the creation of ghettos, gated communities and shanty towns, which reinforced segregation, and the birth of "grey zones" or nobody's useless lands within the city.[109]

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[105] Edwin Heatchcote, "From Megacity To Metacity", Financial Times, https://www.ft.com/content/e388a076-38d6-11df-9998-00144feabdc0, last access April 2019

[106] Jean Gottman, Megalopolis. The Urbanized Northeastern Seabord of The United States. (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961)

[107] Ibidem,776

[108] Ash Amin, Nigel Thrift, Cities, Reimagining the Urban, (Cambridge: Polity Press 2002.)

[109] E. McKenzie, Privatopia. Homeowner associations and the rise of residential Private Government, (London New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994)

Another by-product of megalopolis based on the service industry is the birth of two new urban categories: the city users and the metropolitan businessmen. Both are the outcomes of a new urban culture which requires people "to move and not live in a city but between cities, leading to an internationalization and globalisation of metropolitan areas."[110] These populations require hotels, offices, meeting places, restaurants, and shopping malls. This latter infrastructure is the typical feature of a city of consumers. In the past, malls were built on the outskirts of a city; today cities are built and shaped around malls, which belong, together with hotels, restaurants, offices and other transitory places, to the new category of non-places that Marc Augè described as places where the individual may easily hide within the crowd.[111] This new condition defines the concept of "edge cities".[112]

According to Zygmunt Bauman, these non-spaces are the most typical features of modernity or post-modernity, because never before have these places occupied such a huge space.[113] In this condition people form a mass but not a community and experience urban spaces as hostile to their identity and collective consciousness. What people get from this situation is an awareness of the irrelevance of the citizen within the city.[114] Consequently, the metropolis undergoes a process of disenfranchisement of the inhabitants, who have been dispossessed and deprived of their performative power as citizens. Indeed, public institutions have been increasingly catering and adapting to economic interests and spill overs, determined by the class of the city users, no longer by the residents.[115]

In this respect, Ferdinand Toennies described the depersonalization of the urban centres, by proposing the idea of the transformation of community into society:

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[110] Denis Duclos, "Une nouvelle classe s'emparedes leviers du povoir monidal. Naissance de l'hyperbourgeoisie", in Le Monde Diplomatique, n. 533, 1988, 16-17

[111] Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mal"l, in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space, ed Michael Sorokin, (New York: The Nooday Press, 1992), 3-30

[112] See Robert Fishmann, Burgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (New York: Basic Books,1987), "the new Edge City suburbs are not suburbs at all, but a fundamentally new kind of decentralized city that he calls technoburbs." 21

[113] Zygmunt. Bauman, Liquid Modernity, (Cambridge, Blackwell, 2000)

[114] Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History,117-118.

[115] Guido Martinitti, Sei Lezioni sulla Città, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2017), 115

Gemeinschaft and *Gesellschaft*. Tonnies distinguishes between these two concepts by defining community as something related to people, personal contacts, face-to-face daily relationships, traditions, family ties and religion; whereas he describes society as a contract among abstract subjects and impersonal organisations.[116] Today this classic dichotomy is no longer exhaustive because there is even another type of society - the *Vernetzungschaft*, the society of nets.[117]

The increasing depersonalisation of cities is conveyed also through the prevailing rhetoric of highness, which moves the competiveness of financial markets to the city and establishes an authoritative vision of architecture according to which the highest win over the shortest, as well as the rich over the poor, the new over the old.[118] This process goes together with the speculation of urban spaces that transform the democratic idea of the *polis* into an elitist commodity. Indeed, William Goetzmann and Frank Newman observed that the New York City skyline represents much more than architectonic progress; in fact, it is mainly a manifestation of a financial phenomenon - speculations in the stock market that invest in the construction industry. Therefore, a sort of strict correspondence between big business and big buildings has been created and this correspondence has transformed space into wares/goods.[119]

Addressing this kind of issue, Henri Lefebvre proposed the slogan "right to the city" in his article *Le Droit a la Ville*.[120] Lefebvre criticized the functionalist urbanisms of that time and proposed the idea of urban space as the projection of social relations and consequently the proposal to reflect upon the city as a fundamental challenge for the construction of the future. Besides, instead of the commodification of space, Lefebvre introduced the idea of the politicisation of urban space, returning to the original concept of the *polis*. Indeed, according to Lefebvre, the right to the city is a social need rooted in an anthropological basis. Indeed, as the Italian architect Salvatore Settis highlighted, 'city'

> comprende il bisogno di sicurezza e quello di apertura, il bisogno di certezza e quello di

[116] Ferdinand Toennes, Community and Society, (New York, Harper and Row, 1963).

[117] Guidi Martinotti, "Comment on Sharon Zukin", in Sociologica 3, dicembre 2011, 12

[118] Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 149

[119] Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 145

[120] Henry Lefebvre, "Le Droit a la Ville", in L'Homme et la société, 6, (1967): 29-35

> avventura, il bisogno di organizzazione del lavoro e quello del gioco, i bisogni di prevedibilità e dell'imprevisto, di unità e differenza, di isolamento e di incontri, di scambi e d'investimenti, di indipendenza (o solitudine) e di comunicazione, d'immediatezza e di prospettiva di lungo periodo. Risponde al bisogno di suscitare attività creatrici, informazione, simbolismi, immaginario, attività ludiche. I bisogni specificatamente urbani sono bisogni di luoghi qualificati, di simultaneità e di incontri.[121]

These ideas about 'city' helped the development of the discussion about the importance of the urban environment, so much so that a world charter on the right to the city was written in Barcelona during the World Congress of Urbanism, , and in 2005 Unesco started a debate on urban politics and the right to the city. Then, in 2012, the first world congress on the right to the city took place in France.

In 2013, David Harley wrote "Rebel Cities", where he opposed the commodification and privatization of urban spaces.[122] According to Harvey, the worth of a contemporary city depends on how much it earns, therefore its space (both horizontal and vertical) is always for sale. Therefore, the city crisis consists of a loss of its original value and a transformation into an exchange value. Since urban civility is an ecosystem that creates and spreads models of behaviours, but it is also a complex taxonomy of objects, technologies, values and customs, the crisis of the city entails the crisis of the entire human society.[123]

If the industrial city is perfectly portrayed in the scientific and meticulous descriptions of literary naturalism, which expresses human submission to the frenzy of the economic system, modernism is the voice of the post-industrial urban world. Modernist writers reacted against scientism and utilitarianism, moving toward the

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[121] Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 83. My trans.: "entails the need for safety and openness, the need for certainty and adventure, the need for organized labour and recreation, the need for predictability and for the unforeseen, for unity and difference, for isolation and gathering, for exchanges and investments, for independence (solitude) and communication, for short-term and long-term perspectives. It responds to the need for stimulating creative activities, information, symbolisms, fantasy and leisure activities. Specifically, urban needs are needs for specialized places of simultaneity and meeting."

[122] D. Harvey, Rebel cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution, Verso, London-New York, 2012

[123] Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 84

symbolic and mythic as the escape from a reality that seemed to be deprived of human values and feelings. Therefore, the mind of the artist tries to cut through the apathy, greyness and commodification of urban values, thanks to their mind that is able to go back to the mythic past, which turns out to be still present and hidden in the founding layers of the city itself.

In this humanizing process, the poet tries to appropriate the *polis* again, walking through it and describing the new main subject of the city - the crowd, which far from being a community, resembles far more a group of indistinct individuals moving around the streets like isolated atoms. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), Simmel describes the metropolitan condition as "the blunting of discrimination;" he believes it stems from "internalizing money" to the point that "all things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money."[124] Within this kind of mass society, individual alienation is inevitable and it becomes the natural condition of life. "The frenetic rhythms of the crowd take on the nervous quality of the city."[125]

One of the ways to react to the nervous stimuli of the city induced by rapid crowding is that of Baudelaire, who composed a series of poems in which the observer usually is out of the mob and empathizes with an urban subject. This process of identification with the crowd triggers his imagination or memory and thus fosters a process of personalization. The *flâneur* is the observer, who can be simultaneously within the crowd but also critically detached from it, so that he can be aware of the frightening nature of the crowd that absorbs humanity.

Similarly, in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Man in the Crowd" (1840), the narrator decides to follow a man, an 'atom' of the crowd that attracted his attention, for a full night and day through the city. "This old man […] refuses to be alone. He is a man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow."[126] The man of the crowd is metonymically both the crowd and the city With the final sentence: 'es Laesst sich nicht lessen (it can't be read),' the city finally breaks down short of meaning, and we are left with a sense of the mysterious and the uncanny." [127]

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[124] George Simmel, The Metropolis and Mental Life, (New York: Free Press, 1950),72

[125] Ibidem.

[126] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the crowd" (1840), in Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Thomas Ollive Malbott, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978)

[127] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 81

Correspondingly, the sacredness of the old city that arose from a community of shared values has been desecrated by materialism, as Joyce narrates in *Ulysses*. In particular, in the Aeolus chapter, Bloom's attention is called to a newspaper advertisement about a German company planting citrus groves in Israel. "A barren land, bare waste. Volcanic lake, the dead sea; no fish, weedless, sunk, deep in the earth. No wind would life those waves, grey metal, poisonous foggy water. Brimstone they called it raining down: the cities of the plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Edom. All dead names. A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old."[128] The sacred cities of the bible have been corrupted from within because they let their sacred role be profaned, exactly like the commercial city of the twentieth century collapses giving way to the modern "Waste Land" of Eliot, inhabited by "emotionally exhausted citizenry"[129] lost in an entropic urban world where every change and production process "ends up in one form or another as waste."[130] This new disordered and meaningless dimension produces a loss of orientation as happened to the characters in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Not only are the men waiting in vain, but they are also in an unrecognizable location. Indeed, according to Oswald Spengler, the city has become an enclosed system caught in an entropic process that has depleted its energy, producing degenerate ideas and human suffering; as a result, man's sense of nature and myth has been replaced by scientific theory, his sense of a natural marketplace by abstract theories of money.[131]

The city of the 20th century is not only the amplification of previous trends like the increase in inhabitants and consequently the expansion of its area, but it has been deeply influenced by two new factors: large-scale migrations from other countries, above all from ex colonies, and the introduction of telecommunications and new technologies.

[128] James Joyce, Ulysses (1904), (North Caroline: Vintage Editions, 1990), 61

[129] Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History, 124

[130] Jeremy Rifkin, Entropy: A New World View, (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 129)

[131]Richard Lehan, The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History

1.2.6 The 21st Century

As far as urban size is concerned, cities will soon boast a population of 20 million or more. This is a new breed of city - the metacity or MURs- Mega Urban Regions - as the United Nations has recently defined them. According to McGrath and Pickett (2011), the term does not simply refer to large urban agglomerations, but rather it connotes new urban processes. "These various urban configurations, when combined with new digital sensing, communication and social networking technologies, constitute a virtual meta-infrastructure, present in cities of all sizes today. This new metacity has the potential to integrate new activist forms of ecological and urban design research and practice and make the transition from sanitary to sustainable city models globally."[132]

The umbrella definition of metacities, designating efficient and planned cities like Tokyo, and huge informal agglomerations like Lagos, refers also to a

> conceptual framework for understanding socio-ecological relationships and adaptive processes within specific neighbourhood situations in all cities of whatever size and density, whether shrinking or growing. It is a way of understanding any city as a patchy "system of systems", and therefore related to the metapopulation and metacommunity theory in ecology. The metacity theory focuses on the spatial heterogeneity and dynamism of local neighbourhood patches, connecting these with regional fluxes that affect ecosystem services. These regional and local concerns are connected globally through virtual social networks, enhancing urban life through planetary stewardship. "Meta" because the landscape is a dynamic aggregate of changing components linked by fluxes of matter, energy, organisms, and information.[133]

Therefore, the architecture of a metacity can no longer be defined by physical infrastructures alone, but the term encompasses a complex system of "unseen buried support systems for cities; metastructure is that which sits above and beyond everyday

[132] McGrath, B. and S. T. A. Pickett, "The Metacity: a Conceptual Framework for Integrating Ecology and Urban Design", in Challenges 2: 2011, 55-72

[133] McGrath, Pickett "The Metacity: a Conceptual Framework for Integrating Ecology and Urban Design, 70

urban forms and activities."[134] Indeed, the contemporary urban world becomes less concrete and more virtual.

> This virtual realm has only multiplied exponentially in the wired metacity of the 21st century. This technologically-enhanced, socially-networked space provides new forms of collective human agency and intelligence. Tweets, blogs, community sensing and mapping projects, games for change, smart mobs, festivals, crowd source solutions and flash events all point to an increasing demand for citizens everywhere to have a greater stake in participating in the next urban transformation. On a global scale, countless meta-organizations measure, monitor, analyse and attempt to shape urbanization by linking global discussions to local actors. In a metacity, the spatial units or patches appear as neighbourhoods and districts. [135]

As has always happened in the history of urbanism, technological innovations marked the change from one kind of society to another. Indeed, social theorists felt the necessity to find a new definition for that new urban reality which had exceeded the limits of locality, since urban life was no longer strictly determined by the physical space included within the city limits. Daniel Belle coined the term post-industrial in *The Coming of Post-industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*,[136] and Jean-Fracois Lyotard coined the term post-modern in *Postmodern Condition* in 1979.[137] Both highlighted the on-going process of sublimation and dematerialization of the metropolis, which turned into an intangible and immaterial space created by media, which were able to overcome the geographical limits of the city. Accordingly, Marshall McLuhan suggested the idea of a "global village"[138] of communications referring to a sort of Babelic metropolis with no clear borders, which even transcends the idea of nations due to its extension and ethnic composition.

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[134] Ibidem,72

[135] Ibidem.

[136] Daniel Bell, The Coming of Post-industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting, (New York, Basic Books, 1973).

[137] Jean-Fracois Lyotard, Postmodern Condition (1979), (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

[138] Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media. The extension of Man (MIT press, 1994).

Finally, the urban geographer Manuel Castells focused his study on a new type of space, which originated in the modern urban space based on information and social networks. Therefore, these superimposed and electronically processed networks organize city life, orient social and economic interactions, supervise transitions and movements. Basically, the modern network society shapes a new kind of *polis* built around a new virtual *agora*. This new type of space is the space of flows as a "high-level cultural abstraction of space and time with dynamic interactions with the digital age society"[139]. Dynamics of the compression of space and time seem to be the new pivotal feature of technologically-based society, which allows distant, simultaneous, real-time interactions. Indeed, the space of flows is a sort of delocated space, which inverts the founding principle of the city, born from the fixed allocation of a community. "While organizations are located in places, organizational logic is placeless, being fundamentally dependent on the space of flows that characterize information networks"[140]. Therefore, contemporary urbanism combines the physical presence and a superimposed electronic space made up of electronic financial markets, back-office networks, global media flows, intelligent buildings, surveillance networks, transport-telecom interactions, virtual communities and civic electronic spaces. This is the profile of the so-called smart or intelligent cities.[141]

Smart cities are based on the idea of achieving sustainable development and a high quality of life thanks to the 'smart' use of human and social capital and technologies. The structure of the intelligent city is made up of three layers: the first is the physical space inhabited by people, the second layer includes policies, innovations, and information systems, and the third corresponds to the virtual space, social platforms and portals. The interdependence between these layers promotes a new conception of civic participation and a different characterization of public spaces. Indeed, smart cities rely on one hand on the algorithmic processing of data provided by online platforms, which are "digital infrastructures coordinating access to services, products, data, and

[139] Manuel Castells, The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban Regional Process, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991),23.

[140] Ibidem, 154

[141] Poletti, Michieli, Smart Cities and Social Media Platfomrs And Security: Online Content Regulation As A Site Of Controversy And Conflict.

content, primarily through algorithmic matching.[142]" On the other hand, digital platforms need users or citizens to supply them with these fundamental raw materials.[143] The data may be retrieved from the posts submitted via social networks like Twitter, Instagram, Foursquare and other similar social media platforms which are frequently geo-tagged. The function of geo-tagging refers to the possibility to assign a geographical position to a photo or video. This way the user can locate his position and identify his experience through an image that gives a positive or negative connotation to the physical place. This device may be a powerful, helpful instrument to urban planners who wish to know what urban resources are being used and how. Indeed, the amount of information is huge since "60 million photos are sent via Instagram daily, 500 million Tweets are sent out daily, 8 million check-ins occur via Swarm App."[144]

Besides, this kind of social and informational system gives an opportunity to local government to interact with residents and understand their needs, by involving them in the process of decision making and in sharing information. This new kind of reciprocity deeply resembles the original spirit of the *polis*.

Clearly enough, events in the empirical urban world influence and are influenced by the virtual dimension. Even the city acquires a sort of digital identity within the networks, which is featured by the digital identities of city dwellers. These latter use new technologies not only as a space of free expression but also as means to exert their social power as citizens, i.e. as active subjects of the *polis*. Thanks to thei trend, "spaces will once again speak to us, and consequently it will be possible to become interested in their characteristics once again."[145]

Another significant intersection between traditional urban infrastructures and the digital dimension of the smart cities is the diffusion of digital screens that challenge

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[142] Ibidem,2

[143] Ibidem.

[144] Andrew Arnold, "How Social Media Can Be a Tool to Impact Urban Planning, in Forbes, June 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewarnold/2018/06/19/how-social-media-can-be-a-tool-to-impact-urban-planning/#380545b836d9, last access April 2019

[145] Patrizia Toscano, "Instargram-City: New Media, and the Social Perception of Public Spaces", in Visual Anthropology, v. 30, 2017: 275-286

the typical idea of architecture as fixed, stable and permanent.[146] As Anne Freidberg already suggested in her seminal work on the screen, "The Virtual Window," screens deeply affect the surrounding urban space and the relationship that people engage in with the city: the result is an "architecture of spectatorship."[147] "This concept encompasses the dichotomy between the material reality of the built space and the dematerialized imaginary on the screen. […] Thus, spatial design and urban architecture participate in the mobility and connectivity-based experience of living and walking in the city. They add to, build on, and shape urban mobility. As such, they are part of the infrastructure of the media city."[148] Therefore, even buildings follow the cultural trend of liquid modernity,[149] being transformed into liquid architecture – to invoke Marcos Novak's term. This liquidity places citizens in a frenetic, changing movement, in which they have to be restlessly connected, updated and stimulated. Urban interfaces connect urban spectators to other places, other realities, and especially, other people.[150]

The new intelligence of cities resides in the increasingly effective cooperation of digital telecommunication networks, embedded intelligence, sensors and tags, and knowledge management software; and these wireless communications, communication devices, digital sensors and tags, minuscule digital cameras and microphones[151] are harried by serious problems of security.

Together with the digitalization of the *polis*, another widespread process has undergone transformation, challenging and re-shaping the urban eco-system - migration waves. Since the city is the place of identity *par excellence*, that social product endowed with a strong symbolic value, as Lefebvre pointed out, which helps identification of the citizens as it is also the site of collective memory, is also the place where cultural and ethnic clashes concretely take place.

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146 Nanna Verhoeff, "Screens in the City", in Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 125

147 Anne Freidberg, "The Virtual Window"

148 Nanna Verhoeff, "Screens in the City", in Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 127

149 Zygmunt. Bauman, Liquid Modernity, (Cambridge, Blackwell, 2000)

150 Nanna Verhoeff, "Screens in the City", in Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 125-139.

151 Nicos Momninos, "Intelligent Cities: Towards Interactive and Global Innovation Environments", in International Journal of Innovation and Regional Development, January 2009, 378- 355, 338

> The relationship between ethnicity and urban space is a two-way process. To begin with, space has an impact on how people from different ethnic groups lead their lives. Conversely, since the members of the ethnic groups have, by definition, a different cultural background and develop dissimilar economic activities, they tend to utilize the urban environment in diverse ways, which have a different impact on the transformation of urban space.[152]

Urban boundaries mark that safe container, the urban locus, where people invent themselves by both adapting to urban culture and re-ordering the space for themselves, as Bollown claims. This meaningful two-way process is what characterizes and specifies the culture of a city, making urban space not a neutral dimension but a deeply belligerent one.

> As a source of images and memories, it symbolizes "who belongs" in specific places. […] I also see public culture as socially constructed on the micro-level. It is produced by many social encounters that make up daily life in the streets, shops, and parks- the spaces in which we experience public life in cities. The right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of ourselves and our communities – to claim them as ours and to be claimed in turn by them- make up constantly changing public culture.[153]

For this culturally connotative and connoted trait of urban space, the city has become at times a conflictual place where culture has been challenged, negotiated or defended. Studies suggest that the

> people became more aware of their ethnic roots because of the high frequency of inter-ethnic encounters in towns and cities. The outcome of this realization was the endeavours of more recent migrants to the cities to retribalize and over-communicate their ethnic identity. It follows that not only are ethnic relationships more complicated in cities, but the spatial consequences of inter-ethnic relations also tend to be more important in such a habitat since land in cities is scarce and the stakes in urban space are higher than in rural

[152] Freek Colombijn, Aygen Erdentug, Urban Ethnic Encounters the Spatial Consequences, (London: Routledge, 2002)

[153] Sharon Zukin, The Cultures of Cities, (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, 1995), 135

space.[154]

That is why "In recent years, culture has also become a more explicit reason for conflicts over social differences and urban fears. Large numbers of new immigrants and ethnic minorities have put pressure on public institutions, from schools to political parties, to deal with their individual demands."[155] Sociologists Robert Park and Peter Burgess confirm that the urban environment tends to intensify what they call effects of crisis.

> "In general terms, we can express the relationship of the city to this fact by saying that the effect of the urban environment is an intensification of all the effects of crisis. The term "crisis" is not to be understood in a violent sense. It is involved in any disturbance of habit. There is a crisis in a boy's life when he leaves home. The emancipation of the Negro and the immigration of the European peasant are group crises. Any strain of crisis involves three possible changes: greater fitness, reduced efficiency, or death. In biological terms, "survival" means successful adjustment to crisis, accompanied typically by a modification of structure. In man it means mental stimulation and greater intelligence, or mental depression, in case of failure.'[156]

Therefore, if the culturally marked boundaries in the urban environment bring about a crisis whenever different cultures and ethnicities meet, on the other hand it creates the perfect conditions to prompt an evolutionary process of interaction, adaptation and reshaping.

Although "conditions imposed by city life in which individuals and groups of individuals, widely removed in sympathy and understanding, live together under conditions of interdependence, if not of intimacy, the conditions of social control are greatly altered, and the difficulties increased. […] It is assumed that the reason for the rapid increase in crime in our large cities is because the foreign element in our population has not succeeded in assimilating."[157] Besides, researchers, among which the neuroscientist Collin Ellard, assert that

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[154] Colombijn, Erdentug, Urban Ethnic Encounters the Spatial Consequences, 10

[155] Sharon Zukin, The Cultures of Cities, (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, 1995),132

[156] R. Park, E. Burgess, The City, 26-27

[157]William I. Thomas, "Race Psychology: Standpoint and Questionnaire with Particular Reference to the

> Living among millions of strangers is a very unnatural state of affairs for a human being. […] One of the jobs of a city is to accommodate that problem. How do you build a society where people treat each other kindly in that kind of setting? That is more likely to happen when people feel good. If you feel positive you're more likely to speak to a stranger.[158]

The modern situation of post-migration societies will be the topic of the following chapter, which will highlight the most important mechanisms at stake; the focus will particularly be on the role of the city in the process of integration.

1.3 Contemporary urban theories

With the rapid urban growth that took place in the twentieth century due to increasing industrialization, large-scale production and the increasing number of inhabitants, several intellectuals tried to understand this huge phenomenon by analysing urban dynamics and mechanisms and reflecting on what kind of role the city plays in human life. Even though the all-pervasive process of urban industrialisation prompted a general perception of the city as primarily a productive and consumptive system, according to the Fordist conception, this idea turned out to be too restrictive, almost a sort of straitjacket or a Weberian "iron cage"[159] power over the lives of the masses." Therefore, helped by new disciplines like psychology and sociology, many theorists conceived new urban theories in an attempt to encompass and interpret urban complexity. One of the most significant examples is the Chicago school of thought, according to which

> cities were ecological systems (see Smith, 1988); for urban rent theorists, they were perfect markets tending to equilibrium; for urban managerialists they were, first, systems of

Immigrant and Negro," in American Journal of Sociology, XVII, 736

[158] Michael Bond, "The Hidden Ways That Architecture Affects How You Feel", in Future, BBC, http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170605-the-psychology-behind-your-citys-design, last access April 2019.

[159] Max Weber; Peter R. Baehr; trans. Gordon C. Wells, The Protestant ethic and the "spirit" of capitalism and other writings. (London: Penguin, 2002).

exclusion with governmental gatekeepers, and secondly, systems of exclusion with marketized gatekeepers; and for structuralist Marxists they were systems for allocating collective consumption goods and services.[160]

1.3.1 Urban ecologists

The Chicago school was one of the most influential theoretic schools that originated in the early years of the twentieth century and it was the first to specialize in urban sociology. According to the ecologist view of the Chicago school, the city is an ecosystem of human nature. "It is an expression of mankind in general and specifically of the social relations generated by territoriality."[161] Moreover, according to the interpretative framework of the urban ecologists, the modern city is a social organism driven by Darwinian laws of competition, invasion and succession, evolution and survival.

The sociologists of the Chicago school realized that the traditions, customs, and romantic aspirations of city dwellers converted ecological, economic, and industrial factors into a social organization. In their search for objectivity and generalization, they did not find it necessary to deny a concern with the values that propel human beings. For this reason they often used the term social organization; to organize implies that men are creating social values and social goals.[162]

Another prominent perspective on the city is that of the theorist Michel De Certau,[163] who defined the city as a constantly evolving cultural interface, being continuously modified and mediated by the citizens' urban experience. "Its (a city's) present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future."[164] "As continually emergent bodies, cities thus provide ample space for reconfiguration and, as a result, the enunciation of

[160] Cooke Philippe, "Modern Urban Theory" in Question, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, vol 15, n. 3, Royal Geographical society1990, 331-343, 3

[161] R. Park, E. Burgess, The City, 9

[162] Ibidem.

[163] Michel de Certau, The Practice of Everyday Life, (California: University of California Press, 1988)

[164] Ibidem,91

agency. They then become immensely powerful interfaces."[165] De Certau also claimed that "walking has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian […]; it is a spatial acting-out of the place[…]; and it implies relations among differentiated positions […] By encouraging personalization and an intimate user relationship, cities as interfaces provide ample means for user-actualization."[166]

The urban interface interacts with city-dwellers through its mediating body between past narratives and contemporary experiences - landmarks and monuments. Indeed, according to De Certau they exist to give a physical body to cultural norms and values. However, the process of appropriation between people and the urban environment extends the communicative function of the interface beyond its physical, geographical and technical limitations.[167] Landmarks and monuments "have become part of Eco's cultural encyclopaedia and […] mediate older forms, while allowing for generative, combinatorial interactions."[168]

Similar to De Certau's point of view, Dagmar Motycka Weston, in her work "Le Corbusier and the Restorative Fragment at the Swiss Pavillion,"[169] defines architecture and urban design as "a source of existential orientation."[170] Therefore, our placement within the city helps place us since cities are able to map our identity conceptually, ideologically, and semiotically by surrounding us within a specific semiosphere.

Urban semiotics has functioned as the post-modern critique of Marxist urban studies. Space is treated as

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[165] Cory Benavente, "City as Interface: A Discourse on the Semiological Significance of Contemporary Urban Spaces."in Media Theory and Digital Culture, Spring 2013. https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/cctp-748-spring2013/2013/05/06/city-as-interface-a-discourse-on-the-semiological-significance-of-the-contemporary-urban-spaces/, last access April 2019

[166] De Certau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 98

[167] Ibidem,104

[168] Cory Benavente, "City as Interface: A Discourse on the Semiological Significance of Contemporary Urban Spaces."

[169] Weston, Dagmar Motycka. "Le Corbusier and the restorative fragment at the Swiss Pavillion." in Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City. Ed. Hvattum, Mari and Hermansen, Christian. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[170] Weston, "Le Corbusier and the restorative fragment at the Swiss Pavillion," 190

> a social product of the interaction of several actors who are, to a considerable extent, formally organized as groups and institutions. These actors- such as administrators, landowners, urban planners, owners or tenants of shops and office space, residents, grassroot action groups and squatters- have different relationships with any given space. There are multiple and fluid representations of space, but there is only one physical space[171]

Roland Barthes, one of the most famous pioneers of urban semiotics together with Umberto Eco, Mark Gottdiener, Henri Lefebvre and Kevin Lynch, brought about the idea of the city that states that "Human space has always been a signifying space."[172] To exemplify this, Barthes quotes Victor Hugo according to whom the signifying nature of urban space was best expressed by Notre Dame. "Hugo best expressed the signifying nature of urban space in *Notre Dame,* where he conceives the monument of the city as an inscription of man in space. Because there are two ways of writing - in stone and on paper."[173]

Finally, Barthes describes the city as a "discourse, and this discourse is actually a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it."[174] Barthes' colleague Henry Lefebvre went on in his analyses of the city as the place of human significance by using this principle to criticize the progressive commodification of the city, treated more and more as a commercial product rather than the "inscription of man in space," quoting Roland Barthes.

For this reason, in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la Ville*, Lefebvre proposed the novel definition of *right to the city* as a "demand…[for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life."[175] He argues that such a project requires what he calls a new contract of citizenship. What people require is to radically extend and deepen the contract, to articulate a new and augmented set of rights, and to struggle to achieve

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[171] Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life", in American Journal of Sociology, 1938, p. 8

[172] Roland Barthes, "Semiology and Urbanism", in Neil Leach, Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory, (London, New York: Routledge,1997), 413

[173] Barthes, "Semiology and Urbanism 413

[174] Ibidem.

[175] Henri Lefebvre, Le Droit à la Ville, (Paris: Editions Anthropos 1968)

them. He lists many different rights, among them the right to information, to difference, to self-management, and a right to the city, in his *The Production of Space*[176]

> Whether utopian or realistic, man must, if he is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of his agenda. […] Revolution was long defined either in terms of political change at the state level or else in terms of the collective or state ownership of the means of production [. . .] Today such limited definitions of revolution will no longer suffice. The transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space founded on the permanent participation of the "interested parties," with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests.[177]

Lefebvre distinguishes between the city and "the urban." He held that the contemporary city is a capitalist city, which is merely an impoverished manifestation of the urban. Moreover, he argues that capitalist industrialization forced on the city the primacy of exchange value, which consequently makes everything in the city, including space itself, reducible to economic exchange and a marketable commodity. Thus,

Lefebvre sees the right to the city as a struggle against the alienation of the urban space, which is more and more detaching from the idea of *polis,* i.e. place of social and political life. He talks about this de-alienation as a process of appropriation.

According to the French philosopher and sociologists, the act of appropriation is performed by the city dwellers who use city infrastructures, inhabit public spaces and circulate around the streets. Through these actions, inhabitants make the city their own, they appropriate the public space through their use and in this way, they simply exert their right to the city. [178] Therefore, appropriation is a right in the sense that inhabitants are endowed with a *de facto* normative right to space in the city. Accordingly, the capitalist commodification of the urban space which brings about the logic of property rights is actually an expropriation of what properly belongs to the community of the inhabitants by arrogating the right to the city to property owners, who bought

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[176] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 166– 167

[177] Ibidem,422

[178]Lefebvre, Le Droit à la Ville, (Paris: Editions Anthropos 1968).

the land

> In this light, owners' claims to property rights are wrong, a claim to something that is not properly theirs. Appropriation is thus a way to rethink the concept of rightful ownership, to transform radically our notions about who rightfully owns the city. Not only does it refuse property rights as a conception of ownership, it affirms a radical alternative: the city belongs to those who inhabit it. Appropriation is thus closely linked to both de-alienation and self-management, to inhabitants making the space of the city their own again.[179]

Lefebvre calls for the "real and active participation" of the inhabitants, who, through active and pervasive participation, may appropriate their city again. At the same time, this new appropriation will be an act of reorientation, which will take the city from its role of capitalistic engine and bring it to perform its role again of constitutive element of social identity among urban inhabitants.[180]

David Harvey further explains *right to the city* as follows: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city…the freedom to make and remake our cities."[181] Over the past decade, the right to the city has become one of the most discussed issues not only in urban studies but also in policy circles, in the academy, and among activists.

> UN-HABITAT[182] and UNESCO have led an effort to conceptualize the right to the city as part of a broader agenda for human rights (UNESCO, 2006; UN-HABITAT, 2010; Sugranyes & Mathivet, 2010). The goal is to encourage urban policies that promote justice,

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[179] Mark Purcell, "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre And the Right to The City", in Journal of Urban Affairs, 36.1,141-154, 145

[180] Lefebvre, Le Droit à la Ville, (Paris: Editions Anthropos 1968)

[181] Chendan Yan, "Who owns the 'Right to The City' Moving Towards Urban Inclusivity, in Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 2016, https://environment.yale.edu/blog/2016/06/who-owns-the-right-to-the-city-moving-towards-urban-inclusivity/, last access April 2019

[182] The United Nations Human Settlements Programme is the United Nations agency for human settlements and sustainable urban development. It was established in 1978 as an outcome of the First UN Conference on Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976

> sustainability, and inclusion in cities. A related effort is to develop charters that articulate a right to the city, such as the World Charter for the Right to the City, the European Charter for Human Rights in the City, and the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. In Brazil, the right to the city has been codified in a national law, the City Statute (Fernandes, 2006). Activists have also taken up the idea. A network of community organizations in the United States called The Right to the City Alliance was launched in 2007. A similar effort began in Europe in 2010.[183]

Nearly everyone stresses the figure of the user or inhabitant of urban space. "Most agree that it is the everyday experience of inhabiting the city that entitles one to a right to the city, rather than one's nation-state citizenship."[184]

Thus, inhabiting the city is a performative act which leads to a process of appropriation through the identification and redefinition of one's own identity, because, as the funder of psychogeography states: "People can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves."[185] Psychogeography was defined by Guy Debord in 1955 as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."[186]

Psychogeographers were inspired by the French nineteenth century poet and writer Charles Baudelaire who introduced the concept of the *flaneur*, the urban wanderer. Indeed, psychogeography was originally developed by the avant-garde movement *Lettrist International* in the journal "Potlatch," and one of the founding theories was that of the *dérive* coined by Ivan Chtcheglov in his highly influential 1953 essay "Formulaire Pour un Urbanisme Nouveau." According to Chtcheglov, "Architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space, of modulating reality, of engendering dreams."[187] Similarly, the Situationists International theorized

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[183]Purcell, "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre And the Right to The City",145

[184] Ibidem.

[185] Guy Debord, Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps (1959)

[186] Guy Debord, Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography in Les Lèvres Nues, 6, (September 1955), https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html, last accessed April 2019.

[187] Chtcheglov, Ivan (1953). "Formulary for a New Urbanism", in Internationale Situationniste, 1953

that "[C]ities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones."[188] In addition, Guy Debord, founding member of Situationalist International, admits in his 1961 film *A Critique of Separation* that "The sectors of a city[…] are decipherable, but the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable, as is the secrecy of private life in general, regarding which we possess nothing but pitiful documents."[189] Since the personal significance of the city is incommunicable, it must be experienced. For this reason, psychogeographers advocate the act of becoming lost in the city, through the *derivè* (drifting), which leads the walker to better connect to the city. Debord endeavoured to list the finer points of this theoretical paradox in his seminal work *Theory of the Dérive* in 1958, a document which is an instruction manual for the psychogeographic procedure, executed through the act of dérive (drifting).

> In a *dérive*, during a certain period one or more persons drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.[…] But, the *dérive* includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities.[190]

The act of wandering advocated by the psychogeographers has both a personal and social significance, against the dehumanization and modern alienation of the city: "A means of dissolving the mechanised matrix which compresses the space-time continuum. […] The solitary walker is an insurgent against the contemporary world, an ambulatory time traveller."[191]

Another more precise definition of *derive,* published in a *Situationalist International bulletin* in 1958, is "A mode of experimental behaviour linked to the condition of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied

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[188] Knabb, Ken, Situationist International Anthology. (Berkley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), p. 50

[189] Guy Debord, "A Critique of Separation" in Situationalist International, 1961, https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/separation.html, last access April 2019

[190] Ken, Situationist International Anthology. (Berkley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), p. 50

[191] Siobhan Lyons, "Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city", in The Conversation, http://theconversation.com/psychogeography-a-way-to-delve-into-the-soul-of-a-city-78032, last accessed April 2019.

ambiances."[192] Here the focus is on the concept of "ambiance." Situationists used the term "ambiance" to convey the feeling or mood associated with a place. According to them each place has a character and tone, differently effect human behaviour and psychology, by appealing to different cultural background, or symbolic meaning.

By mapping the urban ambience, Situationalists distinguished also small chunks of the city naming them: *unités d'ambiance* or units of ambiance, which are "parts of the city with an especially powerful urban atmosphere […] The ambiance units appeared on the map as fragments of commercial street maps carefully cut out to indicate each unit's defenses and exits." [193]

The reimagining of the city proposed by psychogeography has its roots in dadaism and surrealism, art movements which explored ways of unleashing the subconscious. Tristam Hillier's paintings such as *La Route des Alpes* (1937) could be described as an early example of this concept as well as Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical painting.

De Chirico was attracted to 19th-century German Romantic painting and to the works of the philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. The latter's search for hidden meanings beyond surface appearances and his descriptions of empty squares surrounded by arcaded buildings in the Italian city of Turin made a particularly deep impression on de Chirico. In his painting *Turin Melancholy* (1915), for example, de Chirico illustrated just such a square, using unnaturally sharp contrasts of light and shadow that lend an aura of poignant but vaguely threatening mystery to the scene. The arcades in this painting, as well as the deep perspectival space and dark-toned sky, are pictorial devices typical of de Chirico's strange, evocative works. He gave his paintings enigmatic titles like *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* (1913–14), *The Philosopher's Conquest* (1914), and *The Soothsayer's Recompense* (1913) that contribute to their cryptic effect.

[192] Ibidem.

[193] Denis Wood, "Lynch Debord: About Two Psychogeographies", in Cartographica, 45:3, 185-200, 185.

Psychogeography gained popularity in the 1990s when artists, writers and filmmakers such as Iain Sinclair and Patrick Keiller began using the idea to create works based on exploring locations by walking through them.[194]

Psychogeography also became a device used in theatre, art and literature. Particularly in Britain psychogeography has become a recognised descriptive term used in discussions of successful writers such as Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd and in the documentaries of filmmaker Patrick Keiller. The popularity of Sinclair brought the term into greater public use in the United Kingdom. Indeed, he has popularized the term by producing a large body of work based on pedestrian exploration of urban and suburban landscape. Sinclair and similar thinkers draw on a longstanding British literary tradition of the exploration of urban landscapes, before the Situationists, found in the works of writers like William Blake, Arthur Machen, and Thomas de Quincey. The nature and history of London were a central focus of these writers, who used romantic, gothic, and occult ideas to describe and transform the city. Sinclair drew on this tradition combined with his own explorations as a way of criticising modern developments of urban space in such key texts as *Lights Out for the Territory*. Peter Ackroyd's bestselling *London: A Biography* was partially based on similar sources, indeed it depicts London as

> a labyrinth - half stone and half flesh. It cannot be conceived in its entirety but can be experienced only as a wilderness of alleys and passages, courts and thoroughfares, in which even the most experienced citizen may lose his way; it is intriguing, too, that this labyrinth is in a continual state of change and expansion. […] I will sometimes stray from the narrow path in search of those heights and depths of urban experience that know no history and are rarely susceptible to rational analysis. I understand a little, and I trust that it will prove enough. I am not a Virgil prepared to guide aspiring Dantes around a defined and circular kingdom. I am only one stumbling Londoner who wishes to lead in the directions that I have pursued over a lifetime. The reader of this book must wander and wonder.[195]

Likewise, new research by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists reported the

[194] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography, last access April 2019

[195] Peter Acroyd, Londond. The Biography, (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 2-3

impact of urban space on human psychology. They defined the space where we live as cognitive capital that provides human beings with coordinates for life, behaviour and memory; it builds individual and collective identity. The stability rate of the surrounding landscape (both urban and rural) is directly proportional to the sense of safety, which betters self-perception and a sense of belonging; it favours the productivity of individuals and the community by triggering creativity as well. Conversely, the fragmentation of territories, the violent and fast changing landscapes, the increase of sprawling peripheries with no centre cause individual and social diseases.[196]

Indeed, according to a research project in 2006, 30% of the variance in incidence of schizophrenia is due to urbanisation. This process, which has not yet been studied, may be called "territorial distress" or "dysmorphia."[197] Usually, the concept of territorial distress refers to the anxiety of emigrants who are uprooted from their homeland.[198] Today, a variant of this concept, referring to those who remain in their own territories but who no longer recognize them because of radical changes, is spreading. Indeed, these radical changes, which may be caused by several events, annihilate the familiarity of people with their territory. The distortion of the shape of the city provokes individual and social sufferance and diseases.[199] As a matter of fact, "buildings and cities can affect our mood and well-being, and specialised cells in the hippocampal region of our brains are attuned to the geometry and arrangement of the spaces we inhabit."[200] The neuroscientist Colin Ellard discovered that people are strongly affected by building façades.[201]

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196 Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 136-137

197 F. Amadeo e M. Tansella, "Ambiente urbano e schizofrenia. Dall'Associazioe Statistica alla Relazione Causale", in Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale, XV2006, n4, 240

198 E.de Martino, "Angoscia territoriale e riscatto culturale nel mito di achilpa delle origini. Contributo allo studio della mitologia degli Aranda", in Studi e Materiali di storia delle religioni, XXIII, 1951-52, pp.51-66

199 Settis, Architettura e Democrazia, 136-137

200 Bond, "The Hidden Ways That Architecture Affects How You Feel"

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http://cdn.bmwguggenheimlab.org/TESTING_TESTING_BMW_GUGGENHEIM_LAB_2013_2.pdf, last accessed April 2020.

> If the façade is complex and interesting, it affects people in a positive way and negatively if it is simple and monotonous. For example, when he walked a group of subjects past the long, smoked-glass frontage of a Whole Foods store in Lower Manhattan, their arousal and mood states took a dive, according to the wristband readings and on-the-spot emotion surveys. They also quickened their pace as if to hurry out of the dead zone. They picked up considerably when they reached a stretch of restaurants and stores, where (not surprisingly) they reported feeling a lot more lively and engaged. One possible theory is that the visual complexity of natural environments acts as a kind of mental balm.[202]

One of the outcomes of this kind of psychological urban experiments is that social interactions, which are crucial to mental health, "do not come easily in cities. Social isolation is now recognised by urban authorities as a major risk factor for many illnesses."[203] Therefore, the sociologist and American urbanist William Whyte advised urban planners to place objects and artefacts in public spaces in ways to make it more likely for people to engage with each other. In 1975, the Project for Public Spaces, founded by one of Whyte's colleagues, transformed the way people used Rockefeller Centre in New York City by placing benches alongside the yew trees in its basement concourse (instead of the people-repelling spikes the management had originally wanted). The architectural firm Snohetta has followed a similar principle in Times Square, introducing long sculpted granite benches to emphasise that the iconic space, once clogged with cars, is now a haven for pedestrians.[204]

One proven, negative aspect of experiencing urban life is a constant sense of being lost or disorientated. This feeling derives from the shape and organization of cities. Indeed, some are easier to navigate than others. For instance, "New York's grid-like street pattern makes it relatively straightforward, whereas London, with its hotchpotch of neighbourhoods all orientated differently and the Thames meandering through the middle, is notoriously confusing."[205] At the Conscious Cities Conference, Kate Jeffery claimed that people need a sense of direction and so they should know how things relate to each other spatially. She said, "places with rotational symmetry, which look the same

[202] Ibidem.

[203] Ibidem.

[204] Ibidem.

[205] Ibidem.

whichever direction you look at them from – Piccadilly Circus, for example – are a 'nightmare' for orientation." [206] A visible manifestation of this seek for orientation are the "desire lines" that wend people's way across grassy curbs and parks tracing preferred paths across the city. These alternative routes represent a rebellion against the prescribed framework imposed by architects and city planners. Moreover, endless vistas and limited views affect us quite differently. Allegedly, our vision and our minds ask for greater freedom of penetration through space. There seems to be some reason to think that objects around us may stimulate us, or create a sense of frustration, depending on their nature and placement.

Other researches in this "psycho-urban field" diagnosed the "privacy-territoriality syndrome: the fact that a lack of privacy tends to produce short tempers and unpredictable outbursts of aggression is well known from human experience and animal experiments. That the reaction is intensified by increasing population density and pressure also seems adequately demonstrated."[207]

Besides, even the compression of the time-space experience of the city due to the speed of the transportation means often problematizes people's sense of orientation, by substituting a gradual passage from an urban ambience to another one.

> When we walked through the varied streetscapes of an old town, getting home was a gradual process. We began to feel at home when we passed the old house with the columns, six blocks away; we felt it more strongly after we had gone by the grocery store, with only two blocks left; and we felt it completely when we turned the corner into our own block. But, in a high-rise residential structure, set in the bland environs of a modern urban precinct, we do not even get any great feeling of having reached home when we pass through the front entrance into the elevator lobby. The feeling comes only when we close the door to our own apartment behind us.[208]

Therefore, the psychological and emotional polarization and detachment between the safe and familiar spaces, such as one's own home, and the public and mostly unfamiliar urban zones, is leading to an impoverishment of inhabitant's sense of belonging,

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[206] Ibidem.

[207] Albert Eide Parr, "The City as Habitat", in The Centennial Review, 14.2, Spring 1970, 177-187, 183

[208] Albert Eide Parr, "The City as Habitat", in The Centennial Review, 14.2, Spring 1970, 177-187, 184

depriving the city of its role of orientation through cultural symbols and physical reference points. This process is gradually destabilising people and creating a sense of estrangement from the city and the consequent difficulty of feeling part of the urban space. In other words, inhabitants' comfort zone tends to restrict to closed private places. The increasing risk is that of an alienation of the city which is turning into an alienating and estrange place rather than the generative source of a human community.

As it has been greatly illustrated throughout this first chapter there is a profound symbiosis among the city, human beings, their personal identity, their mental health and their culture. A city influences one's ability to remember and reconfigure the present in order to go forward towards the future. Urban space has even managed to overcome its physical boundaries by acquiring a digital dimension. Yet, the locality, the territorial foundation of a city, is the necessary placement for the self and the community. The urban space is the concrete and specific scenario where community grows and is constantly challenged by events.

2. The Political and Social Condition of the Post-multicultural Urban Environment.

2.1 Multiculturalism and Post-multiculturalism.

In this second chapter, the focus will narrow down to the life, identity and features of the city and its inhabitants in the contemporary world. As was described in the first chapter, the architectural complexity and the multidimensional identity of the modern city goes hand in hand with the problems and issues of citizenship and membership, not only intended as legal status but also as a relational situation - conditions that regulate the life of the individual, the community and the city. These issues are extremely important particularly in current times, when the concepts of race, nationality, and identity are no longer clear-cut, but complex and hybrid. For this reason, this chapter will consider the modern theoretical approaches of multiculturalism and post-multiculturalism in order to interpret the modern urban condition, its pitfalls and promises, first at a universal level and then at a more specific one.

Indeed, this dissertation will focus particularly on London as a unique example of a multicultural city, where particular historical, social and urban conditions have given, and continue to give, rise to intercultural spaces, together with an evolving idea of citizenship, Britishness and identity. The analysis will demonstrate how the concrete reality of urban life and spaces is the primary ontological factor that gives life to new and complex conditions that reshape social, ethnical, and political categories. By force of circumstances, the unprecedented make-up of most of the cities in the world, and this is particularly true in the case of London, is generating a new cultural 'DNA', in which all the possible differences involved in the "multi-" identity are gradually becoming an integral, living and evolving organism.

As stated in the first chapter, the physical make-up of a city, its monuments, streets, parks, and buildings, is not only a container of human life, but an active part of it, its reflection and its complementary counterparts. Indeed, the interactions between inhabitants and their city are characterized by emotional, familiar, and symbolic implications and relevance. This is possible not only because in their everyday

lives human beings constantly try to create reference points and symbolic coordinations to give order to their lives, but these come to be crystallized in the physical dimension of the city, which become an evident cultural map, an eternal reminder, and a reassuring and comforting certainty. Therefore, not only do the "varied ways of conceptualizing the city affect in distinct ways how people inhabit, view, and think about the city," but the fact that social changes, like the presence of new inhabitants, are reshaping the physical make-up of the city is a shocking and definite sign that the DNA of a population is inevitably changing, evolving. According to Baucom, "what is finally threatened by the growth of a black population in England is less the white body than the metropolitan landscape- which the immigrants remake" […] by "transforming" an imagined, idealized "once quiet street…into a place of noise and confusion" and thereby "fundamentally altering and remaking England and Englishness." [209]

It is not by chance that the word "inhabitant", which defines a person who daily and actively lives in a place, contains the word "habit." This is an English word derived from two Latin words, the verbs *habere* and *habitare*, "to live, to dwell," and *habitus*, "condition, demeanor, appearance, dress."[210] Interestingly, the habits of people, which are an important part of their identity and a consequence of their conception of life, the outcomes of their values, and the social *habitus* a person wears, is ontologically linked to the act of living and inhabiting and consequently to the physical places of these acts. Therefore, firstly, it is not possible to comprehend the social and cultural changes outside the urban framework that hosts them. Secondly, the urban environment is the first and most peculiar place where such changes take place, thereby influencing the course of history.

This is particularly true nowadays in London, where thousands of different ethnicities, cultures and languages inhabit the same places and these "social differences are gathered together in cities at a unique level of intensity. […] The city, at least for some, has come to stand as the paradigmatic site of post-modernity: it is a place where,

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[209] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 23-24.

[210] Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/inhabitant, last accessed November 2019.

all comes together."[211] While the contemporary city is becoming ethnically, culturally and socially more complex and its boundaries are blurring due to transnational identities, there is an increasing "need for the local," which clearly remains a necessary dimension for every human being. Adrienne Rich and Elspeth Probyn deal with this issue in their "Notes Towards a Politics of Location"[212] and "Travels in Post-modern: Making Sense of the Local,"[213] respectively.

"Locale is inscribed on our bodies, in our homes and on the streets."[214] Our identity is necessarily formed from its birth starting from our body and then in a precise physical and social locale. The relationship between one's own identity and its location is highly complex because on one hand location may be an instrument of coercive power and restrictive determination, but, on the other, it is the place where recognition and identification take place. This concern about location aims at replacing the idea of universalism with the specificity of an identity necessarily bordered. This idea of location, which combines identity, place and culture, explains why the transformations that are occurring within the urban environment are deeply affecting not only one's own cultural and political identity but also the psychological and most intimate self.

The unprecedented condition affecting the largest cities in the world may be called "super-diversity," to use Steven Vertovec's definition[215]. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the urban environment is not only marked by increasing immigration, but by different types of migration and even "diasporic identification and transnationalism. In addition, families with multiple ethnicities, and individuals with multiple and hyphenated identities, are also increasing."[216]

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[211] Geraldine Pratt, "Grids of difference: Place and identity formation"' in *Cities of Difference*, R. Fincher and J. M. Jacobs (eds), (New York: The Guilford Press,1998), 26-48.

[212] Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986).

[213] Probyn, Elspeth. "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local." in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[214] *Ibid*, 187.

[215] Steve Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29 (6), 1024–54.

[216] William Bradley, "Is There A Post-Multiculturalism?", *Working Paper Series on Multicultural Societies*, N.19, 2013,7.

Britain is therefore experiencing the "transformative 'diversification of diversity'."[217] Whereas immigration and the presence of multiethnic citizens were characterised by well-organized and clearly defined communities originally from Commonwealth countries, nowadays these are seen as super-diversity. "Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade."[218] Of course, diversity itself is something deeply rooted in the British ethnical and cultural DNA as Peter Ackroyd reported in his "London: the Biography,"[219] where he describes the long history of a city of assorted immigrants. The population of Roman Londinium included administrators, traders, soldiers and slaves from Gaul, Greece, Germany, Italy and North Africa. "By the tenth century the city was populated by Cymric Brythons and Belgae, by remnants of the Gaulish legions, by East Saxons and Mercians, by Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, by Franks and Jutes and Angles, all mingled and mingling together to form a distinct tribe of "Londoners."‟[220]

But the modern condition of diversity has changed from the traditional view.

> New, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups have hardly gained attention or a place on the public agenda. Yet it is the growth of exactly these sorts of groups that has in recent years radically transformed the social landscape in Britain. The time has come to re-evaluate – in social scientific study as well as policy – the nature of diversity in Britain today.[221]

In this condition of super-diversity, new and different actors have come to interplay within the urban environment: new migrants not necessarily from former colonies and not necessarily sharing cultural and linguistic links with Britain, asylum seekers,

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[217] Steven Vertovec, "The Emergence of Superdiversity In Britain", *Centre on Migration, Policy And Society*, 2006, n. 25.

[218] *Ibid.*

[219] Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*, (London: Vintage,2001).

[220] *Ibid*, 702.

[221] Steve Vertovec, "The Emergence of Superdiversity In Britain," 5.

students and workers and, above all, second or third generation British citizens. Indeed, after almost a century from the first massive migration waves from Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and the West Indies (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), a new post-migration condition is developing, leading to new identities of born and bred London citizens who are neither purely English nor are they totally foreigners. Indeed, both the ethnical and cultural DNA of Britain are evolving and are creating new identities deeply rooted and shaped by their native location: the city.

This unprecedented and complex condition marked the shift from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism, both because the increasing complexity of the social urban make-up has exceeded the theoretical categories of multiculturalism and because of the failure of most of the multicultural policies. Multiculturalism has been declared a failure not only in continental Europe, but also in traditionally migrant-receiving societies such as Canada and Australia[222]: "We are now entering a 'post-multicultural' era."[223]

In order to understand this post-multicultural era, it is necessary to trace back to the origins of multiculturalism and review their fundamental theoretical pillars together with outcomes. During the period of immigration in the 1950s, which regarded almost exclusively members of the Commonwealth, policies toward immigrants took an assimilationist approach [224] sustained by the idea that immigration would be temporary, by the economic need for workers and by an imperialistic attitude towards the subjects of the colonies. The post-war policy of ignoring multicultural differences and demanding that immigrants take on the traits of the dominant culture has led to cultural clashes: Notting Hill riots of 1958 publicly demonstrated the failure of such a theory and brought the issue of race to the fore.[225]

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[222] Roger Chapman, *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints and Voices*. (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010).

[223] Will Kymlicka, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies", in S. Vertovec and S. Wessendorf (eds) *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*, (London:Routledge, 2010).

[224] Hesse Barnor, *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements and Transruptions*, (London: Zed Books, 2000).

[225] David Cesarani,"The changing character of citizenship and nationality in Britain", in David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook's (eds.) *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe,* (London:Routledge, 1997).

> The genesis of this multiculturalism can be seen as representing a corrective to assimilationist approaches and policies surrounding the incorporation of immigrants and is committed to a plurality of self-contained cultures. Recalling the philosophical and political conundrum outlined above, this version of multiculturalism advocates the public recognition of difference through the protection of cultural group rights. Supporters of this position view the formal recognition of cultural identities as imperative for achieving 'true equality.' [226]

Therefore, multiculturalism can be identified with a set of institutional initiatives implemented to provide each ethnical group with opportunities of specific social and political representation and to promote equality, respect and tolerance, to support continuity of traditions and reinforcement of ethnical specificity. This kind of attitude entailed actions in the following field: public recognition, education, law, religious accommodation, food, broadcasting and media.[227] The focus on recognition, as multiculturalism has been commonly conceptualized,[228] deserves credit for acknowledging the urgency of the demand for being legally and publicly acknowledged because of the supposed link between recognition and identity.

> Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people of society around them mirror back to them a confining or demanding or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm and be a form of oppression imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. […] Thus, discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others.[229]

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[226] Gareth Morrell, "Multicutlturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Centre About Asylum And Refugees*, 2008:1-40, 2.

[227] Steven Vertovec, "Towards Post-Mutliculturalism? Changing Communities, Conditions and Contexts of Diversity", in *International Social Science Journal*, 61.199, 83-95.

[228] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'the Politics of Recognition.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)

[229] Ibid, 60.

However, the policies of recognition of multiculturalism also entailed the clear separation of people into definite groups: the homogeneous British dominant group on one side, and all the other ethnic groups on the other side. This attitude reflected the will to hold on to "the 'monological ideal', which seriously undermines the place of the dialogical in human life. In other words, this ideal puts too much emphasis on individual origins and ignores the fact that cultures collectively, and identities individually, are formed and constantly reproduced through exogenous interaction."[230]

Minorities were offered a multicultural legislation - a wide range of policies, that officially guaranteed recognition and cultural tolerance. [231] Even the Race Relations Act (1976) actually perpetrated a paternal leadership, which, on one hand, opened up the space for a multicultural co-existence, but on the other created a system of labelling and fixing such ethnic and cultural differences into a framework that worked as a "sort of "structure of control" for managing minorities without changing the identities of the majoritarian (usually "white") "unified selves of the 'managers'."[232] This multiculturalism was based on the belief that ethnic and cultural differences would not 'melt together', but, on the contrary, should have been ordered in a sort of clear social hierarchy.[233] Such politics was clearly exposed by Tony Blair's 2006 speech on multiculturalism and integration, where he addressed immigrants by stating that they would be guaranteed the 'right to be different' upon the fulfilment of 'the duty to integrate'.[234] As Paul Gilroy pointed out, multicultural society signed the beginning of the post-colonial, not non-colonial, society and policies. Indeed, the institutions and

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[230] Gareth Morrell, "Multicutlturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Center About Asylum And Refugees*, 2008: 1-40, 10.

[231] Favell, Adrian, "Multicultural Race Relations in Britain: Problems of Interpretation and Explanation" in Christian Joppke (ed.) *Challenge to the Nation State: Immigration in Western Europe and the United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[232] Mark Mishra, *What Was Multiculturalism? A Critical Retrospective*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2012), 30.

[233] Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave,1998).

[234] Tony Blair, "The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values", *Lectures on Our Nation's Future*, Downing Street, 8th December 2006.

legislation associated with multiculturalism reproduced certain social structures and ideologies typical of the empire. [235]

Already in the late 1990s and early 2000s, political and academic debates began to seriously question the outcome and the effectiveness of multicultural policies. Indeed, several reports showed a problematic reality: natives and immigrants were living parallel lives. The desire to provide all cultural groups with social and legal recognition had led to a rigid categorization based on a static idea of culture,[236] which was reflected into a "fragmented society and residential segregation, effectively separate schools, different places of worship, divergent community associations, discrete social networks and disparate places of leisure."[237]

Consequently, such social and residential ghettoization destroyed people's sense of mutual obligations and their desire to contribute to the welfare state, undermined social relations and socioeconomic mobility and therefore it opened up ground for social conflicts and extremism. Far from being rigid, culture is a relational issue and cannot be conceived as a neat category that perfectly contains a specific group of people,[238] nor as a set "of collective behavioural-moral-aesthetic traits and 'customs'[…], which instils a discrete quality into the feelings, values, practices, social relationships, predilections and intrinsic nature of all who belong to (a particular version of) it." [239]

Interestingly enough, multiculturalism focused excessively on the cultural definition of immigrants and excluded the white British people from the political and social discourses that were marking a deep change in British society.[240] The idea that multiculturalism was just a static condition that should regulate social interactions and public life created group barriers that raised disruptive trends that damaged and prevented meaningful social bonds and a defensive attitude that encouraged people to

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[235] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

[236] Christian Joppke, Steven Lukes, 'Introduction', in Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes (eds.) *Multicultural Questions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[237] Saskia Warren, Phil Jones, "Cultural Policy, Governance and Urban Diversity: Resident Perspectives from Birmingham, UK", *The Authors Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie,2008* :22-35.

[238] Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[239] Steve Vertovec, "Multiculturalism, culturalism, and public incorporation", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.

19(1): 49-69, 54.

[240] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *After Multiculturalism*, (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000).

hide behind rigid labels.[241] Not only did this attitude increase a pervasive sense of strangeness and segregation felt by both immigrants and natives, but it came to be even more problematic by the growth of second and third generation immigrants often characterized by hybrid identities.

The Parekh Report, the product of the Commission for the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, depicted Britain as marked by significant cultural hybridity and a conception of Britishness that is constantly evolving.[242] This official report attempted to re-describe Britain in terms of hybridity, by creating overlapping communities and cultural interaction.[243] The report pointed out that in a society of multiple and overlapping identities, many enjoyed the diversity and complexity of life in Britain 'but also experienced conflicting loyalties'.[244] Parekh advocates debate and dialogue on the basis of shared principles, a process that is central to any democratic society. Therefore, redefining multicultural policies and frameworks turned out to be an urgent issue of contemporary British society. As Goodhart argued, culturalism "broke down society in terms of race, ethnicity, lifestyles, attitudes and behaviours."[245] Now, Britain, he argues, requires a new 'social glue': it is naïve and dangerous to suggest that diversity will take care of itself.

Vertovec[246] and Kymlicka[247] use the term 'post-multiculturalism' to present the modern particular phase of multiculturalism, in which the attempt is "to foster both

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241 Munira Mirza, *Response to 'Strength in Diversity.' Consultation on Community Cohesion and Race Equality strategy*, (London: Institute of Ideas, 2004).

242 Bikhu Parekh, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).

243 Steven Vertovec, "Transnational Challenges to the "New" Multiculturalism*", ESRC Transnational Communities Research Programme Working Papers 01-06*, 2001.

244 Bikhu Parekh, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).

245 David Goodhart, "Too Diverse?", *Prospect Magazine*, https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/too-diverse-david-goodhart-multiculturalism-britain-immigration-globalisation, last accessed November 2019.

246 Steve Vertovec, "Towards Post-multiculturalism? Changing Communities, Conditions and Contexts of Diversity", *International Social Science Journal* 61(199): 83–95.

247 Will Kymlicka, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies", in Steve Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf (eds) *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*. (London: Routledge, 2010).

the recognition of diversity and the maintenance of collective national identities"[248]. In order to combine national identity with the official recognition of cultural diversity, there is a need for policies that aim to introduce various new strategies such as citizenship and/or language tests and citizenship ceremonies. In this context, even in traditionally migrant-receiving countries such as Australia, there has been a move away from multiculturalism to a social cohesion agenda, as a result of which the term 'multiculturalism' was officially replaced in government documents by the word 'citizenship'.[249] Most notably, in 2007, the Australian government changed the name of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).[250] The universal and democratic ideas entailed in the concept of citizenship were an attempt to apply a distinct policy that goes beyond race and tries to embrace a new evolving culture and social status generated by the every-day urban interactions and not imposed from higher up.

2.2 Post-multicultural Era: Problematization and Reshaping of the Idea of Citizenship, Britishness, Integration and Identity

The idea of citizenship has become central in the modern post-multicultural landscape. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what the term citizenship implies both historically and politically. Indeed, the meanings that the term citizenship acquire are strongly determined culturally. The choice of citizenship as the central concept of the post-multicultural era is quite significant and it needs to be disambiguated through an attentive contextualization in contemporary urban culture. However, it is interesting to trace its historical and etymological origins in order to comprehend its evolution and modern applications. Historical and linguistic implications help to understand the multiple conceptual dimensions that can co-exist within such a broad term. Interestingly enough, "citizenship" does not immediately refer to ethnical bonds but it

[248] Dorota Gozdecka, Selen Ercan, Magdalena Kmak, "From multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism: Trends and paradoxes." *Journal of Sociology*, 50. 51-64, 58.

[249] Heba Batainah, Mary Walsh, "From Multiculturalism to Citizenship", in C. Aulich and R.Wettenhall (eds) *Howard's Fourth Government*. (Sydney: University of New South WalesPress), 2008.

[250] Dorota Gozdecka, Selen Ercan, Magdalena Kmak, "From multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism: Trends and paradoxes.",58.

stresses the emotional, fraternal and moral ties that relate people who share something that determines and contains them - something that requires them to collaborate. Therefore, citizenship entails a paradoxical condition that combines, on the one hand, the sharing of some civic values which may be universal and widely acknowledged no matter the ethnicity of the subjects, and on the other, the specificity of a reality that involves these civic values and demands that people be engaged with it: a community. Although the etymological meaning of community which originally entailed the idea of friendship, fellowship, and courtesy (*communitatem* has been questioned by some modern sociologists who have pointed out the lack of a sense of community in the modern urban environment), it is evident that one of the principal and most performative realities that citizens share is, indeed, the city. Thus, the city is the place where the local and the universal meet and this may give rise to new identities that escape neat ethnical and national categorization, but which still claim recognition of urban membership and identification with a new idea of Britishness.

Another dichotomy within the concept of citizenship is its essence and performance. Indeed, citizenship shapes people's identity, their social essence and political role, but this identity does not depend on ethnic or cultural properties; it is defined by the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights and it is realized when citizens participate in a pluralist public sphere.[251] In his *Laws,* Plato explains that the status of a citizen demands the cultivation of virtue, which is at the basis of any political and legislative act in the *polis.*[252] Similarly, Adam Smith in "Theory of Moral Sentiments" declared that the identity of the citizen is ontologically characterized by the respect of laws and the wish to promote the welfare of the entire society by every means in his power.

The active attitude of the citizen is perfectly entailed in the concept of membership, from the term 'member': from Latin *membrum* "limb, member of the body, part," from root **mems-* "flesh, meat" (also from the Sanskrit *mamsam* or "flesh;"

[251] Jurgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity: Some reflections on the Future of Europe," in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 258-259.
[252] Lucia Prauscello, *Performing Citizenship in Plato's Laws*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Classical Studies, 2006), 1.

Greek *meninx* "membrane," *mēros* "high" (the "fleshy part"); Gothic *mimz* "flesh").[253] Thus, membership implies belonging to an organism, being part of a whole, which does not have to be necessarily a homogeneous being, but a living entity in which each part plays a role for the benefit of the entire entity. Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer (2002) offer this definition of citizenship: 'Citizenship denotes membership of an intergenerational project, committed to knowing a past and promoting a better future for generations to follow.' [254]

Since membership guarantees both civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights and certain associated responsibilities, it has been traditionally used to trace boundaries between members and outsiders considering geographical and territorial coverage as a parameter, according to specific political interests. Indeed, historically, citizenship has been an instrument of expansion and control for several empires.

The first dichotomy may be epitomized by the comparison between the Athenian polis and the Roman Empire.

> The former was conceived for a relatively small administering territory with the aim of practicing an early form of direct democracy: a civic conception of political community. Citizens had the right to respect and security under the law, but also had partial responsibility in its creation. […] A quite different model of citizenship emerged from the development of the Roman Empire, where allegiances were less immediate and more universal. There, citizenship was multi-ethnic, disregarding blood ties, and did not aspire to administrated politics. The result was an inclusive and open citizenship (the first to guarantee civil rights), a legally defined political community that required neither 'myths of common origins' nor intimate contact between its members. Yet, while civil and legal rights were protected, the responsibilities of citizens amounted to little more than respecting the law: law-making was an entirely top-down process and citizens were passive.[255]

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[253]Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/member, last access November 2019.

[254] Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglas Klusmeyer, *Citizenship policies for an age of migration*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

[255] Gareth Morrell, "Multicutlturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Center About Asylum and Refugees*, 2008: 1-40, 11.

A further dichotomy is entailed within the concept of citizenship: the vertical relation between subjects and state, and a horizontal one among all the citizens. Whereas the concept of citizenship illustrated by both Hobbes in "Commonwealth" and Locke in his "Second Treatise" focused on the idea of universal peace and collective security imposed from above,[256] in the eighteenth century emphasis was on a bottom-up approach brought about by Rousseau's idea of social contract. Rousseau's philosophical and political theories questioned the absolute legitimacy and power of the state and its rulers, and fostered the idea of the general will and common interests of the members of society.[257] This new paradigm inspired the principles of the French Revolution, whose idea of citizenship was described by a paradox: on one hand, it attempted to propose a democratic idea of citizenship which not only guaranteed equality under the law, but also an affirmation of popular will. On the other, the universal principle of rights, bound to a growing idea of human rights, was actually limited to national borders and a strong national ideal. Indeed, in the French Declaration of Rights (1789), the term *citoyen* defined a person entitled to specific human rights because of his/her national belonging.

After the failure of nationalism in the twentieth century, the post-war period witnessed a major shift in the form and function of citizenship. Deeply influenced by the great poverty of the 1950s, T.H. Marshall changed the debate about rights within the framework of citizenship. He pointed out the contrast between formal equality and socio-economic inequality, which impeded actual full participation in public life.[258] These reflections led to the creation of welfare programmes and institutions to which all citizens were entitled. Nevertheless, the idea of citizenship, of entitled people, was still deeply defined by territorial and ethnic parameters.

The large-scale immigration that followed de-colonisation, and the multi-ethnicity internalised within a nation brought the issue of citizenship to the fore and put into question the idea of rights, membership, collective identity as well as the issue of citizenship acquisition or transmission. The principles of *ius solis* and *ius sanguinis* have

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[256] Gerard Delanty, "European Citizenship: A Critical Assessment", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol.11(1): 63-72.

[257] David Wootton, *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).

[258] Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, (London: Pluto Press, 1992).

been widely discussed. This debate is fundamental and deals with the choice of what the source of citizenship should be: *ius sanguinis* is the law relating to blood, therefore it entails the idea that citizenship becomes a part of the cultural DNA which can be biologically transmitted. *Ius soli* expresses the idea that the place of birth determines citizenship; that is, nationality depends on where a person is born. Britain has had to deal with this issue extensively and it has shaped a great part of its modern history. Enoch Powell's opinion is emblematic in explaining the dispute: "The West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. By law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; but in fact, he remains West Indian or Asian."[259]

2.3 Historical Evolution of the Concept of Citizenship in Britain.

It is rather difficult but still fundamental to try to pin down what is meant by British citizenship. Since the notion of Britain was broadened by the advent of the empire and the Commonwealth, the status of British citizenship has become complex, taking on many political and social forms and functions, and remains greatly debated. Besides, lacking a unique defining constitution or historical event that could define the origin and parameters of British citizenship, this fundamental concept has been open to a number of interpretations. For one, it has been considered synonymous with identity, addressing social and welfare rights, Britishness, electoral participation and social engagement. [260]

The official idea of British nationality arises when one traces back to the roots of this status. It points out that legislation regarding nationality and citizenship derives from the medieval concept of "allegiance."

> Feudal lords demanded the allegiance of their local communities and those lords, in turn, swore allegiance to the monarch. As the powers of the monarchy increased, the concept

[259] See Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

[260] David Goodhart, "The baby-boomers finally see sense on immigration", *The Observer*, 24th February 2008.

> of allegiance broadened into a general allegiance to the Crown. All those who owed allegiance to the Crown were the Crown's subjects, and Common law generally attributed subject status to those born within the Crown's territories. [...] After the Act of Union 1707, joining England and Scotland, 'English subject' became a 'British subject'. Those who were not British subjects were 'aliens.'[261]

The concept of allegiance is quite central to understanding how the concept of citizenship has been interpreted over the centuries. The word allegiance comes from the Anglo-French *legaunce* "loyalty of a liege-man to his lord," and it has acquired a general figurative sense of "recognition of claims to respect or duty, or observance of obligation."[262] Therefore, firstly, this concept stresses the vertical nature that citizenship has traditionally entailed in British history. Indeed, citizenship has worked as an overtly controlling social order, being ambiguously interchangeable with the status of subjects. Secondly, "The idea of private property as the basis for political rights maintains that this hereditary structure emphasised the vertical relationship between subject and sovereign rather than forging any horizontal relationship among subjects."[263]

Even though the principles of the French Revolution brought to the fore a new idea of citizenship based on the political rights of the citizens and subsequent participation by them, the idea of British citizenship remained stuck to its traditional vertical hierarchy that was embedded in the politics of the Empire.

> The relationship between the development of citizenship and the functions of an empire provide an interesting example of how the changing aims of citizenship affect its dimensions. At the height of the Empire, British citizenship or 'subjecthood' outside Britain was comparable to the multi-ethnic citizenship of the Roman Empire. Some historians argue that the brutal expansion of this form of citizenship aimed to preserve the Britishness of the Empire, and the sheer numbers of people that could be described

[261] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/632300/britnatsummary.pdf, last accessed November 2019.

[262] Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=allegiance, last accessed November 2019.

[263] Gareth Morrell, "Multicutlturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Center About Asylum and Refugees*, 2008.

> as 'British' became a powerful posturing symbol of the reach of the Empire. Others suggest that while the development of citizenship and subjecthood was linked to control, it was never linked to nationhood or Britishness.[264]

What significantly distinguishes the politics of the British Empire from that of the Roman Empire is the cultural idea attached to the concept of subjecthood or citizenship. Indeed, if within the Roman Empire subjects where free to maintain their own culture and citizenship was simply a formal act of respect and obedience to Roman laws and ministers, the British Empire chose to impose certain cultural elements that partly defined the idea of Britishness - language, culture, literature, and customs. This cultural imposition was more a way to control or eliminate cultural differences through imposed citizenship rather than an attempt to share political duties and rights. Consequently,

> the dissolution of the Empire and the post-war migration to Britain that followed exposed the conceptual gap between the previously transposed ethnic and cultural genesis of 'the people' and the political and civil concept of citizenship and it forced the government to reconsider the issue of citizenship. [265]

The 1948 British Nationality Act created two primary categories: citizens of the UK and its colonies and citizens of Commonwealth countries. Despite the fact that both these categories of people had the right to settle in Britain, this Act was "not designed to facilitate and did not anticipate non-white immigration."[266] Immigration, however, certainly did follow and, until 1962, was largely unrestricted. This was a policy largely out of step with public opinion on the issue of non-white immigration, as polls from the time indicate. A number of factors contributed to the formation of this policy,

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[264] *Ibid.*

[265] *Ibid.*

[266] Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

including enduring liberal support for the Commonwealth and nostalgia for the Empire as well as the demand for cheap labour.[267]

This initial unrestricted openness, which mandated equal rights of citizenship for all British subjects - erasing the distinction between subject and citizen - brought about significant social tensions in England and forced politicians to turn to new measures of control over even those who had already been defined as citizens. Indeed,

> The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act dramatically reduced the rights previously associated with being a British subject, most notably rendering subjects of the Commonwealth and colonies subject to immigration controls. The only exemption was for those considered to have a 'close connection to Britain: those born in the UK or of British descent.[268] The growing popular opposition to further non-white immigration was intensified by the riots of 1958 and penetrated the political discourse in the early 1960s. Some argue that despite the full support of the public and the backbenches, immigration controls were implemented reluctantly by the Conservative Party leadership. The contradiction of preaching multi-ethnicity in the Commonwealth without practicing it at home was apparent to leading party members.[269]

Then, another contradiction arose regarding the idea of British citizenship. The restrictions imposed by the act of 1962 went beyond the title of citizenship, making it no longer sufficient to take part in British political and civil life. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act introduced a new distinction within the idea of citizenship: those citizens who had a "close connection" to Britain, geographically restricted to the British Isles. Karatani suggests that by developing the idea of requiring a 'close connection' in order to be granted British citizenship, citizenship policy continued to be driven by control, in this instance immigration control, rather than a

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[267]Bob Carter, "What Race Means to Realists", in Justin Cruickshank (ed.) *Critical Realism: The Difference That It Makes*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

[268] See also David Cesarani, "The changing character of citizenship and nationality in Britain", in David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook (eds.) *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

[269] Gareth Morrell, "Multicutlturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Center About Asylum and Refugees*, 2008: 1-40, 12.

discussion about nationhood or horizontal rights and responsibilities.[270] This process of diversification and stratification of citizen rights would continue in the following years. As a matter of fact, the British Nationality Act 1981, which abolished the one from 1948, introduced the term 'British citizen' and attempted to 'rationalise and clarify' the status of British citizens and the role of citizenship. It restricted the right of abode to only British citizens and modified the ancient rule of *ius soli*- conferring citizenship to anyone born on the land- by employing the principle of patriality, the rule of *ius sanguinis*, as a criterion of citizenship.

This Act created six categorizations of citizenship[271] and the nature of citizenship policies maintained their policy of immigration control.[272]

> The categorization of the different statuses within the general condition of citizenship produced a stratification of rights and the creation of quasi-citizens. This situation contributed to the creation of fragmentation of the community and a lack of inclusiveness.[273]

Thus, British tradition and their concept of citizenship and multiculturalism are fundamentally concerned with the role of racial and ethnic categorisation in the construction of social and political identities.[274] Even though their fundamental aims certainly overlap, the democratic and universal character of citizenship should balance the inherent diversity of multiculturalism. For this reason, probably, the most modern attempt to redress multicultural policies towards post-multicultural practices are currently abolishing the term "multiculturalism" and adopting "citizenship."

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[270] Reiko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003).

[271] Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[272] Reiko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain.*

[273] Lydia Morris, *The Control of Rights: The Rights of Workers And Asylum Seekers Under Managed Migration*, (London: Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 2004.),54.

[274] Liza Schuster and John Solomos, "Citizenship, multiculturalism and the politics of identity: contemporary dilemmas and political agendas", in Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (eds.) *Challenging Immigration and Ethnic Relations Politics: Comparative European Perspectives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Nonetheless, even the idea of "citizenship" needs to be reconfigured in order to avoid persistent fragmentation. The contemporary theorization of citizenship firstly distinguishes between people's legal and political status based on the formal recognition of the subject not only as legal personae but also as active parts of the political life of the community, and social citizenship intended as people's recognition as responsible agents in social life. According to Tillet[275], legal citizenship includes suffrage and the right to participate in government, while civic membership or social citizenship, as T.H. Marshall defined it, is based on abstract signs and symbols or the civic myths of the nation. Social citizenship is conceived as an evolving idea and dimension which has to accommodate the changing demographics, industries, and histories of liberal democratic societies and performed also through representation in the social/cultural heritage of the nation[276]. The right of recognition and the concept of membership are two fundamental aspects of the modern reconfiguration of citizenship. Indeed, both refer to extra-legal markers of citizenship, considered in its affective dimension.

Affectivity is a new fundamental aspect that justifies the call for civic responsibility within the national community and for the attention and care of vis-à-vis dynamic social relations. Citizenship is not "an ideal category born out of the thought of "great authors;" it is also an element of specified social configurations that cannot be reduced to normative injunctions to civicism, to the modern liberal concept of citizenship, nor to its connection with 'nation-building.'"[277]

Therefore, the universality of the rights entailed in the idea of citizenship, the condition *sine qua non* is the specificity of a community. "The focus on commonality inherent in citizenship offers diverse individuals the opportunity to develop strong social bonds on the basis of their shared civic identity." [278] However, the concept of horizontal comradeship, as Benedict Anderson defines it, is quite unambiguous and

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[275]Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[276] Thomas Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, (London: Pluto, 1987).

[277] John Clarke, Kathleen Coll, Evelina Dagnino and Catherine Neveu, *Disputing Citizenship*: (Bristol, Policy Press, 2014), 10.

[278] Munira Mirza, Munira, "Response to 'Strength in Diversity", in *Consultation on Community Cohesion and Race Equality strategy*, (London: Institute of Ideas, 2004).

cannot be static. In this regard, Benhabib[279] proposed the idea of democratic iterations to conciliate between rights claims from several kinds of belonging and membership. This implies a process of public debate thanks to which universal rights are judged and tested. Consequently, not only does citizenship become a constantly evolving set of policies, but it turns out to be 'jurisgenerative', a clear realistic and pragmatic understanding of what constitutes membership and allows citizens to be both the subject and author of laws.[280] This process can take place at various territorial levels, allowing the concept of community and participation to be layered along the lines of multiple but compatible identities and allegiances. Indeed, a new concept of citizenship has emerged in the last years, one that transcends national borders and expands towards a global web of rights and duties. It is a whole web of overlapping acts of ethical, political and social decisions that migrants carry with them.

Although in the modern landscape membership together with citizenship may not correspond to national borders, they are always rooted less in a legal framework than the apolitical and informal space of social and familiar relations. Saskia Sassen situates citizenship in broader social contexts, not just legal but also in political subjectivities and discursive practices that structure formal and informal spheres. [281]

Similarly, Seyla Benhabib claims that citizenship is a form of "social practice" not reducible to legality. [282] For this reason, the urban environment has become particularly significant in order to understand modern citizenship and its implications.

A further significant aspect worth considering about citizenship is its narrative dimension. Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose define citizenship as "a language by means of which people can make claims on the political community concerning rights

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[279] Benhabib Seyla, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[280] Jürgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State" in Amy Guttman (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[281] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City. London, New York and Tokyo*, (New Haven, Princeton University Press, 2001).

[282] Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and duties, political and moral or ethical practices, and criteria of membership."[283] Janice Ho reckons that "narrative is the symbolic process through which the experimental dimensions of citizenship outside the sphere of law can be captured. [...] I take citizenship as a discursive and narrative frame in which issues of membership (who counts as a citizen), of political subjectivity (of who is the citizen-subject), and of the practice of citizenship (of what counts as political) are often contested. [...] Citizenship as narrative is what exceeds and remains unprescribed by law [...] (It becomes) the locus of symbolic struggle."[284]

Like citizenship, even Britishness is a means to narrate one's own identity and membership. It is not by chance that Britishness has often become synonymous with citizenship and that affective bond that immigrants and their descendants usually claim to share. Indeed, both citizenship and Britishness are becoming fundamental concepts around which the new identity of British urban actors is gradually growing and both are undergoing a reshaping process. The Fabian[285] New Year conference on 14 January 2006 focused on the importance of developing a more coherent notion of Britishness.

Britishness as an identity is commonly understood to be based not on ethnicity or race, but "it could lay claim to the idea of liberty, active citizenship, being a good neighbour, civic pride in the public realm, not only formal equality before the law but a richer equality of opportunity [...] Commitment to the British values of liberty, responsibility and fairness also means taking citizenship seriously."[286]

Britishness has followed the fate of Britain as a political concept, and while there are some elements of cultural commonality that the members of the British Isles perhaps share, it is primarily a shared political identity that informs Britishness, something that existed in the imagination of British subjects, supported by symbols and institutions. Britishness is an intangible top-down concept endowed with high

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[283] Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose, "Citizenship and Empire, 1867-1928,"in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 277.

[284] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2015), 8.

[285] https://fabians.org.uk/about-us/, last accessed November 2019.

[286] *Ibid*, 1.

performative power, since it is able to form people's identity and consequently to shape participation in society, particularly if it involves a constant quest for recognition.[287]

Nonetheless, there has been extensive discussion as to whether Britishness, or a 'New Britishness'[288] can provide this focus of community. It is questionable whether this is possible for two reasons:

> Firstly, Britishness retains too many imperial connotations. […] Despite the different ways of understanding Britishness, it is a concept that 'leaves too much out.' Secondly, despite the fact that Britain is itself a multi-national construct, Britishness is not a purely political concept. Britishness came to represent the 'national' in what Benhabib[289] identifies as the dialectic of political rights and cultural identity. The fact that historically political rights have not been inclusive means that it would be difficult for the term to achieve the necessary separation of cultural and political identities. Furthermore, Britishness is often equated to British, which may limit the attraction and reach of the latter.[290]

It is within this argument that the importance of the city sneaks in. The great pragmatism of the urban interactions and spaces is the first ontological source for a real community, for a group of people that, no matter the ethnicity of its members, is defined by a common physical background and spaces, but also needs a language not only made of words but also of symbols and events. As Homi Bhabha pointed out, a

> metropolis presents a radically different understanding of time and community to the one assumed by nationalism's "homogeneous, empty-time" in which we are all imagined to be travelling together, through history. The city in its radical cosmopolitanism disturbs the narrative of national, linear time, by presenting the "return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history. […] The city disturbs that narrative by exposing the way

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[287] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the 'Politics of Recognition'*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[288] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, "The Excluded Majority: What about the English?", in Phoebe Griffith and Mark Leonard (eds.) *Reclaiming Britishness*, (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2002).

[289] Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[290]Gareth Morrell, "Multiculturalism, Citizenship, And Identity," *Information Center About Asylum And Refugees*, 2008: 1-40,15.

> in which London, and Britishness, have both been constructed through global power games. The figure of the postcolonial migrant in the city reminds us of those multiple, transnational histories. [291]

The city is the ground on which social and cultural changes take shape and impose their presence as real, irrefutable realities. In this gradual but continuous process of creation of a new hybrid society, even the concept of integration is transformed and re-theorized. In contemporary society, integration is no longer understood to be a unidirectional process that involves only ethnic and cultural minorities, but it is a pervasive two-way or even three-way process that involves the whole society and may involve several dimensions. Indeed, Esser[292] refers to four dimensions: acculturation (similar to socialization), placement (position in society), interaction (social relations and networks), and identification (belonging). Similarly, Heckmann and Schnapper[293] distinguish between structural integration, cultural integration (or acculturation), interactive integration, and identification integration. These kinds of distinctions shed light on the complexity of the integration process in modern times, when integration can no longer be synonymous with assimilation, but it deals with multiple diverse subjects and identities, not only ethnicities. For instance, the new increasing category of immigrant descendants is unique in this respect.

> Although they do become familiarized with the immigrant community and possibly its pre-migration background through their primary relations with family and immigrant community networks, they simultaneously become thoroughly acquainted with the culture and language of the society of settlement, not only through informal neighbourhood contacts starting in early childhood but especially through their participation in mainstream institutions, particularly the education system. If such a double process of socialization takes place under favourable conditions (in which policies can play an

[291] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London; New York: Rout- ledge, 2004), 199.

[292] Esser, H, *Integration und Etnische Schichtung. Working paper no. 40*. Mannheim:Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 2001.

[293] Friedrich Heckmann, Dominique Schnapper, *The integration of immigrants in European Societies, (*Stuttgart: Lucius and Lucius, 2003).

> important role), these second-generation young people develop a way of life and lifestyle that integrates the roles, identities, and loyalties of these different worlds and situations.[294]

One key issue within the new theoretical framework of integration is relationship, meant as a common bond and place. The concrete reality of physical, emotional and relational proximity seems to be the decisive factor in the process of integration. Phillimore's work also tested the framework developed by Ager and Strang and found that

> a fundamental aspect of integration was interconnectedness, with connections facilitating access to a range of networks, highlighting its multifaceted nature. The two-way nature of integration was also important in promoting institutional change to adapt to the presence of migrants and, perhaps most important of all for funding, the recognition, again, that integration was a long-term process (and not just a policy goal) requiring sustained funding. A later report further emphasised the importance of social networks (which could of course be transnational networks) and introduced the significance of social capital. [295]

Besides, Saggar[296] who reflected on the different integration measures, pointed out that many migrants tend to identify much more with a local neighbourhood than with a nation state. The importance of the particular residential place in accelerating the integration process was also stressed by the Commission on Cohesion and Integration's report (CIC 2007), [297] which

> produced what is described as a 'new' definition of integration linked to the concept of cohesion but distanced from the idea of assimilation, which was beginning to gain ground

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[294] Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, Rinus Penninx, *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe: Contexts, Levels and Actors*, IMISCOE Research Series, 2016, 19.

[295] Gary Craig, "Migration and Integration. A Local and Experiential Perspective", in *Irish Working Papers*, 7, 2015, 1-75, 10; see also Sin Cheung, Jenny Phillimore, *Social Networks, Social Capital and Refugee Integration*, (Birmingham and Cardiff, Universities of Birmingham and Cardiff, 2013).

[296] Saggar, S., Somerville, W., Ford, R. and Sobolewska, M., *The Impacts of Migration on Social Cohesion and Integration,* (London, Migration Advisory Committee, 2012).

[297] *Our Shared Future*, London, Commission on Cohesion and Integration, CIC (2007).

> again in political circles. [...] The CIC's definition (actually of a 'cohesive community') (p.40) was one where there was 'a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities, […] where diversity was valued […] those from different backgrounds had similar life opportunities and where strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.' [298]

Again, the various urban backgrounds turn out to play a decisive role that goes beyond any theoretical framework and anticipates it, by responding to real necessities and unpredictability, which is typical of a historical period of great social and demographic changes. Indeed, "the sustainability of neighbourhoods as cohesive entities may be seen as requiring a stable population base; on the other hand, developing levers for integration at the local level may require a social mix, and housing interventions with integration and cohesion in mind have to address this tension.[299]

Another example is the extensive studies that focus on the issue of housing and neighbourhood, which outlined four roles that housing plays in the lives of migrants: as shelter; status and identity; as a nexus for social relationships, providing safety and freedom; and as the site of the integration process.

Robinson and Reeve shed light on another aspect of integration: segregation. On one hand, their research pointed out

> the benefits of new immigrants associated with living, at least initially, in clusters of people from a shared background (which was found to be quite typical of many areas of migrant settlements) or shared ethnic or cultural identity [...] This 'clustering', or segregation on the basis of shared ethnicity, has been seen as a public policy problem in many countries (as discussed above) and, certainly in the UK, has been worsened by the drift of much community cohesion policy. [300]

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[298] Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, Rinus Penninx, *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe: Contexts, Levels and Actors*, 19.

[299] David Robinson, 'Communities and cohesion: what's housing got to do with it?' in *Housing Studies Association conference paper*, Sheffield Hallam University, April 2004: 52-79, 72.

[300] David Robinson, Kesia Reeve, *Neighbourhood Experiences of New Immigration*, (York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation,2006).

Moreover, evidence has suggested that the group that positively segregated itself the most was actually the white British population. This confirms the modern theories claiming that integration is a three-way process involving immigrants, the host society and institutions. Indeed, the process of integration is leading to an epochal cultural change while it is affecting the physical landscape, social habits, cultural customs and events, social intercourses and also culinary and music tastes, and last but not least, the way people narrate and imagine their identity. Nothing is left out.

As a matter of fact, in London where "hundreds of cultures co-exist, enrich and challenge each other,"[301] one can observe all kinds of interesting phenomena and processes of contact between cultures - fusion, eclecticism, crossover and syncretism, but also confrontation, friction and rejection. These contact processes may well define the concept of intercultural communication, which stresses the cultural impact of ethnic groups "through the merchandise they bring along, through the enormous diversity of their food, music, religions, values and behaviour; but also through their energy and activities, which make an immense contribution to the cultural domain - in films, theatre, literature, and the many festivals and cultural celebrations that currently enrich the life of London."[302]

There are ethnic restaurants all over London and new typical ethnic foods are available in the supermarkets from "exotic regions around the world". The presence of many different religions is evident in the architectural impact of churches, mosques and synagogues. Music events, films and shows featuring foreign topics and tastes are available around the city. The sharing of these multicultural and intercultural events has become even more effective in terms of integration thanks to some official websites. A survey of ongoing cultural developments is reported on the BBC London website together with detailed information about the cultural events and activities of some thirty London communities. But much of the most comprehensive information is available on the Global London website, where one can find almost everything ethnic and cultural in the multicultural capital. Therefore, the ongoing integration and

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[301] Reiner Salverda, "Multilingual London And Its Literatures", in *Opticon1826, Autumn 2006,* http://ojs.lib.ucl.ac.uk/index.php/up/article/view/1490, last accessed November 2019.

[302] Reiner Salverda, "Multilingual London And Its Literatures", in *Opticon1826, Autumn 2006,* http://ojs.lib.ucl.ac.uk/index.php/up/article/view/1490, last accessed November 2019.

hybridization of the British community is taking advantage of the modern dimension of the meta-city, which creates a further, virtual, but no less real and impactful than the physical, space for sharing and interaction.

Although in this post-multicultural era differences seem to be on their way to integrating and creating new hybrid identities, Tonkiss makes the point that "many people don't come to the city to celebrate their differences; rather, people also come to the city to be indifferent"[303] This idea was anticipated by George Simmel's theory of anonymity in the city. Indeed,

> while walking in the crowd, being surrounded by a thousand faces and not knowing any of them, touching and pushing past people in the busy street or metro carriage while carefully refraining from getting too close represents an art of city life that some might understand as alienation , loneliness, and lack of community; for others this is the culture that has enabled them to be indifferent, to be private, to walk and travel unhindered, unremarked and unbothered. [304]

Alienation, conceived as "the isolation or estrangement from other people"[305] is, in fact, one of the risks and shortcomings of the contemporary, post-modern, post-multicultural urban environment and it may affect newcomers as well as natives. Coming from the Latin *alienare*, alienation indicates the action of estranging.

Seeman[306] reported that the major form of subjective alienation is powerlessness, which is the perception of lost control. This feeling of being out of control is strictly connected to the multicultural and post-multicultural nature of the city and more in general to an overstimulation of urban subjects which are constantly under the pressure of a social reshaping process triggered by the physical proximity, social and human interaction with strangers. In the 1930s, sociologists of the Chicago School pointed out that without strong local social bounds, informal social control breaks down, allowing deviance, crime, and all sorts of social pathologies to develop.

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[303] Fran Tonkiss, *Space, The City and Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2005), 30.

[304] *Ibid.*

[305] Irene Taviss, "Changes in the Form of Alienation," in *American Sociological Review*, 34: 46-57.

[306] Louis Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," in *American Sociological Review*, 24: 783-791.

In particular, Simmel argued that urban areas harm residents mental states by exposing them to high levels of negative simulation: the chaotic sights and sounds of the city, such as contact with strangers, crowds, noise, sirens, dirt and garbage, and the disorder, crime, and danger that result from a breakdown of informal social control. Negative stimulus is conceptually similar to uncontrollable negative reinforcement.[307]

> There is some agreement that alienation refers to feeling cut off and separated from one's social environment or from oneself. Most commonly this is divided into feelings of isolation (I'm alone), feelings of powerlessness (I can't do anything about my condition), feelings of meaninglessness (Things don't make sense), and feelings of self-estrangement (I don't know or approve of myself). Normlessness spread widely throughout a society has been described as a condition of anomie.[308]

Interestingly, the phenomenon of alienation is growing together with the increase in social integration and hybridization. Even though this phenomenon may seem a paradox, it can easily be understood by analysing this phenomenon from a psychoanalytical point of view. Lacan explains the original relationship between the self and the other by underlining that the child finds its ego in and through the other. In other words, alienation is a constitutive part of self-constitution.[309] Therefore, the ambivalence in our reaction to foreigners: 'too lazy to do anything, only here to profit from us' and at the same time 'trying to steal our jobs' mirrors a reflection of our own internal ambivalence. Consequently,

> there is only a problem with foreigners because there is already something foreign in me. Worse: it is because foreigners resemble me without being completely identical ('minor differences') that I am constantly at risk of being drawn into the vortex of that dynamic

[307] K. Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of George Simmel*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950).

[308] James H. Parker, "The Urbanism-Alienation Hypothesis: A Critique", in *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 8.2 (July-December 1978), pp.239-244, 240.

[309] Lacan, J. (1989), The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I, in ID., Écrits. A Selection, (London, Routledge, 1-7.

> which is propelled by the '*je est un autre*,' – by what is, necessarily, constitutively strange to me.[310]

For this reason, the more the stranger becomes similar to me, for instance, through the process of integration, the scarier it is. This concept is clearly explained by the Freudian concept of "narcisism of minor differences."[311]

> In the undisguised antipathies and aversions, which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to deal, we may recognize the expressions of self-love, of narcissism. This self-love works for the preservation of the individual and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his own particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration.[312]

The processes of social transformation involved in the post-multicultural urban environment do not only lead to integration of minor communities within the social spaces of the host one, but they also challenge the identity of the host society itself which is put into question and is asked to change and grow within a new set of relations, symbols and narrations.

2.4 Narrations of The City

Benedict Anderson stated that "communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." [313] Therefore, self-imagination, which implies self-narration, is intrinsically a part of the process of identity building. The sum of the narration, which intertwines among community members as it represents their lives, gives voice to their experiences, and depicts the

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[310] Rudi Visker, "The Strange(R) Within Me",in *Ethical Perspective: Journal of The European Ethics Network*, 12, 2005, 425-441, 435.

[311] Sigmund Freud, "Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), *in ID., Civilization, Society and Religion (The Pelican Freud Library vol. 12*), (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1985), 91-340, 92.

[312] *Ibid*, 131.

[313] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Original and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

troubles they are struggling with, creates a sort of meta-city - a virtual, yet real, urban dimension inhabited by ideas and feelings. This literary urban location is the experienced city, the place where identity is negotiated and forged. This is the place where individual urban lives come together and form a unit, a community. Indeed, thanks to literary narration, the particularities of race and ethnicity become eschewed for more democratic and experience-based forms of belonging. Novels are able to map shifting boundaries, mould new breaking changes into matter-of-fact truths, providing readers with the necessary time to digest and maybe even understand them. Novels are able to make people aware of that set of relationships, always ignored, that make them a community. Indeed, to some extent, if the writers are the material authors of the novel, the city may be allegorically considered the ontological author of urban life, which is translated and interpreted by those people who are able to look into the political, cultural, personal and interpersonal lives of urban dwellers. In so doing, their interpretation provides the city and its citizens with an image of themselves that may reveal their real identity, through a process of recognition.

As a site of narrative and culture, the city is mobile, existential and yet perversely monumental, combining in contemporary fiction globalized economy with both "the localized dynamics of intersubjectivity and a sense that culture always creates a sense of loss through its very ongoing adaptation or evolutionary survival."[314] Therefore, to understand modern London, it is necessary to look at those authors who have conceived and imagined it in this contemporary post-modern and post-migration time. Interestingly enough, the newly-British citizens who are shaping the new hybrid and super-diverse London by adding a new chromosome to the British DNA, have found their voice, and contribute to narrating the birth of a new London.

> In the field of aesthetic reflection upon the urban environment of London [...], there are two main categories of London inhabitants, ignored by most critics, whose origins in part shape their responsive vocabulary to the city: first, those who were born or who arrived in infancy and were embedded for large tranches of life in the metropolis without recourse to comparison. (Such embeddedness one finds in writers such as John Betjeman, Bernardine Evarist, John Keats, Andrea Llevy, Will Self, Zadie Smith, Evelyn Waugh and

[314] Nick Hubble, Philip Tew, *London in Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 94.

> Virginia Woolf); Second, those who are capable of recollecting and reflecting upon their arrival as a definitional landmark (with potential epiphany and comparative perspective (examples include J.G. Ballard, Charles Dickens, Wilson Harris, Doris Lessing, Colin MacInnes, Katherine Mansfield, V.S. Naipaul and Ian Sinclair, to name a few).[315]

Clearly, the British cultural DNA has changed, and the London cultural DNA has been particularly transformed in unique ways. Therefore, London needs a new voice, a new language able to describe itself. It is not by chance that many modern authors introduced creole expressions and other sounds borrowed from other languages like in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and again in her *The Autograph Man* (2002) or Rachel Lichtenstein and Ian Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room* (1999).

Starting from the immediate aftermath of the "Windrush immigration" and, more in general, of the first waves of post-war immigration, one of the very first issues writers tackled was the idea of citizenship that needed to be challenged.

The idea of citizenship had already begun a process of practical and theoretical reconfiguration, moving closer to the idea of "social citizenship,"

> For Marshall, social citizenship designates the legal rights of an individual to the state's provision of welfare services, but it also refers to the responsibilities of each citizen to the national community and to the affective ties that can be cultivated between socially distant citizens who are strangers to one another. Welfare institutions generate affiliations between strangers that structure the embryonic imaginary of social citizenship.[316]

However, the striking daily urban reality that forced the coexistence of people of different ethnicities challenged the ideal status of citizenship even more by disclosing paradoxes and setbacks.

Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) underlined the problem of the stratification of civil rights, which, despite their universal nature, were designed to close the real political participation to a strict circle of urban subjects, by excluding others - the "second class citizens." Indeed, in the aforementioned works,

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[315] *Ibid*, 5.

[316] *Ibid*, 20

> protagonists seek authorship to overcome their marginality: authorship is both a means of and a metaphor for citizenship in these texts, one used to bridge the chasm between the formal and substantive realities of national belonging. Authorship status is linked to proprietorship and is a way of accessing the public sphere, one allowing these immigrant protagonists to engineer a socioeconomic rise and to forge a public sphere.[317]

Interestingly enough, these narrations shed light on the pragmatic nature of citizenship. Despite any political policies and ideologies, the city provides people with the place and means to create themselves as *de facto legal personae*, that is, as active actors, who culturally and economically contribute to urban life and who significantly occupy a place in the urban scene. Here, the process starts from practice; it then needs to be legally and formally acknowledged.

Progressively, along with the growth of new born-and-bred and mixed generations, together with the question of citizenship, the issues of multiculturalism, integration, hybrid and transnational identity arose and were embodied by many contemporary British writers. Among the numerous significant examples, four representatives will be examined more in detail: Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and Monical Ali.

> In Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), he investigates how second generation immigrants sought ways of politicizing their exclusion, which differed from the prior generation's more assimilationist assumptions. (He launched) a critique of state multiculturalism's incorporation of ethnic migrants through a program of tolerance and cultural diversity that depoliticizes racism, since it treats racist inequities in terms of cultural misunderstandings, rather than systematic forms of discrimination. Rushdie envisions a multicultural citizenship in which immigrants of colour can act as citizens and political subjects in their own right, instead of either assimilating into existing norms of the nation-state or being passive objects of tolerance.[318]

Although the word "imagine" generally refers to an abstract, and mainly an act of fantasy, above all if it is connected to the literary world, here the word can be even

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[317] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, 22.

[318] *Ibid*, 23.

better interpreted as the act of depicting: providing the physical urban reality, but also the feelings and thoughts that inhabit it, with verbal images. These writers had indeed the merit of "dressing" the new London society with those words that characterize it and make it aware of itself. Interestingly enough, in the case of these authors, like in many others of post-multicultural London, their personal life is in itself the first narration. They are both authors and actors, even though their works are not necessarily autobiographical, because they physically embody the changes they narrate.

A clear example of this rich and complex condition is Hanif Kureishi. His personal experience perfectly entails the complexity of contemporary London identities, which far from being linear and monolithic, embody a transnational dimension. He was born from an English mother and a Pakistani father on 5 December 1954. Significantly, he defines himself as a "child of the empire" not only because his father and grandfather actively participated in the empire, but also because both his family and he spent part of their lives in Pakistan as well as in England. His father, Shanu, had sailed to England to study law. He worked at the Pakistani embassy where he met his future wife Audrey and finally settled in south London with their two children.

He belongs among those "pioneers" of the new generations of Londoners; and he realized that he had to find his place in a changing society, look for a new language to describe a growing new reality and, at the same time, understand the complexity of his own identity which defied the borders of ethnical and cultural categories by living within them - in the productive yet delicate dimension of borders rooted in the city of London.

> I was born in Bromley and grew up in the suburbs, VS Naipaul and Salman Rushdie were born elsewhere. You have to invent a style and a world. It was a new kind of English realism. [...] I just didn't know what to do with it (my identity) or what use it could be to me. My dad said, 'You should change your name. You could pass.'[319]

[319] Robert McCrum, "Hanif Kureishi interview: Every ten years you become someone else," *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/19/hanif-kureishi-interview-last-word, last accessed November 2019.

Kureishi experienced the fast evolution of post-war England, which struggled to find a new identity within its new mutlicultural condition after the failure of the British Empire. As previously mentioned, after the period of unrestricted policies regarding immigration, the social and political attitudes completely overturned, and he came to be considered just a "paki." Indeed the author remembers what happened after the election of Enoch Powell and his famous speech "rivers of blood," which signed the beginning of the explosion of social tensions and fears:

> We thought we were going to be sent back. We'd been brought over here to help run the NHS and the public services, but now we realised that we were just Pakis and niggers. My dad was persecuted as he came home from work and he thought it was all too difficult. But, I liked my name. I couldn't change it to Pete Brown. So what I had to do was uncover who I really was.[320]

Therefore, the affirmation of Kureishi's name, which indicates his first identity beyond categories passed through literature, and while he narrated the city, he was experiencing a sort of mirror of himself, and he gave voice and faces to the new urban actors: the new Londoners.

> It was through his life as a writer that he began to discover who he was and to reconcile the warring parts of himself. The doubleness persisted. He would be suburban and metropolitan. Arrogant and shy. An entertainer and a spectator. A bad boy and a good son. A professor and a hooligan. Provocative and complicit. Hankering after the academy, yet living on the street. Juxtaposing high art and popular culture. Quoting Beckett and Kafka, but celebrating Carry On films, reggae and pop music.[321]

Consequently, not only did Kureishi take the following steps towards a post-multicultural London, but he contributed to its rise. The late-70s Britain was on the turn, but the big story, the making of a multicultural society – "the empire strikes back" – was still in progress. Kureishi was just one of several young emerging talents ("Commonwealth writers") who were beginning to find a voice within English society.

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[320] *Ibid.*

[321] *Ibid.*

Then Salman Rushdie and *Midnight's Children* burst on to the scene in 1980. A version of the young Kureishi's life eventually found its way into both *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Buddha of Suburbia.* The script of *My Beautiful Laundrette* was nominated for an Oscar and won the New York Critics' best screenplay award and the *Buddha of Suburbia*, coming so soon after *My Beautiful Laundrette,* put Kureishi in a unique position.[322] Interestingly enough, *My Beautiful Laundrette* embodies the liminality of the author even in its formal structure. Indeed, it is a screenplay, later made into a film by Stephen Frears in 1985, which therefore embodies the nature of a verbal narration, the script, but with a visual one, multi-ethnic actors and a multi-ethnic London setting. The fact that the streets and locations are well recognizable and profoundly real helped the movie to become an effective and impacting voice of the city.

The story is about a young Pakistani who opens a glamorous launderette with his white punk boyfriend. Apart from the fact that from the very beginning, Kureishi shows liminal identities of the city, making them meet and blend with each other by creating a third new space where people are able to just be urban actors who find their home in the city's streets and squares, the particular choice of a laundrette as the place that hosts liminalities, by acting indeed as a third space, is rooted in Kureishi's life and family tradition:

> I had an uncle who had a laundrette. People sometimes like to think that the laundrette in the film is a symbol, and it did, I suppose, become a symbol of some sort. But it wasn't a symbol originally. My uncle had these laundrettes. He was a Pakistani entrepreneur and he would take me around these laundrettes [...] when I was starting to write. He would say, 'You know, you should run one of these, because they're the future. Everyone's got dirty clothes, they're going to want them to be washed. Why don't you think about doing this?' And then we'd go around them, and I never actually came to run one myself, but he would explain to me the difficulties. There was a Chinese restaurant near one of his laundrettes, and they used to go and do their prawns in the drying drum. He'd explain the problems with this, and I was very amused and interested. [323]

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[322] *Ibid.*

[323] Colin MacCabe and Hanif Kureishi, "Hanif Jureishi and London", *AA Files*, No. 49 (Sprig 2003), Architectural

Association School of Architecture, 40-49, 47.

The laundrette is the future because it represents that public space in society, from a physical as well as economic point of view, which gives the protagonists the right to feel like actual citizens, because they, with their business, contribute to urban life. Any possible racial or cultural distinction is erased by the common necessity to wash clothes. As a matter of fact, this image cannot only be interpreted from a factual and pragmatic point of view, but also from a metaphorical one. Clothes are the symbol of our *persona*, the means through which we engage in public relationships and show our own status. Therefore, owning a laundrette means cooperating with and becoming necessary to the public identity of other citizens. Besides, owning means engaging with the real and de-facto public life of the city going beyond one's cultural and ethnical identities, but affirming oneself as a factual part of the urban scenario.

One of the best demonstrations of the effectiveness of Kureishi's narrations is the fact that not only was he popular and critically acclaimed, but he inspired a new generation of British authors. Indeed, Zadie Smith remembers her first reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, at age 15: "There was one copy going round our school like contraband. I read it in one sitting on the playground and missed all my classes. I'd never read a book about anyone remotely like me before."[324]

The Jamaican-British novelist Zadie Smith was born in North London in 1975 to an English father and a Jamaican mother. Significantly, Smith changed the spelling of her first name Sadie to Zadie at age 14 because the stronger and particular sound better embodied the complexity of her origins. Indeed, she claimed, "The only thing that identifies people in their entirety is their name: I'm a Zadie."[325] Like Kureishi, Zadie Smith chose to inhabit her name, her identity, by letting it flourish, get a voice, a place, and finally by making it mould the new London. Her narrations seem almost to give the city the necessary time and place to experiment itself, in order to find and explore its new dimension. Indeed, "To put it simply, fiction is like a hypothetical area in which

[324] https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/zadie-smith-on-the-buddha-of-suburbia, last accessed November 2019.

[325] Claire Armistead, "Identity is a Pain in the Arse: Zadie Smith in Political Correctness." in *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/02/zadie-smith-political-correctness-hay-cartagena, last accessed November 2019.

to act. That's what Aristotle thought — that fictional narrative was a place to imagine what you would do in this, that, or the other situation."[326]

As a matter of fact, in her acclaimed first novel, *White Teeth* (2000), she creates a narrative space in which she embraces not only the contemporary super-diversity of London, but also the family pasts that engendered such diversity. It is a vibrant portrait of contemporary multicultural London, told through the story of the members of three London-based central families (the Joneses, the Iqbals and the Chalfens). Particularly tracing the relationship of two wartime friends, Samad Iqbal and Archibald Jones, she traces back the historical heritage of the empire, and following them through the unfolding of multicultural London, she depicts the issues of identity by making through both city affiliation and alienation. By describing a wide range of protagonists, stories, sensibilities and ideologies, Smith manages to provide an insight of the complexity of Londoners' super-diversity, hybrid nature and multi-layered experiences. London here is the "motherly" place that allows the birth of "white teeth" who mix and engage with other kinds of "white teeth." They all, through their physical presence and experience, carve their path among the city roads. The factual experience of some relationships that the city hosts is depicted as that force that prompts people to affiliation beyond cultural-based stereotypes, which are still present, though.

> Archie recognized the way that people were typically categorized culturally, yet did not see how those categories applied to people he actually knew. "For God's sake, they're not those kinds of Indians... Samad and Alsana Iqbal, who were not that kind of Indians (as, in Archie's mind, Clara was not that kind of black), but who were, in fact, not Indian at all but Bangladeshi [...] In doing so, he may have avoided stereotyping, but denied the cultural reality of those he knew well, isolating them from their background.[327]

Through her characters, Zadie Smith mocks the multicultural assumption of a dominant culture to categorize diversity by imposing a sort of order to the rapid, dramatic and inevitable change that society was undergoing. She questioned the efforts

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[326] Murphy Moo, "Zadie, Take Three," in *The Atlantic*, October 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/author/jessica-murphy-moo, last accessed November 2019.

[327] Katina Lynn Rogers, "Affirming Complexity: White Teeth and Cosmopolitanism", *Comparative Literature*, 5: 1-13, 11.

to try and understand scientifically the unique process which was at work, by making fun of the British Joshua Chalfen, who considers himself an expert of hybridization thanks to his experiments on cross-pollination, yet he is not able to engage sincerely with the Bangladeshi Millat and the Jamaican-British Irie because of their multicultural backgrounds.

In concluding her novel, Smith affirmed that

> This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. […] Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. […]Yet, despite all this mixing up, despite the fact that we have finally slipped into each other's lives with reasonable comfort... it is still hard to admit that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English. […] But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears - dissolution, disappearance.[328]

Indeed, she destroyed the idea that all immigrants and their children desperately call for recognition and integration within British society by forgetting their own identity. Reality is and continues to get more complex than any ideological and theoretical grid. The final narration of Irie, who sleeps with both the Bangladeshi twins, Millat and Magid, later giving birth to a son who will embody Bangladeshi, Jamaican and British DNA, with no possibility of knowing who the father is, and who finally ends up with the British Joshua Chalfen, effectively represents the fuzziness of those limits which actually melt within London and escape any definition.

In a certain sense, in London, ethnical and cultural limits are leaving their function of borders to become threads that continue to spin until they give form to a new social and cultural fabric. In this process the city functions as a loom that allows the threads to move, contemporarily providing them with the necessary host structure.

Another highly appreciated example of this was the first novel by the English-Bangaldeshi writer Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (2003)[329]. In her seminal and epic saga of a Bangladeshi family living in the UK, she starts from the location of Brick Lane in 1967,

[328] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Vintage, 2001), 271.

[329] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, (New York: Simon,2003).

famous for its curry houses, boutiques and heady vibrant international mix. But this multicultural street is just the starting point of the human voyage that Nazeen, the protagonist, undertakes through London, which presents itself to Nazeen as both the ghetto in which she lives and a place of modern fluidity and dynamism. She is introduced as the submissive, village, virgin bride sent to London to begin a new life with Chanu, an older Pakistani man, who was disillusioned by the allure of Britishness and recognition. Then, the writer added another significant character: the British-born Pakistani, Karim. He is a second-generation streetwise young man who becomes Nazneen's 'lover' and is swiftly radicalised after 9/11.

Ali describes a wide array of feelings and relationships that bind the characters to London and to different ideas of Britishness. There is the unconditional, blind admiration of Chanu, who is proud of knowing Shakespeare perfectly and who considers British culture and history as his own; but he has actually never left Brick Lane except to go to work. Actually, he turns out to be alienated from urban life, living an imaginary projection of London. This physical and cultural alienated condition will lead him to a psychological and personal background that forces him to return to his native Bangladesh.

On the other hand, there is Karim, the second-generation character who struggles with his complex identity by apparently finding his voice and place in activism and radicalism. Interesting enough, he, who stammers when he speaks Bengali, but speaks English perfectly, turns out to be more rooted in the society he was born into and less brave than he thought. In this case, the claimed detachment from the city of London hides the case of a new identity which cannot imagine itself outside its urban environment, and which is actually so complex it allows Karim's identity to "perform" and perhaps disguise itself freely.

The other significant relationship is that which gradually forms between Nazeen and London. She, the silent, submissive Bangladeshi woman who cannot speak English and who seems to be intimidated by the urban life of Brick Lane, is actually open to be forged by London. Indeed, when her daughters grow up, not only did they - born and bred Londoners - help their mother to gain a voice by learning English, but they spontaneously prompted her to venture out in the streets of London. The act of wondering gradually made her become aware of her presence as a part of a busy but rich and dynamic entity. This seems to provide her with the courage to re-imagine

herself and signs her way with the same freedom and energy of the ice-skaters she loves watching on TV.

> A charming metaphor unfolds as she is mesmerised by the fluid movement of the ice skater, who glides through life unencumbered, in control of her elegant physique and in perfect harmony with her partner. [...] Nazeen clumsily seeks to emulate the ice skater by trying to renegotiate her body in new forms as if trying to rid herself of the shackle that is her room, home and husband. Her efforts end in failure, but this marks a first real attempt to spin, move, and find a way to be alive again. Curiously, the novel ends with Nazeen on an ice rink wearing a sari, but she is fully prepared to move freely on the ice unaided, finding the courage to 'spin' on her own, finally conquering the space she inhabits and embracing the freedom she discovers within it.[330]

Although the focus of this paper is on how literature, novels in particular, are re-envisioning the modern urban environment of London, other kinds of narrations must be mentioned that are shaping the British capital in the modern era of metacities, marked by virtual infrastructures and social networks. These are contributing to create a new image of the city with new symbols, mythological narrations and ideological frameworks. These modern narrative forms are affecting the lives, culture and sensibility of both long-time residents, who struggle to adapt to an ever-changing society greatly marked by increasing super-diversity and newcomers, who strive to find their place and role in order to become part of the urban environment. Both require narrations to orient themselves.

Actually, not only are social networks a form of abstract narration through new kinds of representations, but they directly engage urban subjects in a two-way communication. "The differential role of social media compared to other internet-based applications relies on the development of migrants' social networks and the possibility for users to consume, produce and share content and opinions within and across networks."[331]

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[330] Andrew Whitehead, Jerry White, *London Fictions*, (London: Paperback, 2013), 157

[331] Amanda Alencar, "Refugee integration and social media: a local and experiential perspective," in *Information, Communication & Society*, 5.

Clearly, not only does communication via social networks play a relational role, but it has a performative one as well, that of helping the acculturation and integration of newcomers in the urban reality. This is the first proof of the practical outcomes of the virtual networks of the real life of the city - city and metacity work together through reciprocal implications.

In her seminal work on acculturation, Kim (2008) defines 'communication' as a key dimension of immigrants' adaptation, with media playing a variety of roles in this process. In recent years, however, digital technology has had the potential to transform the settlement of migrants in the various areas of socio-political, economic and cultural integration.[332] (McGregor & Siegel, 2013). Thus, new technologies can provide migrants with general information about rights, citizenship, and local migrant support services, help overcome feelings of isolation by making information available to migrants in their own languages as well as promote cultural practices in both their home and new destination countries. Besides, social networks are a fundamental means for new post-migration transnational identities, that condition which goes beyond national borders and embodies ethnical and political identities which contemporarily combine two different cultures and nations. This attitude of relying on social networks to maintain bonds with one's country of origin while struggling to integrate in the "new homeland" is quite controversial and has given rise to anti-ethical considerations.

> Some scholars have argued that social media may decelerate the process of integration into the host society as newcomers become less dependent upon finding friends and developing social connections in their host society. In contrast, research has provided strong evidence that maintaining social relationships in the home country and connecting with transnationals online can help migrants overcome adjustment challenges instead of producing social segregation in the new society.[333]

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[332] McGregor, E. & Siegel, M., "Social Media and Migration Research," MERIT Working Papers 068, United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT),2013, https://ideas.repec.org/p/unm/unumer/2013068.html, last accessed November 2019.

[333] Nelli Elias, Dafna Lemish, "Spinning the web of identity: The roles of the internet in the lives of immigrant adolescents", *New Media & Society*, 11, 533–551, 543.

Vihalemm specified that social media support the integration of immigrants through the creation of weak networks[334]. A weak network is the communication that occurs among individuals who are not close family or friends. Even if the communication is not habitual, the weak networks promote integration.

> It is because the communication takes place with a broad array of people drawn from different cultures thus leading to a harmonious time with others. Social media is also significant in boosting the integration of immigrants by enabling constant mediations of the customs, lifestyles, opportunities and even the cultures of the host communities.[335]

This broad communication implies contacts not only between an ethnic minority group and the host community but also among different ethnic groups. This multidirectional and reciprocal kind of communication allows immigrants to maintain familiar and ethnical bonds and, at the same time, to carry on a general and pervasive process of integration, acculturation and placement within both physical and virtual urban life. Integration takes place since it is now easier to interact with the locals.

As Foster anticipated in his novels, civic identity may well be embodied in friendship, which is a "trope for democratic citizenship." Indeed, in *The Longest Journey*, "civic friendship is a form of voluntary affiliation contraposed to the deterministic biology of affiliation. [...] Friendship allows Foster to imagine a political community formed through the associative bonds of citizenship and not the tribal bonds of nationality.""[336] As a matter of fact, "the acts of affection associated with friendship are both intimate gestures of feeling and civic modes of political praxis."[337]

Friendships, as well as a general feeling of comradeship and membership, which has been proven to be the basis of an effective idea of citizenship, are strongly enhanced by social media platforms.

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[334] Vihalemm, T, *Role of Social Media in Migration and Integration*. The United States: Estonia, 2016.

[335] *Ibid.*

[336] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2015), 8.

[337] *Ibid,* 19.

> Friendships are usually between individuals from varied cultural backgrounds and mostly cultivated on Facebook and Instagram. This works toward integrating the immigrant communities by shortening the cultural distance that initially existed between them. It is known that some friendships on Facebook began without either partly knowing each other. They occur across various ages and races, which boosts the integration process.[338]

Indeed, one aspect of social platforms is their ability to function as promoters of "glocalization." According to Roland Robertson, glocalization "means the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies."[339] This is precisely the ability of such virtual platforms that potentially opens up universality because they may be joined by anyone in any part of the world; but at the same time, they locate visitors or participants in a precise city, or even in a precise street, square or neighbourhood.

An example of such a virtual platform in London is called "Thinking Bob." The popular website "Londonist," which is frequently included among the informational websites about London life and events, defined Thinking Bob as the place where "clever Londoners go to play." First, this social platform is presented as a real place, which becomes a metonymy of all those physical places where "Thinking Bob" arranges various activities. Second, it almost insinuates that anyone who joins can rightly be considered a Londoner, since they are taking part in the social life of the city and therefore are actively playing their roles as members of that urban group. Interestingly, "Londonist" explains that Thinking Bob is

> an on- and offline social community where like-minded Londoners can get together and do [...] whatever they like. From pub quizzes to history tours, street games to murder mystery nights, Thinking Bob is a ready-made social circle where members can meet and get out and about to explore the best of London.[340]

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[338] Bora Erdem, "How Can Social Media Be Helpful for Immigrants to Integrate Society in the US", *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, May-August 2018 Volume 3. Issue 3: 74-79, 75.

[339] Roland Robertson, "Globalisation or glocalisation?" in *Journal of International Communication*.,18: 191-208.

[340] https://londonist.com/2015/02/thinking-bob-where-clever-londoners-go-to-play, last accessed November 2019.

The term "like-minded Londoners" is particularly relevant because it points out a new particular process of group creation no longer based on ethnic or cultural affinity but on personal interests. As John Lanchester pointed out during an interview, modern London is witnessing the formation of new "urban tribes" based on common jobs or interests. This category, which goes beyond ethnical categorization, is one of the signs of the post-migration process of hybridization and integration. Besides, it demonstrates that city life, which arranges such new "urban tribes" by locating them in different areas, is again one of the primal factors of the creation of social and personal identities. It is the urban environment that hosts and brings about historical and human changes. "Urban environment" means not only the structure of physical places but also that meta-city made up of virtual networks and, even more importantly, by narrations. Even though "Thinking Bob" introduces itself as the place where "events are tailored to get people thinking, get people talking, get people doing,"[341] the fact that the web site reports members' stories means that it has become a way to narrate not only city life and events, but also a way to get involved with the city, by playing one's own role as a member of a community.

Another important aspect of social networks is that they are just a portion of the greater narrative system of social media in which every communicative channel is intertwined through numerous oblique references and cross references that create a sort of virtual hypertext that involves citizens not only in reading it, but also in enjoying it by interacting with it. An example of such embeddedness of narrative frames and means is the phenomenon of the twitter-page Very British Problems (@SoVeryBritish), which, like the parody account Elizabeth Windsor (@Queen_UK), obtained 889,000 followers in a very short time by narrating stereotypes, common fears, habits and common thinking of British people. In a certain sense, it is a funny way to encapsulate "Britishness" in funny jokes, memes and tweets. A television show has been produced based on this Twitter page, where

> Celebrities from the worlds of entertainment, sports and politics riff on stereotypes regarding British reserve and eccentricity, accompanied by stock footage, rudimentary animations and a honeyed narration by the distinguished actress Julie Walters, who tells

[341] https://londonist.com/2015/02/thinking-bob-where-clever-londoners-go-to-play, last accessed November 2019.

> us that if you wore an anorak on a summer day just in case, or apologized to an inanimate object, then you are suffering a very British problem (V.B.P. for short).[342]

Besides, the weekly column 'Very British Problem' can be read in the Saturday edition of *The Telegraph*. Each week readers are presented with 10 tweets on a specific British topic. Interestingly enough, most of the comments on the tweets confirm the correspondence between the tweeted text and their own life, feelings and personal situation. This means that these tweets, together with the TV series and the newspaper column, are able to truly narrate the British identity and maybe exorcise the possible tensions about this widely discussed question in Britain's post-migration society: What is being British?

The constant process of meta-narration of the city involves another channel, which is particularly able to combine narration and urban buildings and infrastructures - advertising. Posters are able to communicate immediately on several levels through images, colours, logos and writings; they are able to reach people's conscious and subconscious understanding; and finally, they are present among people by being placed in many different parts of the city at the same time. This makes advertising a unique and highly impressive means of urban narration. One of the most striking examples of the use of advertising in narrating city and citizenship in the campaign published by the government in the aftermath of the 7th July 2005 Islamist terrorist suicide bombings in the London subway that targeted commuters travelling on the city's public transit system. After such a shocking event, the issue of identity, integration, trust and fears where highly called into question. The government urgently needed to defend the idea of community and membership, which risked a collapse. For this reason, they put up posters throughout the London transit system (bus stops, train and tube stations), and along streets with the following slogans: "Seven million Londoners, One London", "We are Londoners, we are one." In this way, such posters were able first to reaffirm the values of London's identity based on multi-ethnic and multi-cultural diversity embedded in a unique civic identity, and second, these posters

[342] Mike Hale, "Review: 'Very British Problems' Keep Calm and Carry on through Discomfort", in *New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/arts/television/very-british-problems-tv-review.html, last accessed November 2019.

were able to give voice to the injured city, by letting the walls of their injured infrastructures communicate to the city dwellers: the community.

3. Kamal Ahmed, Life and Times of a Very British Man.

3.1 Introduction

This third chapter will continue the tour through the meta-narrations of London's identity, particularly observing how they have been questioned and negotiated by both personal and political experiences that occur in modern London. The focus of this chapter will be on the book published in 2018 by the Anglo-Sudanese British journalist Kamal Ahmed, editorial director of BBC News and group director of Communications for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in London, titled "*The Life and Times of a Very British Man*."[343]

This is a revelatory work which aims at sheding light not only on the present condition of contemporary post-multicultural London, but also to investigate the facts and narrations that contemporary London is rooted in and which still have a resonance in the city, as the author explains.

The need to write about the life of a city that has undergone enormous changes over the past 70 years originated from the awareness that its national and political history was also his own - personal and familiar - and, what's more, that the way the people live and perceive these changes is deeply influenced by a sort of "single story" that is not able to portray reality as it actually is. It is not able to comprehend the super-diversity and hybridity that characterises modern London and which exceeds the reassuring framework usually employed to categorize people and situations.

Chimamanda Adichie, a Nigerian writer, spoke about the danger of a single story, pointing out that "The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes the recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. […] Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and malign, but stories can also be used

[343] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

to empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."[344]

In order to explain the 'single story' about immigration and immigrants in England and try to disentangle the negative effects of these, Kamal Ahmed gives a very comprehensive overview of English history from the 1950s to modern days and of his personal story, which is profoundly entrenched in political and social conditions. He adds other real stories of Londoners who, like himself, struggled to find their place or to be acknowledged as part of England's story.

In the preface of his book, the author clearly explains his motivations and objectives, but first he makes clear that his personal story is not a diasporic one, but the story of a man who clearly knows where his home is and who he belongs to. The problem is that his 'home' is not yet ready to look at him and see itself in the mixed colours of his skin.

Interestingly enough, he immediately underlines how is story is not the typical diasporic narration featured by nostalgia of the lost homeland. Indeed, he confides that all he has of his Sudanese father are six photographs from the 1960s. The topic of the photographs has been widely debated and discussed in post-colonial and diasporic literature, particularly by Salman Rushdie who narrates in *Imaginary Homelands*:

> An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It's a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born. The house is rather peculiar – a three-storeyed gabled affair with tiled roofs and round towers in two corners, each wearing a pointy tilled hat. The past is a 'foreign country' goes the famous opening sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, 'they do things differently there.' But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.[345]

Kamal Ahmed's perspective is different. The pictures of his Sudanese father are almost foreign to him. His home is where he lives, where his mother grew up, where his grandparents were born, where his father fled to and worked. His home are the streets

[344] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," Ted Talk, 2009.

[345] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: From Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, (London Granta, 1991), 428.

he walked down millions of times, the neighbourhood where he found friends but also enemies, the school where he struggled to understand who he was and which group he belonged to. His home is the music, books and movies that populated London in the '80s. His home is neither lost nor past, but it needs someone to narrate its changes, difficulties and possibilities, its new identity, which corresponds to London's new identity. Indeed,

> The Policy Studies Institute pinpointed it first in a report 10 years ago and revealed that Britain's black and Asian populations were marrying across ethnic lines at a "staggering rate." Half of British-born Caribbean men, a third of Caribbean women and a fifth of Indian and African/Asian men had a white partner. Not so much black Britain as brown Britain. […] It's very British of course, mixed-race. […] Brown Britain was my Britain. (8-9)

Ahmed's recount is not a static description of his mixed-race Britain, but an engaging account of the transformations that gradually took place in London and those identities and relationships that became more and more a part of the urban environment, inhabiting the streets, neighbourhoods, shops and schools by imposing their presence as real, irrefutable realities. The city of London described by the author proves to be exactly that constantly evolving cultural interface that provides space for transformations and reshaping. The place that necessarily exceeds superimposed rigid frameworks and categorizations, but which is rather based on the universal and democratic idea of citizenship, a new evolving culture and social status generated by the every-day urban interactions and not imposed from higher up. Citizenship, consisting of the sharing of civic values and cooperation, necessarily paves the way for the birth of a community that can be transnational and transcultural, but still deeply rooted in its location - the city. Thus, the city is the place where local and universal meet and this may give rise to new identities that escape neat ethnical and national categorization, but which still claim recognition of urban membership and identification with a new idea of Britishness.

Together with this new idea of citizenship and Britishness, which irrefutably have been taking place and reshaping London for more than 50 years, Kamal Ahmed also takes into consideration those cultural discourses and narrations that influence urban life - the way inhabitants perceive each other, regulate their relationships, identify in

and out of groups and, consequently, how they orient their choices and actions. Indeed, as pointed out in the second chapter,

> The sum of the narration, which intertwines among community members as it represents their lives, gives voice to their experiences and depicts the troubles they are struggling with, creating a sort of meta-city - a virtual, yet real, urban dimension inhabited by ideas and feelings. This literary urban location is the experienced city, the place where identity is negotiated and forged.[346]

This clearly described by Kamal Ahmed, when he narrates:

> I do not speak Arabic. Have visited Karthoum just once. And, therefore, I have never had the "from home" narrative to fall back on, the stories at my father's knee to use as nourishment. The romantic red dust of the Sahara is not mine, the call to prayer is not mine, not in the way the River Thames is mine, the sands of a Devon summer holiday beach are mine. I am as British as they come, like hot buttered toast and bacon sarnies. And still something of an alien in my own country.[347]

Kamal Ahmed's experience made him clearly understand that the concrete, tangible reality of urban life is often less strong, effective and reliable than cultural narrations, symbols and stereotypes inherited from the past. Those narrations have a resonance, as the author calls it, which affects feelings, judgements and actions. For this reason, the author questions and reasons on those elements whose resonance made him and others feel like aliens in their own country, contributing to a fear of the "other" and above all fear of the fact that the concept of identity is more closed to the idea of mixed and hybridity than that of neat definitions and categories.

Therefore, the urge of the author stems from the need for new narrations able to provide a different, more updated perspective. Narrations together with conversations and contacts, as the author advocates, is the way through which a crisis, meant as a moment of profound change, might create the perfect conditions to prompt

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[346] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Original and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.
[347] Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 21.

an evolutionary process of interaction, adaptation and reshaping.[348] As a matter of fact, as explained in the previous chapter, narrations are able to map shifting boundaries and mould new breaking changes into matter-of-fact truths, providing readers with the necessary time to digest and maybe even understand them.

The act of narration triggers a process of awareness of changing reality; it provides a sort of lens, a distance, through which people can observe themselves and see themselves as a community. Indeed, to some extent, if the writers are the material authors of the novel, the city may be allegorically considered the ontological author of urban life, which is translated and interpreted by those people who are able to look into the political, cultural, personal and interpersonal lives of urban dwellers. In other words, the city itself may be viewed as a book plot that needs to be interpreted and narrated in order to enable a process of recognition and acceptance. This process affects those symbols and cultural discourses that inhabit the metacity and which are reflected in people's actions, choices and, above all, in their perception of themselves and their definition of community.

Kamal Ahmed chose to narrate his Britain, starting with those historical events responsible for the articulation of stereotypes and cultural discourses as well as for modern tensions and discriminations. This ideological dimension intertwines with the reality of his personal and familiar story, which appears as the embodiment of those changes that particularly London, has undergone. Nonetheless, Britains still need time to come to terms with them.

> All I have to sell is my very ordinariness. Anybody could be me. I grew up on an everyday suburban street of terraced houses in west London. [...] My grandparents never travelled across a sea, even the Irish Sea, preferring Devon to Alicante. The only thing not so ordinary about me was something pretty extraordinary my mother did many years ago. And that was marrying my proud black dad in the 1960s when *niggers* and *coloureds* were still part of Britain's lexicon. This book is as much their story as mine, a story of a different type of Britishness, a narrative woven deep into our nation's tapestry but still so rarely visible. (17-18)

[348] See Robert Park, Peter Burgess, *The City*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

In order to make it visible and, even more, to help Britain to understand what it has become, Kamal Ahmed advocates for "conversation."

> In a country where so many want to transmit what their truth is, partial, filtered, aggressively put, it is time to find our receive button, switch it on and listen. I use the word conversation. Contact theory proposes that talking to each other is better than not talking to each other. Or shouting at each other. And a conversation, if it is to go anywhere, needs to understand where the participants are coming from. All of them. (15)

Coversation comes from the Latin word *conversari,* which means "to live, dwell, live with, keep company with," as the passive voice of *conversare* means "to turn about, turn about with," from an assimilated form of *com* - "with, together" (see con-) + *versare*, frequentative of *vertere* "to turn" (from PIE root *wer- (2) "to turn, bend").[349] Therefore, the act of conversation implies not only the act of speaking but that of sharing, of being together, of living and therefore also, in a certain sense, of belonging to each other. All this requires a hosting place: the city.

The Life and Times of a Very British Man seems to lay the basis for this advocated conversation, by retracing significant cultural and urban narrations taken from the historical and political past of the nation, but also from the author's personal story. He tries to "converse" with the stories by questioning and comparing them with the actual urban life of London: a new life that Hamed's grandparents, parents and the author himself have witnessed. This process of enquiry, questioning, and the demystification of cultural myths and narrations, above all those concerning immigrants, is necessary to explain those ideas, stereotypes and fears which still have a resonance on the present. Besides, this allows him to propose a sort of counter-narration. He engages with the metacity and tries to render it more faithful, consistent and in harmony with the physical urban life whose reality has sometimes been manipulated, misunderstood or purposely ignored and refused.

[349] "Converse,"*Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/conversation, last accessed April 2020.

3.2 Metacity: Cultural narrations that still steer contemporary urban community in London.

Of the various stories that populate London, Ahmed chooses those that deal with what he cares about most – identity, British identity. Undoubtedly, the matter is tightly linked to issues of race and immigration and of location - what and where home is, of the borders that define community and of the identification of the "other."

Although English history has always been characterised by the presence of "others," who eventually became part of the English DNA over the centuries, every time a new "other" turns up, the processes of engaging and acceptance is always difficult since they imply a crisis - a time of change and a break with the past, but also a sort of evolution and growth, as Robert Park and Peter Burgess outline.[350]

Kamal Ahmed traces the upheaval that hit England beginning in the 1940s.

> Mum doesn't remember seeing a black person as she grew up. In 1940s Britain, 'others' were mostly Jews and the Irish, around one million out of a total population of 50 million. But in rural Devon, there weren't many Jews or Irish either. If we're honest. This was Britain coming to terms with a changing world still wary, in part – grumbling and uncomfortable with what it saw as threats to its system. (36)

From this initial period, the author subtly introduces the distinction between blacks and other immigrants, which is still at the core of national fears. Interestingly, being black is one of the worst 'faults' of certain immigrants, as if a different skin colour established an unbridgeable distance, determining that easy and recognizable limit between 'us,' the community, and them - the 'monsters.' The idea of a monster always comes from those stories that brought them to life, those mythological tales in which one's purpose is to save the self, by confining despicable and dangerous traits outside, in the identity of a monster. That is why it is important to keep those stories alive.

> During the war – when the need for labour was acute – there had been some small- scale projects to bring in Carribbean migrants. A few hundred black workers arrived in Liverpool under one scheme, to the consternation of local skilled workers who 'resented

[350] R. Park, P. Burgess, *The City*.

> being associated in the minds of English people with the unskilled negro labourer.[...] The Ministry of Labour itself fretted that 'many coloured men are unreliable and lazy, quarrels among them are not infrequent. (37)

Laziness, unreliability and incapability are three of the features of the 'monster' that English narrations created. Because efficiency and work ethics are so important for the British identity, a monstrous person must surely be the opposite. This is how the process of "otherization" works. Still, the writer Kamal Ahmed highlights how this kind of narration appears to be more ideological than real. For instance,

> Norman Tebbit spoke about his father growing up in the depression of the 1930s and getting his bike and looking for work.' He was attempting to contrast a pre-war generation with those who took to the streets in the early 1980s to protest about the grotesque conditions they lived in […]. Inadvertently, he was also making the most powerful argument for immigration imaginable - people getting on their bike, on a plane, on a train, and looking for work, a better economic future. Very British, in fact. Some might even go so far as to describe it as a 'British value.' (38)

Another typical topic of the process of "monsterization" is the issue of peace and community: "an influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned."[351] Clearly, the monster is the *unheimlich,* as Freud would have called it. It is what is outside one's home - *heim* in German - and therefore defines the threat. Even though this is the typical scheme behind every real or mythological monster, the British English definition of *heim* has been complicated by its imperial history and by those narrations that the British Empire employed in order to define its identity.

> Two ideas then come into conflict. On the one hand, the attitude to empire and the Commonwealth – these are our people; on the other, an attitude to the more visceral issue of colour, and by definition, race - these aren't our people. It was a contradiction that was to sit, glowering, dangerous, at the heart of the debate about the British and our attitude

[351] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man,* 38.

> to others, from Windrush, via Enoch Powell, riots, mass immigration, all the way, in different form, to the Brexit vote. (40)

This kind of contradiction is at the base of one of the most significant and relevant speeches that still has a deep resonance in those narrations regarding race and immigration in England: Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood."[352] One of those speeches that populate the metacity, responsible for influencing people's actions and choices; one of those narrations imposed from above as an ideological grid which is often not able to comprehend the complexity of reality. For this reason, the author analyses said speech by trying to contextualize Powell's words in order to unveil their true meaning and, above all, by providing a different description of the scene Powell depicted in his speech.

Powell's rhetorical technique is based on few, but clear and fascinating topics able to gain the audience's favour. First of all, the idea is that he is simply fulfilling his duty as a statesman by providing against "preventable evils." Indeed, because of his role he does not have the right to "shrug (his) shoulders" when asked to define "preventable evils." They are already present in the second topic - a state of alert. Indeed, Powell relies on several narrations regarding fear: fear of a "black invasion," of becoming a persecuted minority, or, worse, of the total destruction of the nation. The portrayal of this kind of life-or-death situation, which acquired even more pathos and lure thanks to the story-telling technique Powell used to relate conversations with real English people.

> Politicians want to show their connection with ordinary people. Powell employed the storytelling technique, repetition of examples of real people's accounts, taking individual experience and making it the norm, making common what may well have been unusual or apocryphal, with no hint, no need, for a countervailing narrative – the blessings of immigration remaining silent, those stories untold. (41)

The first story quoted by Powell exemplifies the fear of a "black invasion."

[352] Enoch Powell, *Rivers of Blood*, **speech to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on April 20, 1968**

> A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a middle-aged, quite ordinary working man employed in one of our nationalised industries. After a sentence or two about the weather, he suddenly said: 'If I had the money to go, I wouldn't stay in this country. […] I have three children all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan't be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip over the white man.' Here is a decent, ordinary fellow Englishman, who in broad daylight in my own town says to me, his Member of Parliament, that his country will not be worth living in for his children […] In 15 or 20 years, on present trends, there will be in this country three and a half million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants. That is not my figure. […] whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by sections of the immigrant and immigrant-descended population. […] Already by 1985 the native-born would constitute the majority. It is this fact which creates the extreme urgency of action now. (79-84)

Certainly, the description of the complaining man as a respectful, honest, hard-working and genetically Englishman aims at defining from the very start the requisites of the in-group, which must be protected from the monstrous other, who will soon "have the whip over the white man." Interestingly, reference to the whip seems to draw a parallel with British colonial history and to envisage a sort of reversed situation where immigrants are not only coming, but they are coming to take control what the black writer Reni Eddo-Lodge calls 'fear of a black planet' in her book *Why I'm no Longer Talking to White People About Race*.[353]

Therefore, according to this narration, the British were about to become victims themselves, strangers in their own country.

> The impact upon the existing population was very different. For reasons they could not comprehend, and in pursuance of decision by default, on which they were never consulted, they found themselves made strangers in their own country. They found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds for childbirth, their children unable to obtain places in school, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated; at work they found that employers hesitated to apply to the immigrant worker the standards of discipline and competence required of the

[353] Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm no Longer Talking to White People About Race,* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing,2017).

> native-born worker; they began to hear, as time went by, more and more voices which told them that they were now the unwanted. (81)

Powell reinforced this sense of fear by citing the story of an old respectable English woman living in Wolverhampton, the only English person among immigrants. She was alone, after having lost her husband and sons in the War. The life of this kind woman was threatened by her foreign neighbours.

> The quiet street became a place of noise and confusion. [...] she was abused and feared she would have been attacked but for the chain on the door. […] She is becoming afraid to go out. Windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letterbox. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies. They cannot speak English, but one word they know. 'Racist,' they chant. (83)

This emotional story turned out to be false or at least misunderstood:

> Years later investigators revealed the name of Druscilla Cotterill, a woman who lived alone on a street in Wolverhampton, who had lost her husband and had, once, rented out rooms. Local people denied that Mrs Cotterill had ever had excrement pushed through her letterbox. […] Mrs Cotterill was invited into neighbours' homes for dinner, sittting and chatting with the new immigrant families. She appears to have been affected by a drink problem and who knew what grief she faced and needed to numb. When she died, a bouquet was sent by those Carribbean immigrant neighbours who had apparently made her life such a misery. Those immigrants who were carpenters and factory workers, here to make a difference. No Bogeyman aliens. And no 'wide-grinning piccaninnies. (95-96)

This is a clear example of how stories involving the metacity may be distant and disconnected from the reality of urban life that brings people together and many times gives an opportunity to form new relationships, familiarity and community life for those who are less monstruous than how "ideological discourses" depict them. They appear less *unheimlich* because, in fact, they come to share the same heim - the city.

The complex relationship between race and Britain's imperial history problematizes even more the whole discourse on immigration in England, a state

divided between strong national pride that raises exclusive borders and its role of "mother country."

> The fractious battle in Parliament in 1968 was over a question which has rumbled so much thunder through the squally storms of Britain's post-colonial history, and one that has affected every debate about race and immigration in this country. […] What responsibility does the 'mother country' have to those it once ruled and granted rights and passports to - those very British blue passports, as subjects of the Queen? (83)

The most dangerous part of this issue is that, in order to be free to decline any responsibility, the true accounts of those people arriving in England were hidden or simply untold. For instance, this was the case of Mombasa, where up to 200,000 Asian residents, former British subjects, were expelled by Jomo Kenyatta, who became president in 1964 and wanted to 'Africanise' Kenya: "Kenyan jobs for Kenyan workers. The Asian population could either get Kenyan citizenship, which was complicated and not always attractive, or leave. To go where? England, that country they had helped, heeding the call, the order, of the mother country."[354] The same thing happened in the late nineteenth century to Indian workers in Uganda. Indeed, they, who had been called there by the mother country to build the Uganda Railway, were then called bloodsuckers by the new president Idi Amin as he demanded their expulsion from the country or they would be put in military camps.[355]

Nonetheless, the exclusiveness of the British identity won over the responsibility for colonial relations. Indeed,

> The legislation agreed later that year and effectively withdrew British passport rights mainly from Asians who lived in British colonies. The 1968 Act was restrictive. Immigrants from the New Commonwealth would be obliged to show a 'close connection' to Britain through a blood relative, a grandparent or parent who was born in the UK. (81)

This political resolution enforced the "encouragement of re-emigration," which Powell presented as the second element of the Conservative Party's policy: "The natural and

[354] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man,* 82
[355] *Ibidem*, 83-84

rational question is equally simple and rational: by stopping, or virtually stopping, further inflow and by promoting the maximum outflow."[356]

The "go-home" measures were the only "way-out" according to Powell, who clearly stated in his famous speech that integration is a "dangerous delusion." Because,

> to be integrated into a population means to become for all practical purposes indistinguishable from its other members. […] to imagine that such a thing enters the heads of a great and growing majority of immigrants and their descendants is a ludicrous misconception, and a dangerous one. (84)

As explained in the second chapter, this was the typical post-war idea of integration, very different from that conceived in the modern, post-multicultural society, where integration refers more to urban membership and the sharing of civil and universal values. Kamal Ahmed responds to Powell's idea about immigration simply with himself, his mixed identity that demystifies Powell's ideology.

> I like National Trust houses, Richmond Park on a summer's evening, the Specials, running, the NHS, James Baldwin, Jonathan Coe, Britain winning gold medals at the Olympic Games, Liverpool Football Club, a good Victoria sponge cake, Mo Farah, village pubs, city pubs, Glencoe, Broadchurch, The Office, Fleabag, Soul II Soul, Radio 4, French wine, British lamb, Parliament, cous cous, politeness, irony, Very British Problems on Twitter, olives, double-cooked ships, Miles Davis. At school I read Jane Austen, William Golding, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Shakespeare. At university Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Ada Smith. I am an immigrant descendant and I am British. And there's the problem, Mr Powell, right there. You can't see how anyone can really be both. (85)

The author's list is quite significant. He is careful to name several different details which may be rightfully defined as core elements of an identity, in this case typically British. He mentions physical places together with music and sport references, he mentions food, TV series, radio programmes, political and historical entities like Parliament, education, literature, and even the blog "Very British Problems" on Twitter. Thus, the author has been able to comprehend all the different components

[356] *Ibidem*, 83

of the urban dimension, both physical and material, and those cultural and narrative elements which make up the meta-city. The urban, as a signifying whole, is proof of Kamal Ahmed's identity.

The author's personal counter narrative actually begins with the story of his father, who appears totally different from the general account of unskilled immigrants as proposed by Powell – poor savages from underdeveloped countries. However, his father came to England because he received a scholarship to study in Britain from Khartoum University. "He became a research scientist at the Institute of Ophthalmology, tucked away on Judd Street, central London, switching from bilharzia to the study of eye pathologies. He became an expert in the use of the electron microscope. He worked at the world-renowned Moorfields Eye Hospital."[357]

> Dad's family were senior figures/prominent members of in Omdurman society, Sudan's second-largest city. […] They helped to found one of the city's best-known schools, Ahlia, in response to increasing demand for education in Sudan. […] my family were governors of cities, we didn't sit around under trees doing nothing. [My father] grew up in a large house, a compound 2,000 square metres in size. It was one of the few brick houses in the city. […] The children were called to meals by their nanny. They had one each. Over the dining table hung a rope which was pulled by my grandfather to signal that the next course should be brought. Servants scurried. […] We weren't bunnies from the jungle, you see. (48-49)

As Chiamanda Adichie stressed in her talk on "The danger of a single story," the importance of Ahmed's different recount helps to open people's minds and free them from the danger of the "single story." Ahmed's story undoubtedly provided a more dignified and complete image of his father as an immigrant. Interestingly enough, the reference to "sitting around under trees doing nothing" refers to a popular stereotype the author himself admitted to believing in when he was a child. This demonstrates how he had deep roots in London and its cultural narrations. Implicitly, he is demonstrating that, despite his mixed race he is a full-fledged part of the English culture. Moreover, the author describes Sudan's political and social situation in the 1960s, drawing an interesting parallel between the African state and United Kingdom.

[357] *Ibidem*,55

> It was a grand world. It was a shifting world, bureaucratic and traditional. In Britain, it would have been called Victorian. His was a country in turmoil, the air thick with experiments of democracy and revolution. […] It wasn't the time for staying at home. Seddig was out there, fist raised, chanting for democracy. […] This was the 1960s in Sudan for Seddig, just like it was the 1960s in Britain for Elaine. […] They had glimpsed a new world through snatches of television, by scouring the papers for news, through academia. And they determined to have part of it. (51)

Since both the author's father and mother were part of a changing world desiring more freedom, this seek for democracy and opportunities makes the narration of their identity and their cultures much more similar than one might expect. This makes readers aware that the desire for citizenship of the author's father and other immigrants like him is not so absurd since the democratic and universal values citizenship is based on were the same the author's father believed in. Besides, he fulfilled the other criteria for citizenship, which is also determined by participation in the social, economic and political life of a community. Seddig Ahmed initially came to England on a scholarship to study in Britain awarded by Khartoum University. The description of the work of author's father work is significant because it confirms a *de facto* position of Seddig Ahmed in British society, as a person who is solidly a part of the community and of the city as an organism that functions thanks to the collaboration of its parts. Besides, the fact that London is the site of Seddig's personal and professional fulfilment confirms the role of the city as the place for new possibilities.

> My father committed wholeheartedly to his new home. […] He had no time for the romance of 'nation' and 'soil.' His was a global community of individuals, internationalism, not nationalism. […] For me there was no rose-tinted 'going home' narrative beloved of filmmakers. […] I'm more proud of what he achieved in Britain and the hurdles he clambered over. I'm proud of Sudan as an intellectual exercise. But my father never gave me a homespun story about Sudan, because he wanted to spin a different one. (52)

The urban environment and the relationships it hosts are the perfect tool for spinning one's own story. Being actively involved in urban life means leaving the undeniable

print of one's life and choosing how to be part of the set of symbols "inscribed in stone" that define the city. A city like London, so multifaceted and dynamic, is like a text that does not have a single meaning in itself, but its meaning is the various interpretations of its readers - the identity of its inhabitants. Indeed, London for the author's father was precisely that: the freedom to write one's own story - "freedom from Sudanese life marked by control of a family."[358] Meant it was also the answer to his search for change: "the global meeting place where you could discuss politics late into the night with your new-found friends from the North African diaspora as well as intense young Englishmen who believed, like you, that the world was there to be changed."[359]

As the author points out, London has the same value and importance for both immigrants and natives, who find there the possibility to be part of something greater than themselves while at the same time becoming protagonists in such a wonderful place. A place able to contain their individual identities, hopes and actions: a sort of ontological place.

> Where to go, to drink at the bar of the future? The pick was easy. Sitting at the centre of the new world for my father, just as for my mother, was London, and, just as for my mother, for my father a city both vibrant and dirty, forging a life somewhere between the American mix of modernity and fearful, segregated authority and the stultified, more foreign, European continent. London was not just the capital of England; it was the capital of the English-speaking world and of the crumbling British colonies. It was lusciously historic, its twisting, narrow streets, its churches and cathedrals, and so modern with its Underground and expressways and cinemas and nights out at the London Palladium, flashing neon lights bright at Piccadilly Circus. Pick a place, any place, that would be the destination of choice , the destination to put yourself at the beating heart of all that was going to be ripped up by its roots, this fresh, fair world so many wanted to see, then London was it. (50)

Moreover, as the author narrates, the city, with its mixture of fixity, thanks to its buildings and monuments, but also of change, through the constantly evolving stories that concentrate on city life, invites urban inhabitants to engage with the past and, in

[358] *Ibidem*,54
[359] *Ibidem*,54

some way, to converse with it or put it into doubt. This is what happened to the author when he stayed in the same hotel where Powell had delivered his famous "Rivers of blood" speech forty years earlier. It was 2008.

> I have been to the Midland Hotel in Birmingham where Powell delivered the speech that he knew would go up 'like a rocket and stay up.' It was for the fortieth anniversary. It is now called the Burlington Hotel. In a different room at the same hotel on the same day in 2008, someone was there for the same reason, and his name was Nick Griffin. (62)

Nick Griffin was then head of the British National Party and he was once a member of the National Front, founded in 1967. Both Nick Griffin and the National Front were the incarnation of Powell's words. The solid reaction to the fear of a black invasion and the violent try to "re-conquer" a city which had already changed and transformed. The city that was already home to a new kind of British citizen.

> The National Front used to march up and down the streets of west London with Union flags and barking dogs, the streets where Mum and I used to go shopping on the bus. The National Front believes Britain 'should remain a white country', that all non-white people living in the country they – I – call home should be deported in a 'phased and human way', 'Where to?' I always wondered. (62)

In a room in that hotel, the author, a brown man, working for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, had the possibility to reply to Powell and the "far right Britain"[360] through the words of Trevor Philips whose

> speech had a simple message: that large parts of what Enoch Powell had said were wrong. Integration between different communities was possible. [...] Multiple loyalties are possible, where one identity – I'm British – doesn't necessarily clash with another – part of me is Sudanese. Like love, it is not a zero-sum game. […] Whatever we feel about immigration is part of our future. […] What about terrorism and immigration? Yes, migration should be managed. And the only actually uncontrolled immigration is from the European Union and they are not truly brown in the slightest. So, immigration is no longer an issue of race. Some conflate it – still – for a reason. (67)

[360] *Ibidem*,63

Mis-narrations about immigration, terrorism, "pure" identity, are all Powell's narrations that still have a resonance, as the Kamal Ahmed notices, and the best way to reply to such narrations is to give voice to real experiences, which provide a more complex and true image of Britain and its new inhabitants. That is why Ahmed recounts his own life story as a personal history and a lens through which he can provide a true view of British society and its evolutions. A story which is both individual and universal, in both cases deeply rooted in that urban environment that profoundly influenced people's lives and which gives its urban residents the right to call it home.

> To me and the millions who grew up in suburban Britain, these places were and are the foundations of an essential Englishness, the Englishness of John Betjieman, poetry sunk in schools named after English heroes like Henry Fielding, magistrate, reformer and writer, and Ellen Wilkison, the first woman to become Minister for Education. Poetry sunk in those carefully tended parks and gardens […] Poetry sunk in the roads of terraced houses with a tree carefully planted every tenth paving stone; neat signposted names, Cranmer Avenue, after the Reformation Archbishop, and Blodin Avenue. […] houses built with Victoria sweat and dust, the same sweat and dust that constructed all of outer London.(8-9)

The author opens up the complexity of the urban spirit made up of buildings and streets together with poetry, inspirational examples and stories. John Betjieman once said that "topography is one of the chief themes in my poetry[...] about the country, the suburbs and the seaside [...] then there comes love [...] and increasingly, the fear of death."[361] Topography is the art of writing about the environment, and for the poet it was more important than love and death. Probably because the place where we live is what gives birth to the essence of our identity. It allows us to exist, not to be lost, but to live. The author is deeply sure that those streets, gardens, and buildings in which Britishness is sunk engendered his own Britishness and that of all those who shared urban life with him - his Caribbean neighbours, and the Greek family at number 10.[362]

[361] John Betieman, Radio Talk. BBC Radio 4, 2 August 1978.
[362] Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 105

> This was my London. My London, where ethnic groups lived together, house next to house. What if we had been elsewhere, maybe Thorpe Hesley in Yorkshire where my mum was born. Or down in Devon, Torquay, where Mum grew up and never saw a brown face. Nord did I. (108)

Of course, the city is also a site of conflict. The place where one's identity is both guarded and questioned, as the author remembers:

> Two boys. I was at my front door, just fishing out my key, which I stored in a little grey, furry pouch to keep it safe and stop me losing it and making my mum angry. 'Jungle bunny. Go home.' And a snigger -hahahahahhahhhahhha. […] What it was like to walk home from school to the street you grew up on, a few miles from the hospital you were born in and around the corner from the school you went to just like all the other local children. Who didn't know what it was like when someone says 'Go home' and you are just about to walk into your home so you are doing exactly what is being asked of you but of course their request means something completely different. (112-113)

Again, here the city acts as a witness to racial insults and prejudices. Indeed, despite what ideology or fear want to impose, the urban environment is the safe place where people anchor their identity; it is the physical, undeniable reality that discards mis-narrations. Nonetheless, sometimes the ideas that populate the metacity are louder and stronger than the concrete and provable urban life, and, consequently, the urge to respond to such ideas and fight them is urgent and pressing. The same author narrates how he tried to become part of those narrations, giving in to stereotypes and giving up his real name in order to feel part of the in-group.

The first incident deals with something Ahmed himself wrote: Keep Britain tidy. Kick out Pakis.

> A piece of graffiti scribbled on the cover of a bright orange exercise book at school. By me. By a boy grappling in a world where half-white and half-black didn't have an anchor. By a boy- who, lacking bravery- didn't always kick up at bullies and sometimes kicked down, targeting the people who were targets. By a boy who thought that if only people from the Asian subcontinent learnt to speak with an English accent then 'racism' would cease, failing to realize that voice wasn't really the issue. By a boy who wondered if 'Pakis' were the problem because they were – like- different, I kept being told. (119)

The second episode regards the issue of name. The author narrates that when he was young and worked for a newsagent's belonging to an Asian couple, he told them his name was Neil.

> My name is after all Kamal. Lots of us did it – children with funny, foreign names who used short English names in our effort to fit in, particularly with people we didn't know well. We were the generation of black and Asian people who fought for similarity. […] Mohammad is now in the top ten boy's names in the country. No one had ever heard of Kamal in the 1970s. […] Today the name is a badge of honour, from Azibo to Zyshonne, Aiecha to Yanika. When my son tells me the name of a friend on his rugby team I hardly recognize it, and am glad of it. Young people no longer think names are funny. It wouldn't cross their minds. (121)

Names, like skin, is the immediate sign of our identity. However, unlike skin, which is genetically determined, a name may be considered the first identity our parents choose for us. That word which speaks about the culture we belong to and the memories we evoke. In contemporary London even names that are culturally different but yet recognized as part of the urban panorama testify how much the metacity is changing and how urban cultural narrations increasingly reflect the reality of the urban community.

3.3 City as a site of identity and reconfiguration.

The first part of this chapter focused on how Kamal Ahmed dealt with historical and cultural narrations that have been influencing the London metacity for ages. He analysed and called into question those meta-narrations that interpret and connote the urban environment and its inhabitants, creating a sort of intangible city that influences and culturally leaves a mark on urban interactions, laws, and institutions. The author traced back the narrative origins of stereotypes and urban myths about race and

immigration, and proposed a sort of counter narrative, a different perspective, or a broader one, taking into consideration both his parents' lives and historical events.

The second part of this chapter will focus on the story of the author's life – his childhood, adolescence and mature age, plus his children, the third-generation, and how the relationship between the urban condition of a community, which inevitably ameliorated despite xenophobia and restrictive political policies, and the resonance on meta-narrations of the fear of invasion, persecution of the English residents, impossible integration and immigrant inferiority changed. The author will focus on clashes between actual physical and ideological situations, past myths and new narrations, the fear of change and urban interactions that continuously mould urban society and its semantics is typical of the city as well. Indeed, because the city is the place of identity *par excellence*, the social product endowed with a strong symbolic value, which helps the identification of its citizens, as Lefebvre pointed out, it is also the place where cultural and ethnical clashes effectively take place. The urban locus is the location of the self, the space where people invent themselves by both adapting to urban culture and by re-ordering the space for themselves, as Bollown claims. But it is also the place where the personal dimension intertwines with the social, where culture has been and is constantly challenged, negotiated and defended.

Therefore, the city is also a conflictual place, where the effect of crisis is intensified as sociologists Robert Park and Peter Burgess state. They also pointed out the fact that *crisis* is not necessarily meant in a violent and destructive sense. Indeed, from the Greek *krinein* meaning 'to decide', the term crisis refers to a decisive moment, a moment of change and evolution. "As continually emergent bodies, cities thus provide ample space for reconfiguration."[363] Therefore, the everyday urban experience, where cultures and ethnicities meet, sharing the same urban locations and symbols, is the perfect condition to prompt the evolutionary process of reshaping. The notion of urban experience is quite complex; indeed it refers to the act of inhabiting specific physical communal places, taking part in specific moments of social interaction and cultural development, and sharing customs and cultural trends.

[363] Cory Benavente, "City as Interface: A Discourse on the Semiological Significance of Contemporary Urban Spaces."in *Media Theory and Digital Culture*, Spring 2013. https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/cctp-748-spring2013/2013/05/06/city-as-interface-a-discourse-on-the-semiological-significance-of-the-contemporary-urban-spaces/, last access April 2019

> The activity of inhabiting confers to the city that surplus of values and meanings that distinguishes it from its mere spatial extension, and from the physical forms that occupy it. And it is starting from this public and collective nature that the term metropolis, as well as that of city, acquires an extension so vast to be able to denote the activities, functions, behaviours, habits that manifest themselves in that space [...] We can thus imagine the urban space as an immense machine producing forms, significations, symbologies, narrations, images, concepts and practices starting from the complex network of relations that gives life to it.[364]

Alberto Abruzzese defines the metropolis as a verbal dispositive,[365] taking the term dispositive from the reflection of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, inspired by the Foucaldian idea of dispositive[366]. Agamben calls dispositive "anything that owns the capacity to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, model, control and assure the gesture, conducts, opinions and discourses of living beings"[367]. According to this definition, the city may be defined as a complex verbal dispositive influenced by past narrations that continue to reverberate in the urban environment, but it also continues to produce new narrations not only through the experience of urban dwellers who meet and grow within urban structures like schools, parks, squares and neighbourhoods, but also through the fact that

> communication started to invade the city's spaces with posters, banners, shop windows and flyers, as a new literary form able to shake and activate the collective forces inhabiting those spaces. The act of writing has started to overflow from the quiet horizontality of the book to end up occupying streets, squares, walls and banners. The texts (but now also images) are reproduced in large quantities on different support formats and spread out in a new urban context that hosts hundreds of thousands of people. We are facing the transformation of the urban space into an immense communicative machine that imposes

364 "The City as a Narrative Dispositive," *Unità di Crisi. Observatory on Politics of Representation*, http://www.unitadicrisi.org/the-city-as-a-narrative-dispositive/, last accessed April 2020,
365 Alberto Abruzzese, "Introduction", in Valeria Giordano (Ed.), *Linguaggi della metropoli*, (Napoli, Liguori, 2002).
366 Michel Foucault, "The confession of the Flesh" in C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other ritings 1972–1977 by Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon Books), 194-228.
367 Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?,* (Roma, Nottetempo, 2006), 2

> its own literary work through the most varied forms of medium, and starts to involve its inhabitant also in the production plan.[368]

The transmedial urban narration takes advantage of new technologies like social media, but also TV series, movies, music and sport. These are some of the elements, together with his school experience, that Ahmed analyses and describes in the narration of his London.

The first topic of the author's urban and personal narration is school.

> Big school. […] We were a mix of every background, white, black, and brown, and every class, from the 'manor houses' of north Ealing with their wrought-iron lanterns hanging in the porch and their Saabs in the driveways, to the council estates of Greenford where drugs were peddled on the upper walkways and ice formed on the inside of the windows. [...] My school was Every School, that London mix of teenagers that bred strength and tension in equal measure. (129)

This author's first premise points out how his school was "Every School" - a paradigm of all the schools in London that became the places where the real London joins together. Every race and social class is obliged, by law, to share the same spaces and, even more, to work for the same purpose: to learn. Besides, the act of learning through being a part of the national education system, implicitly entails being part of the community and of the nation's future - that future which will produce new goods, improve economy, health, education or, as in the author's case, himself as well. Therefore, the city is that urban place which gives rise to the sense of Britishness, community and partnership.

Of course, as happens in the broader urban environment, the everyday sharing of spaces by people, who, on the on hand, necessarily have something in common with the physical location and the information they are learning, but, on the other, differ due to their skin colour, native language, cultural background and history, lays the ground for tensions and conflicts that set up intangible borders. Even in schools, where differences tend to be cancelled by the democratic regulations of education,

[368] "The City as a Narrative Dispositive," *Unità di Crisi. Observatory on Politics of Representation*, http://www.unitadicrisi.org/the-city-as-a-narrative-dispositive/, last accessed April 2020.

identity is still challenged. This often causes people to create boundaries and to defend them.

In her book *Strangers to Ourselves* Julia Kristeva asserted that borders are what contain who we are, our identity. Therefore, the defence of that kind of borders is not only due to a possible hate of "the other," but the fear of our dissolution, of the loss of our identity.[369] The instinct of self-defence leads people to form "tribes" that help each other defend the borders of their common identity.

> Comprehensive schools in big, complicated cities are an amalgamation of tribes. In-groups and out-groups, winners and not-so-winners. It doesn't matter at what level you think about tribes, across the world, across the country or across the playground, the reasons for their existence are the same. Grouping people allows us all to make sense of chaos, make sense of a set of variables too wide and complicated for individual understanding. [...] Big school was London with a fence around it, […] the black kids, the white kids, the Asians. Posh kids. Poor kids. But be wary. What if the templates you are using are based on falsity, assumptions, prejudice? And, of course, they always are because those templates are shortcuts that allow us to function. (130)

Indeed, the urban paradox, which leads to both cultural clashes and to integration and a reshaping of the community, is well reflected at school, which functions as a sort of miniature urban environment. If on one hand, students divide up into tribes to defend their own territory and identity, on the other, daily contact and "forced" sharing of the same experiences inevitably lead not only to the "amalgamation of tribes," but also to the crisis of those templates at the basis of prejudice because contact shows that reality is more complex than categorizations, and this makes boundaries blur. Indeed, Ahmed remembers that "despite all the misplaced bravado, […] after school I was with my Asian friends – friends who invited me round for food and cups of tea, their parents welcoming me with smiles and jokes – trying to understand why their homework was so much better than mine."[370]

Interestingly enough, when the author once encountered an old schoolmate of his, what they mainly remembered about school were the corridors. "We talked about

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[369] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Leon S. Reoudiez trans., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
[370] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 139.

the corridors at our old school. There were three corridors where children congregated at lunchtime, itself an assault of course, as too many people tried to buy bad food in too short a timeframe. The black corridor, the white corridor, and the Asian corridor."[371] Marc Augè would have defined corridors as "non-places," that is to say, spaces of transcience with no particular cultural or relational meaning, passage of a nameless and faceless multitude.[372] And yet, those corridors remained in the memory of their users as places of life, where people were simultaneously divided into tribes and part of a same routine and the practice of the everyday,[373] as Michel De Certau expressed it. This is what triggers processes of appropriation and community-building. According to the French philosopher, the force of the everyday is what can counteract ideological and power-mechanisms, but it is also the key to engage with the traditions and cultural past of a nation. Indeed, Andy, Ahmed's schoolmate, confessed that when he arrived in London, he first felt jealousy.

> White people had all this history, kings and queens, pomp and pageantry, inventors of the modern world, the iron and steel that built King's Cross, the medicine at the nearby ear, nose, and throat hospital, the science and art and culture resplendent in the museums on Exhibition Road – these are your forefathers. Me, Andy? Slavery. 'That's you in history.' (142)

Yet, despite this feeling, the act of inhabiting the city everyday also made Andy part of that history he envied.

The second urban narrative dispositive the author takes into consideration is television and particularly a TV series that profoundly influenced Londoners' points of view about immigrants and colonizers – "Roots." This was a series about slavery in the United States that had had more than 19 million viewers. The BBC broadcast the first part of the series over an Easter weekend and then on the following three Sundays.

> It took off. Not just in its viewing figures, but also for what it did for the people who watched it. What it did for Andy. And me. 'You knew when 'Roots' had finished', Andy said. All the black kids would come out of their houses and look for the skinheads to

[371] *Ibidem*, 141.
[372] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Anthropology of Supermodernity*, (Paris: Le Seuil: 1992).
[373] Michel De Certau, *The Practice of the Every Day*, (Berkley: Unversity of California Press, 1984).

> fight. "'This one is for Kunta Kinte!" Whack.[...] Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen Lawrence, said that going to work after watching a dramatisation of the horrors of a slave's life 'you looked at people completely different, you'd begin to have a mistrust of white people and took a long time to go, we were completely shocked.' […] 'I remember going to school on the Monday and people somehow didn't mess with you that day because all the black kids had this look in their eyes that said you better back off. (143)

'Roots' helped to question and contradict that "single story" that national propaganda and political speeches like Powell's had contributed to spin. It unveiled the real origins and sufferings that many immigrants in London might have experienced and this, of course, also contributed to change the narrations about their reasons for migrating.

Besides, TV series are particularly effective when it comes to catching people's attention and bringing them to plunge into a story by empathizing with it. Indeed, the strength and plausibility of images shown often create a direct link with the emotional and subconscious spheres of the viewers. This process also implicitly provides viewers with a sort of common background and language, which inevitably create bonds between them, giving them a sense of community, despite any ethnical or social differences. Actually, any type of narrations, even those on screen (TV or films) contribute to the creation of categories necessary to decipher the complexity of reality. Yet, the new urban reality the author embodies escapes those ideological frames imposed from higher up, as the author reminds us, by narrating a meeting with one of his old friends: "'So, what is your background anyway?' Andy says as we shake hands outside. 'I never did know where you fitted in.' The world is round. This is a headache for map makers who need to produce representations that are flat, either on paper or on screen."[374]

Conversely, the three dimensionalities of the urban experience, which hosted mixed identities like the author's, was perfectly narrated by some types of music.

> Music was a good thing because it was a mixed thing. And it was a rare thing because it actually spoke about being a mixed thing all those years ago. It was more than rare, it was unique. Marie Stopes might have wanted me stopped, but Pauline Black and Neville Staple

[374] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man,* 144

> and Terry Hall were willing to put me on the map and sing about stuff that I understood. Welcome to Two-tone. (144)

Two-tone is a British music genre that fuses traditional ska, a music genre that originated in Jamaica in the late 1950s, with musical elements of punk rock and new wave music. Many two-tone groups like *The Specials, The Selecter, and The Beat* featured a mix of black, white, and multiracial components. The two-tone sound originated among young musicians in Coventry (in the West Midlands of England) who grew up hearing 1960s Jamaican music and desired to transcend and defuse racial tensions in Thatcher-era Britain. Pauline Black, lead singer of *The Selector*, became a symbol of those interracial identities that were complicating the British DNA and taking root in the urban environment. "She changed her name by deep poll from Vickers to the literal descriptor 'Black' at the age of twenty-six. It was an identity thing. She was brought up by her adoptive white parents in Romford, Essex, in the 1950s, the only black child in a family were racist jokes were common, and it was drummed into her that she had better be careful about ever going out with black men."[375] She immediately felt like she did not belong to her adoptive family, but she found her home in her band, which for her became that narrative dispositive able to tell her story, her identity and intertwine it with the place where they felt they belonged - the city.

> They taught Britain a lesson. Taught Britain that there are ways to gain that confidence, that solidarity. Dance together. Sing together. […] In a world where I wished my name, sometimes, was Neil, and my Indian friends called themselves Tony and Ian rather than try to explain what their actual first names were- two-tones were the antidote. Two-tone was our safe space. (160)

Two-tones spun that narrative able to create "safe spaces" within the metacity and consequently those spaces became the place where a new Britishness could bud and grow.

> Trevor Nelson, the DJ and friend of Jazzie B, said it was the start of real multiculturalism. That wasn't about seeing and respecting and tolerating other cultures in a big mixed-up

[375] *Ibidem*,157

> pot. This was about creating a new way, not asking for permission to be here, but building our own narrative. [...] The fact is we were Black and British, and suddenly there was a breakthrough. We were heard. We had found a story, a role in this nation's narrative that wasn't about conflict or failure or racism, a new uplifting story of home, even if it was via, as Paul Gilroy dismissively called it in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 'the shiny arena of the infotainment telesector. (177)

Paul Gilroy, in his seminal book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* ,[376] proposed a controversial exploration of anti-black racism in Britain, tracing back the history of British racism tied to an imaginary English 'national culture' which is supposedly homogenous in its whiteness and Christianity. His analyses particularly take into account the political ideological frames whose narrations set ideal national borders that had to "purify" the British society from those who were depicted as the strangers, or the invaders. It was "melancholia" for the imperial past, as Gilroy himself defined it in one of his books.

Yet the presence of multiracial music like two-tone or that of *Soul II Soul* demonstrated that the "Black in the British Flag" was now growing and finding its place, helped by the urban environment that acted as that democratic space where change was possible, a change which started with everyday life and did not come from political ideas.

To demonstrate the democratic force of the city, Ahmed pointed out how many poor musical groups, like interracial bands, had a real possibility to become popular thanks to the so-called "grey economy." This is an informal part of the urban economy that is neither taxed nor controlled by any institution, part of an economy that is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government.

> The thing about this grey economy was that it was multicoloured. It was meritocratic. If you could find customers, you had a business. And people looking for a break, second generation immigrants, alternatives; those who were different, other, flourished in a climate originally not built for them because, boy, when you are struggling at the margins and no one is set to give you a break, you gotta do something, Alan McGee, the anarchic founder of Creation Records. (173)

[376] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

Despite the critical economic controversial value of the grey economy, it had the merit of providing poor people with an opportunity, with a space where they could show themselves and actively engage with the social life of the city. Interestingly enough, urban life, hosting the possibility of a grey economy, acted as an isle of freedom, as it did during the late Middle Ages when cities were oases of democracy and freedom within a feudal world.

Another urban narrative dispositive able to embody a narration about the new racial dimension of Britain was sport, represented particularly by Linford Christie, a Jamaican-born British sprinter who won, among other medals, the gold in the 100 m final at the Barcelona Games of 1992.

> In those 9.96 seconds of supreme physical effort, Linford Christie embodied the start of something – the black meaning good decade. This, he, was the new two-tone. The new start, the next 'here we go again.' The hope, the belief, the same fervent belief my mum had in 1960, I had in the 1980s. […] I had to turn away and look at the floor for a bit. I didn't want my friends to see the tears, ridiculous, in the corner of my eyes. He had won for all of us. The out-group. [...] He was to find a Union flag in the crowd and drape it over his shoulders, showing, in that one moment, to a million second-generation immigrants like me, that this was our country, we were not guests, we were not a preventable evil, we had every right to reside where we were and that fear of other was no more legitimate than fear of UFOs- that other type of non-existent alien that H.G. Wells spoke of. On the podium receiving his medal, Christie said the 'moment when they played 'God Save the Queen' was his proudest, representing his country. (165-169)

Even Linford Christie became a counterpoint to Guilroy's *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*. He symbolically wore the British flag and made it his. He became the new narration of modern London, where between 1991 and 2011 the people defining themselves as 'white British' fell from 93 per cent to 80 and the mix category rised to 1 million people. The win of Linford Christie made the author realise: "This was it. The future was brown. We were an approaching wave, crashing over that privileged

beach which, we thought, was protected by little more than a few flimsy deck chairs. This was going to be our decade."[377]

Despite the presence of these significant new identities that imposed themselves in urban society not only as inescapable realities but also as symbols of many others like them, the embodiment of the ethnical and cultural British DNA had changed. Crime news unveiled the resonance that some traditional narratives about race and fear still had. The most shocking news the author followed closely was the murderer of Stephen Lawrence, who was stabbed at a bus stop in south-east London.

> It changed how the country looked at race, at itself and at the previously largely hidden anchors of discrimination. And that February we were given a new phrase for those anchors.[…] Institutional Racism, the pervading atmosphere, the muscle memory in organisations which causes them to fail ethnic minorities because of ignorance and bias, 'unwitting' it was said, being wrong, doing wrong, without even knowing it. (180)

The term "institutional racism" refers primarily to the fact that "the police investigation into the death was shambolic, factually flawed, defensive."[378] Reading the inquiry report for a publication in *The Guardian*, Kamal Ahmed found "a miserable read of missed opportunities, bad practice, venal attitudes and incompetence."[379] This leads inevitably the author to reason about the nature of institutions and to which values they represent.

Institutions are those organisations that basically govern the *polis*. They combine the values and ideals shared by the community and are chosen as role models for the urban *praxis*, with the concrete everyday of urban life, with their physical presence on the urban map: their buildings. Institutions have a physical presence and, in a way, define part of the city. For this reason, the author noticed that the day of the verdict, all the events connected with the killing of Stephen Lawrence happened "in a triangle of roads in Westminster - the heart of British political history. "A triangle of streets that did not just define a geographic area, but defined power. Those who have it and those who do not."[380] Besides,

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[377] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*,166.
[378] *Ibidem,* 180
[379] *Ibidem.*
[380] *Ibidem*,184-185.

> The House of Commons in Parliament Square where the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, the very man who had agreed to an inquiry in the first place, rose to say his piece: " I think I can speak for the whole House when I say that Mr and Mrs Lawrence's campaign for the truth has been pursued by them with enormous dignity, courage and determination. Sir Paul at New Scotland Yard, 10 Broadway: 'We feel a sense of shame for the incompetence of that first investigation and how the family was let down. We felt we could and we should have done better in this case."[…] Doreen Lawrence at the Home Office on Marsham Street: 'This society has stood by and allowed my son's killers to make a mockery of the law. To me institutional racism is so ingrained it is hard to see how it will be eradicated out of the police force. (183)

If social changes can be immediately visible in everyday urban life, in human interactions and urban makeup, institutions are usually the embodiment of stability, tradition and faithfulness to the establishment. Therefore, the fact that a new body for "good relations" among citizens was set up in 2007 means that social and ethnical changes in the British community started from the bottom, the realistic urban daily life, to get to the top, the political institutions.

> The Equality and Human Rights Commission was an amalgamation of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. It had a duty - put down in the legislation - to promote good relations. Good relations. What two better words were there to finally honour the legacy of Stephen Lawrence? (187)

Ahmed is aware that the process that would lead to a different narration and thus to a reconciliation among all the different and yet similar British inhabitants is still long; and, above all, to pursue this aim, the citizens must go beyond the classical binary struggle between good and bad when referring to immigrants and natives. In this sense, the author's mixed identity allows him to combine in himself the double perspective of those who feel like strangers in a place they call home and those who feel threatened by strangers who they think are robbing them of their home.

> This matters because confining our debate on race to a battle between white people, black people and the history of the Western world restricts our ability to find a path, however

> gropingly, towards solutions. One group is on the defensive, the other takes the position of the justifiably angry victim. […] White people are worried. Black people are angry. Reconciliation requires an understanding that within each of us are the seeds of the other's malady. 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her', Jesus said to those who sought to punish an adultress. Are we all prejudiced somewhere deep inside? (188)

We are all prejudiced because we all use personal prejudice, more or less unconsciously, to judge our experiences, and the ultimate reason for this is the innate necessity to prepare ourselves when faced with something or someone new and different and therefore, potentially, a threat. But we do it also to help us give order to the enormous amount of information we receive and experiences we endure. "We categorise to keep a complicated world manageable."[381]

This necessity increased even more in the twenty-first century, which is characterised by what social psychologists call 'cognitive business'[382]. This term defines the widespread status of overload, overstimulation and multitasking typical of modern people. "Under conditions of cognitive load (where processing resources are limited), people are more likely to give responses that come to mind quickly and easily, following what psychologists call "correspondence bias." This is the tendency to attribute a person's actions to personal dispositions. So predetermined logical mechanisms substitute the mental effort to analyse reality in depth and make judgements just after getting to know all the necessary information.

American sociologist William Isaac Thomas first identified this phenomenon. In 1928 he developed the Thomas theorem (also known as the Thomas dictum), stating, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[383] Later, another sociologist, Robert K. Merton, coined the term self-fulfilling prophecy: a belief or expectation, correct or incorrect, could bring about a desired or expected outcome.[384] According to the Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture "Self-fulfilling prophecy makes it possible to highlight the tragic vicious circle which victimizes people

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[381] *Ibid*,188.
[382] Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor and Miles Hewstone eds., *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996).
[383] William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior problems and programs,* (New York: Knopf, 1928), 571–572.
[384] Merton, R. K., "The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect". *Social Forces*. **74** (2): 379–422.

twice: first, because the victim is stigmatized (STIGMA) with an inherent negative quality; and secondly, because he or she is prevented from disproving this quality."[385] Therefore, self-fulfilling prophecy happens when an originally false social belief leads people to act in ways that objectively confirm that belief and the belief system people refer to is that which is deeply rooted in our thoughts, traditional ideas and safe habits. Of course, this mental process influences and is influenced in its turn by those meta-narrations that govern urban culture, by concretely affecting the life of the city and the relations among its inhabitants.

> In a psychological experiment in 1974, managers were studied while interviewing black and white candidates. The candidates were trained to act similarly to each other. The managers – all white- sat further away from the black candidates, leaned back more often, away from the candidate, and showed what were described as 'speech disfluencies'- they stuttered and stumbled regularly. The interviews with black candidates were three minutes or 25 per cent shorter. In social psychology this is called self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome.[386]

In his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice*, social psychologist Gordon Allport suggests that a way to reduce prejudice and stereotyping is through contact. Indeed, he developed the intergroup contact theory, stating that

> [Prejudice] may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom, or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.[387]

On the contrary, "isolation leaves the many sides involved in this debate shut up in their own dwellings, curtains closed, glowering behind their respective positions, entrenched in views that, because of their repetition with little external contradiction, become more embedded. If I have some knowledge of the other community, it is

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[385] "Self-fulfilling prophecy" in Guido Bolaffi, Raffaele Bracalenti, Peter Braham & Sandro Gindro eds., *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture*, (California: Sage Publications, 2003), 303
[386] Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 230.
[387] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 281.

harder to demonize. Individual contact helps good relations."[388] Clearly the urban environment is the perfect place to create contact among its dwellers; there they share the same spaces such as neighbourhoods, streets, undergrounds, squares, and supermarkets, but it also provides them with the same kind of information or narration produced by newspapers, advertisements, cultural and political events, laws, and customs. All these elements that provide physical and cultural contact foster familiarity, empathy and openness. Allport also said that

> To be maximally effective, contact and acquaintance programmes should lead to a sense of equality in social status, should occur in ordinary, purposeful pursuits, avoid artificiality and if possibly enjoy the sanction of the community in which they occur. The deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect. The gain is greater if members regard themselves as part of a team. (247)

In order to be a team, people need to feel they all belong to something they all share - the city and its life - and they need to care about each other and what they share.

> It is contact that can help reconciliation. Start maybe with the sharing of sorrows. […] Although the sharing of sorrows may initially be necessary, soon groups will move on, the conversation will move on- if the process is working. Move on to what? The similar stories we all experience, the ordinariness of life rather than the extraordinariness of discrimination or resentment. The stories of parenthood, work, and hobbies, sport, who won at football, the Olympics, cricket.[...] Coming together means coming together as individuals, as mothers and fathers, as teachers, as the employed, the unemployed, the disabled, the young, the old, as people who want to build that new urban garden for the local community to enjoy, to repaint that graffiti-laden wall, to fix that fence, launch that sports project to bring schoolchildren together who may be living separate lives. Each one becomes a small tendril link, knitting together to make something stronger. (254)

Therefore the community becomes stronger than the spontaneous show of discrimination, but also maybe stronger than racism, which is not the same. "Prejudice

[388] Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 233.

only becomes racism when it is weaponised by access to the levers of power, the strength to do something with that prejudice."[389]

Thus, becoming part of the urban community is the first step towards reconciliation, but what helped Ahmed to get a deeper awareness of his identity and his partnership with the urban community was also his trip to Sudan and his contact with a different narration of himself.

Changing point of view helped him realize that what won in his life was British history, because all the stories he has to tell regard the city he calls home. All the narrations he had in mind were just prejudices because they followed binary systems which are not able to entail the complexity of history: "After hearing many tales of black people being bad guys – that's what you grew up with in Britain - I wanted nothing more than to hear a different narrative."[390]

Getting in touch with different narrations does not necessarily mean to deny one's own, even though sometimes being familiar with something or someone brings people to take that for granted. Sometimes the danger of the single story does not only regard others but ourselves as well.

> Familiar to me was my mother, white English, and my country, white British. Different to me was my father, black African, and the country he was born in, Sudan. […] Thinking about my mother I became prouder of her, of what she has achieved. By realising that much of what she did was not in fact familiar at all, that seeing somebody every day is not the same as knowing somebody. […] Maybe Mum is like Britain, a little. The country I grew up in is familiar. I see it every day. But do I know it? Do I appreciate it? And know what it has given the world beyond the Bessemer steel process and Two Tone. Reading about Sudan, visiting Sudan, seeing my creative, smart Sudanese family does not make me feel more Sudanese; it makes me feel more British. Maybe I can learn to 'feel Sudanese.' Maybe that is the point, that we all contain different identities. (211-212)

In the post multicultural era characterised by superdiversity and mixed identities, stereotyped categories totally fail, because their complexity exceeds rigid frameworks. Yet new different and multiple identities find their habitat in the urban environment. The necessity of location, which is a fundamental part of the building of one's own

[389] *Ibidem*,237-238
[390] *Ibidem*,206.

identity, is exemplified by the city, which is able to root the presence of their inhabitants in a network of buildings, reference points, symbols, relations and narrations.

> I am not part British and part Sudanese. I am wholly British, with a Sudanese background. Now, that may not be a surprise given I was born in the former and arrived on a plane in the latter. May not be a surprise given I was brought up on school trips to St Paul's Cathedral, and came to Sudan aged forty-nine to hear for the first time that the country's pyramids are older than Egypt's. (218)

The urban environment serves as an anchor of one's identity. Its historical, cultural and social spaces are the map to understanding oneself and to feeling at home. In a period of cognitive business, where the complexity of reality overloads people with stimuli and information, the familiar symbols of the urban environment are easy to decipher and are helpful to produce order and tranquility. Terry Eagleton mentioned the pillar box (or post box) as one of the familiar reference points he is attached to. Pillar boxes are as deeply embedded in British cultural as teatime.

> The colour of pillar boxes signifies identity as well as culture. I know I am home when I see a red pillar box. A red bus. When I drink a properly made cup of tea. Identity is that hard-to-define concept which confers power by its very vagueness, the ability to describe it in the way you want, not the way that others want. I am a Londoner and British. (276)

The distinction between English and British is quite subtle and yet is has recently come to the fore. According to the author the word 'English' "has been manipulated to suggest, with its flags of St George and cricket tests, something far more racially distinct, exclusive." For this reason, even though many of the things he loves are very particularly English he wouldn't define himself as English, but British, and like him, "two thirds of Bangladeshi-heritage people living in the UK say British." According to Ahmed,

> Unlike being English, being British is a brown thing as a white thing. It is the ultimate mixed-race descriptor. British is the umbrella I feel most comfortable sitting under. What is to be British? Something that is inclusive and reconciled, not exclusive and separate.

> We all live on the same few thousand square miles of land, which is a good starting point. (277)

Location is the starting point. This ontological process triggered by the place where people live, particularly by the city that becomes both the witness and the generative locus of people's identity, is even more natural when it comes to the third-generation, as Kamal Ahmed realizes: "I look at my children […] and realise that their experience will be very different from mine, that the notion that they are not quite British enough, that they are 'other' in their own country will seem as ridiculous."[391] Probably, because the notion of 'other' is becoming more and more complex and the borders of the previous racial categories that characterised 'multicultural London' where the Kamal Ahmed grew up are fading. The inevitable process of cultural but also genetic evolution is creating a new type of society.

> I am mix-race and it is stamped on me, in me, by my colour, sometimes a sword, sometimes a shield, sometimes a hindrance, a stone in my shoe. Maud and Noah are mixed-race as well. But not the visible mixed-race of the second-generation immigrant like me. We fret about our own adult and distinct experiences as 'non-white' in a white country, but what of my children who say that 'ethnicity' is not what troubles them, is not what they talk about in those lessons on 'self' that are bundled together under the curriculum title 'Personal, Social and Health Education.' That race and discrimination is not the priority at school. (201)

In London, nowadays, "complicated ethnicity is taken for granted."[392] and the collaboration of ethnically different Londoners as part of a single community is becoming part of the urban daily life, as the author narrates when telling about his daughter who volunteered for the National Citizen Service. It is a national project that brings seventeen-year-olds together and engages not only "in the adventurous – kayaking and rock-climbing - but in the socially useful, helping to clean parks in areas suffering deprivation."[393] Thanks to these projects teenagers with different ethnical and

[391] *Ibidem*,277
[392] *Ibidem.*
[393] *Ibidem*,256

cultural backgrounds worked together across West-London and came home invigorated.

As one of the best examples of "contact theory," working together generates partnership, affiliation, trust and enthusiasm. Besides, if the target of this work is the care of the city, which is their shared home, this leads to a process of appropriation that roots their identity in the urban environment even more. Thanks to these productive and evolutionary mechanisms, "'mixed-race', categorisations, 'communities' will become increasingly meaningless. The border between those 'in' and those 'out' will change."[394]

Besides, as the author points out,

> the proportion of people who can count themselves as an ethnic minority is expected to rise to nearly 40 per cent by 2050, raising the prospect that 'minority' will be a word facing redundancy for all of us black and brown and 'other' people. […] The out-group becomes the in-group, and that in-group is simply British, all the people who live on our small island. (290)

This is the new narration the author tries to insert in the London metacity. This is the recount of how the sharing of the same land, precisely of the same city, by people with a different ethnical background, is producing a new community, where the border between in-group and out-group is no longer race-based, but location-based: the city is the defining criteria. Indeed, the city, as a narrative dispositive, may be defined as a sort of "ontological dispositive:" a system which gives rise to culture and identity through its narrations, symbols, and also through the contact and relations it fosters.

[394] *Ibidem*,257

4. John Lanchester, *Capital*.

4.1 *Capital*: The novel and its theoretical background.

The third chapter explored the process of hybridization in London society and a new growing idea of Britishness. In this fourth chapter, the focus shifts to post-multicultural London seen as a huge economic machine and describes how the increasing commodification of the city has influenced the idea of community and citizenship by taking into account the relationships among inhabitants and those between inhabitants and the place where they live: a relationship profoundly characterised by obliviousness and disconnectedness.

The novel *Capital*[395] by the English journalist and novelist John Lanchester neither debates nor questions the multiethnic and transcultural dimensions of present-day London society, which appears as the natural and *de facto* background of London life. What John Lanchester challenges is the idea of geographical community, which is jeopardized by a consumeristic way of life and view of the city. How can integration and hybridization take place if there is no community to accommodate them and no urban setting that can be called home? Far from the domestic and reassuring idea of the city as home, Lanchester's London is the "capital," not only in the political sense but mainly in the economic sense as well: the city is a negotiable commodity, a vital part of a huge business machine.

"Lanchester's *Capital* examines the changing nature and use of London's domestic spaces in the XXI century leading up to the credit crunch, a new urban dream of property wealth through the residents and workers on a single suburban street."[396] The gentrification and social polarization of this fictitious road at the center of Lanchester's novel is a sharp criticism of the 'Wimbledonisation' of London, a process

[395] John Lanchester, *Capital*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

[396] Katy Shaw, "Capital City: London, Contemporary British Fiction and the Credit Crunch.", *The Literary London Journal*, Volume 11, Number 1 (Spring 2014): 44–53, 6. Online at http://www.literarylondon.org/london journal/spring2014/shaw.pdf, last accessed January 2020.

in which the property game becomes dominated by wealthy, foreign athletes[397]. In an observation on London, Douglas Hurd said, "It's Wimbledonisation. The fair play of the crowd and the skill of the groundsmen is a metaphor for the City. It's a fine place to work, but, just as foreign tennis players win Wimbledon, foreign banks and securities houses own a controlling interest in the City of London."[398] According to Lanchester, the term *Wimbledonisation*, which is often used to describe London's role as a seat for the world's top businesses and financial institutions,[399] well encompasses the sense of detachment, unfamiliarity and disenfranchisement typical of London today. Indeed, the author argues that the "malign influence of capital on the composition of London's residential zones results in residents who are more aware of the value of the buildings on the street than the community they inhabit."[400]

As a matter of fact, the residents of Pepys Road live on the same street but their lives are hermeneutically sealed off from one another as a result of an isolated urban experience. This is also structurally highlighted by the segmented narrative style of the novel that contains 107 short chapters, each dedicated to a single inhabitant whose path of life rarely crosses those of the others, thereby "foregrounding a missing sense of community and the dominance of superficial, product and appearance-based approaches to detached city living."[401] The author wonders:

> How little we have in common. How little people know their neighbours and politicians always speaking about community. In my experience in London life, community in that sense simply doesn't exist. People have work communities, family communities, they have communities of interest and affiliations, they have communities through internet, but not geographical communities.[402]

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[397] *Ibidem*, 9.

[398] https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/its-wimbledonisation-1290844.html, last accessed January 2020.

[399] https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2006/2883, last accessed January 2020.

[400] John Lanchester Interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUM2JyiJ9cs&t=73s, last accessed January 2020.

[401] *Ibidem.*

[402] *Ibidem.*

Lanchester's idea of community and his analysis of urban space seems to contradict sharply Kamal Ahmed's narration of London and the conception of the city as a sort of "ontological dispositive:" a system which gives rise to a new hybrid idea of Britishness through its narrations, symbols, and also through the contact and relations it fosters; as already seen in the third chapter. Indeed, Ahmed's narration presented the city as that constantly evolving cultural interface that provides space for transformations and reshaping. A space based on the universal and democratic idea of citizenship, a new evolving culture and social status generated by the every-day urban interactions and not imposed from higher up. In this sense the city appears as the birthplace of a community that can be transnational and transcultural; a place where the local and universal meet giving rise to new identities that escape neat ethnical and national categorization.

Another fundamental concept championed by Kamal Ahmed and apparently rejected by Lanchester is Gordon Allport's contact theory. In his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport suggests that a way to reduce prejudice and stereotyping is through contact.

> [Prejudice] may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by laws, customs, or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups isolation leaves the many sides involved in this debate shut up in their own dwellings, curtains closed, glowering behind their respective positions, entrenched in views that, because of their repetition with little external contradiction, become more embedded.[403]

Clearly the urban environment is the perfect place to create contact among its dwellers; there they share the same spaces such as neighbourhoods, streets, undergrounds, squares, and supermarkets, but it also provides them with the same kind of information or narration produced by newspapers, advertisements, cultural and political events, laws, and customs. All these elements provide physical and cultural contact and foster familiarity, empathy and openness.

[403] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 281

Besides, "the gain is greater if members regard themselves as part of a team"[404]and in order to be a team, people need to feel they all belong to something they all share - the city and its life - and they need to care about each other and what they share.

In Lanchester's *Capital*, real contact among inhabitants seems totally unattainable due to the lack of cultural and familiar bonds, which are not favoured by institutions and infrastructures. Indeed, the processes of commodification and gentrification of the city, which caused the living spaces of the city to transform into vastly inflated financial assets, completely modified the original and nurturing motherly role of the ancient city.

As a matter of fact, over the centuries the city seems to have lost its sacred and human value, which was its founding element in ancient times, when people were able to define the boundaries of their own identity, within urban boundaries, natural or artificial. Moreover, together with an increasing self-awareness, the assembly of people within an enclosed and fixed space also engendered the necessity to share a common morality, a common way of living according to rules that bound the inhabitants to one another. The city had an ontological, generative and nurturing role, so much so that the people of Mesopotamia believed that the city of Eridu was the birthplace of humanity instead of a place like the Garden of Eden;[405] and in Egyptian hieroglyphics, a house or town were also symbols for mother.[406] This life-giving nature of the city is also expressed by the etymology of the term "metropolis," which is the Latin compound of *meter* (mother) and *polis* (city/town). To emphasize this almost sacred role, necessary for the empowerment and defence of human and cultural dimensions, around the fifth century BC the forum ceased its activities as a marketplace and became a true square, almost according to the dictum of Aristotle, who was writing his *Politics* about this time. He wrote, "The public square [...] will never be sullied because entrance will be forbidden to merchants and artisans [...] The place destined as the market will be far away and well separated from it."[407]

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404 *Ibid*,247

405 Mark, J. J., "The Ancient City" in *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from https://www.ancient.eu/city, last access April 2019.

406 Lewis Mumford, *City in History*, (New York, London: Harvest Book, 1961)13.

407 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1982), 130.

The Industrial Revolution and the technical innovations of the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly regarding large-scale production and transport produced a significant break from the traditional idea of city, turning it into a "negotiable commodity." Industrial towns, whose generating agents were mines, factories and the railroad, were "dark hives, busily puffing, clanking, screeching, smoking for twelve and fourteen hours a day."[408]

During the 20th century, the increasing complexity and dimensions of metropoles, characterized by a core and wide fringes, generated new urban subjects born of the breach between dwellings and work places: the commuters. These new urban subjects typically move to city centres every day, "exploiting" the city just as a workplace. This phenomenon highly contributed to the process of commodification of urban spaces. There was also an increasing trend of depersonalization of the urban space because the city was no longer primarily the core place of one's roots and culture, but a commercial center. In 1950, there were only two megacities,[409] London and New York, with populations of more than 8 million. Tokyo joined them a decade later. This trio formed the core of what the sociologist Saskia Sassen called the "global cities" – urban centres that asserted their power not through empire but through economic influence. The wealth of the world passed through these cities – even if often only on paper – and they expanded rapidly as people crowded in for a share of the opportunity.[410]No longer were cities animated by an idea of community, sharing and commitment but by a philosophy of abundance founded on the unlimited resourcefulness of hard-working people with a Promethean drive that could lead to large-scale urban growth and expansion.[411]

One of the side effects of such transformation in the urban nature and dimension is the creation of the so-called "non-places,"as Mark Augè calls all those

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[408] Mumford, *City in History*, 446.

[409] The term "megacities," was originally coined in the 1970s to define urban settlements of eight million inhabitants or more, and later revised to ten million, https://www.mdpi.com/2078-1547/2/4/55/htm, last access April 2019.

[410] Edwin Heatchcote, "From Megacity To Metacity", *Financial Times*, https://www.ft.com/content/e388a076-38d6-11df-9998-00144feabdc0, last access April 2019.

[411] Jean Gottman, *Megalopolis. The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of The United States*. (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), 776.

transitory places like malls, hotels, restaurants, and offices cities are built on and shaped around, where individuals can easily hide within the crowd.[412] Zygmunt Bauman believes these non-spaces are the most typical features of post-modernity, because never before have these places occupied such a huge space.[413] In this condition, people form a mass but not a community and they experience urban spaces as something hostile to their identity and collective consciousness. What people get from this situation is an awareness of the irrelevance of the citizen within the city.[414] Consequently, the metropolis sets off a process of disenfranchisement of its inhabitants, who have been dispossessed and deprived of their performative power as citizens. Indeed, public institutions have been increasingly catering and adapting to economic interests and spillovers, determined by the class of the city users, no longer by the residents.[415]

City users and metropolitan businessmen, who live between cities and use the city for its services and economic power, are those new urban subjects, who use and occupy the city without belonging to it, without being committed to it and who are outside any social bonds: citizenship is no longer a value for them. In this respect, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, speaking of the depersonalization of urban centres, proposed the idea of transforming community into society: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies distinguishes between these two concepts by defining community (Gemeinschaft) as something related to people, personal contacts, face-to-face daily relationships, traditions, family ties and religion; whereas he describes society (Gesellschaft) as a contract among abstract subjects and impersonal organisations.[416]

The increasing depersonalisation of cities is also conveyed through the prevailing rhetoric of highness, which moves the competitiveness of financial markets to the city and establishes an authoritative vision of architecture according to which the highest building wins over lower ones, as well as the rich over the poor, the new

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412 Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall", in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space*, ed Michael Sorokin, (New York: The Nooday Press, 1992), 3-30.

413 Zygmunt. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge, Blackwell, 2000).

414 Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History*, (California: University of California Press,1998),117-118.

415 Guido Martinitti, *Sei Lezioni sulla Città*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2017), 115.

416 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

over the old. This process goes hand in hand with the speculation of urban spaces that transform the democratic idea of the *polis* into an elitist commodity. Therefore, a sort of strict correspondence has been created between big business and big buildings and this correspondence has transformed space into wares.[417]

Accordingly, the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre distinguishes between the city and "the urban." He held that the contemporary city is a capitalist city, which is merely an impoverished manifestation of the urban. Everything in the city, including space itself, ise reducible to economic exchange and a marketable commodity. In a struggle against the above-mentioned processes, Lefebvre introduced the slogan "right to the city" in his book *Le Droit à la Ville*. He sees the right to the city as a struggle against the alienation of urban space, which is stretching farther and farther away from the idea of *polis* – a place of social and political life. He talks about this de-alienation as a process of appropriation: a social need rooted in an anthropological basis.

According to Lefebvre, the act of appropriation is carried out by city dwellers who use city infrastructures and resources, inhabit public spaces and circulate around the streets. Through these actions, inhabitants make the city their own, they appropriate the public space through their use of it, and by doing so they simply exert their right to the city.[418] Therefore, appropriation is a right in the sense that inhabitants are endowed with a *de facto* normative right to space in the city. Accordingly, capitalist commodification of urban spaces, which brings about the logic of property rights, is actually an expropriation of what properly belongs to the inhabitants' community by arrogating the right to the city to property owners who own the land. Appropriation is thus a way to rethink the concept of rightful ownership, to transform radically our notions about who rightfully owns the city. Not only does this process refuse property rights as a concept of ownership, it affirms a radical alternative: the city belongs to those who inhabit it. Appropriation is thus closely linked to both de-alienation and self-management, to inhabitants making the spaces of the city their own again.[419] David

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[417] Salvatore Settis, *Architettura e Democrazia. Paesaggio, città, diritti civili*.,(Torino: Einaudi Editore, 2017), 145.

[418]Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville,* (Paris: Editions Anthropos 1968).

[419] Mark Purcell, "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre And the Right to The City", in *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 36.1,141-154, 145.

Harvey, Professor of Anthropology and Geography at the City University of New York, further explains 'right to the city' as follows: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city […] the freedom to make and remake our cities."[420] Therefore, he claims that the city crisis consists of a loss of its original value and a transformation into an exchange value, according to which urban space (both horizontal and vertical) is always for sale.

In order to fully represent this city crisis, John Lanchester decided to set his novel between 2007 and 2008, describing the pre-crunch and post-crunch phase that London experienced during the global financial crisis when the American company Lehman Brothers, among others, went bankrupt. His aim was to analyse people's lives and consciousness during that passage from boom to bust. Even though. There have always been boom and bust cycles over the centuries, people have always seemed to believe in a sort of eternal, ever growing wealth, in the aim of earning more and more. In particular, when the economic life of the city seems to be the deepest sense and identity of the city itself and its society, when things start to go bust, people seem to suffer from a sort of anxiety and a pervasive sense of fragility.

To depict this situation, Lanchester narrates the lives of the inhabitants of a single street that, through the stories of its houses and their owners, becomes symbolic of how the city has changed over the past twenty years. Spotlighting a pre-crunch period when house prices were central to the culture of liberal economies, Lanchester explicitly examines the power and problem of the home-as-asset and the isolation, disconnectedness and obliviousness of the inhabitants of the street, whose variety embodies the mixture of the Londoners' identities. They do not seem to share anything except the residential area and the haunting 'We Want What You Have' harassment campaign. Indeed, each of them receives several postcards with the picture of their own front door on one side and the sentence 'We Want What You Have' written on the back. Strangely enough, the arrival of the postcards does not produce any radical changes nor do they pose any existential questions about what the subject of such desire is and why. The significant turn in the story happens in 2008 during the post-

[420]David Harvey "The Right to the City", in *New Left Review*, Sept/Oct 2008: 23-40, 23. https://newleftreview.org/issues/II53/articles/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city.pdf, last accessed Jen. 2020.

crunch phase when their trust in the city as a perfect business machine fails. At that moment, a process of re-appropriation of the urban space by the inhabitants begins. People start to view the city as their home, as their chosen hybrid, transcultural place in which to form and base their own mixed family. The place where to be free.

4.2 The pre-crunch period.

Lanchester portrays the fictitious Pepys Road as a sort of microcosm that perfectly epitomizes the city of London, clearly stressing both its unprecedented condition of "super-diversity," to use Steven Vertovec's definition[421], and its development in the virtual realm with the birth of the so-called *Vernetzungshaft*, the society of nets, according to Ferdinand Toennes' definition[422]. The concept of super diversity addresses the new post-migration and post-multicultural London, where the urban environment is not only marked by increasing immigration but also by different types of migration, characterized by diasporic identification and transnationalism, by families with multiple ethnicities and individuals with multiple and hyphenated identities. Britain is therefore experiencing the transformative 'diversification of diversity' characterised by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade.[423] Lanchester explores London's super-diversity through his characters, who each provide a different and peculiar experience of the city; above all they provide a complex survey on how the city relates to each individual's identity.

Not only do Lanchester's characters inhabit the physical city but they also experience a virtual one. The virtual realm, which has multiplied exponentially in the wired metacity of the 21st century, consists of a technologically enhanced, socially-

[421] Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29 (6), 1024–54.

[422] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1963).

[423] Steven Vertovec, "The Emergence of Superdiversity In Britain", *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society*, 2006, n. 25.

networked space that provides new forms of collective human agency and intelligence. In a metacity, the spatial units or patches appear as neighbourhoods and districts. This process of sublimation and dematerialization of the metropolis has turned the city into an intangible and immaterial space created by media, which were able to overcome the geographical limits of the city itself.

Notwithstanding this enhanced urban space, Lanchester presents the failure of any possibility for cohesiveness among the inhabitants of his fictitious road. Challenging the idea of neighbourhood as a cohesive element for a community, he introduces a new idea of ghettoization.

Several modern studies warned against the danger of social and residential ghettoization that destroys people's sense of mutual obligations and their desire to contribute to the welfare state, undermining social relations and socioeconomic mobility and therefore opening up ground for social conflicts and extremism. In *Capital*, Lanchester shows how the process of ghettoization may actually be applied not only to cultural and ethnical communities locked into geographical spaces, but also to "virtual communities" and single persons locked in their individuality and disconnectedness. In the case of Pepys Road, each house seems like a gated and isolated entity.

4.2.1 Pepys Road

The scope of Lanchester's narration begins with the evolution of Pepys Road over time, starting with an odd sentence: "The name of the place where he was filming was Pepys Road."[424] Lanchester immediately draws the reader's attention to the double dimensions of the street - the physical and virtual ones. This sort of Google street-view-like description puts the road into a broader virtual realm that supersedes the physical limits of the street and immediately transforms it into the metonymy of the city itself.

Tracing back the origins of Pepys Road, Lanchester narrates that

[424] John Lanchester, *Capital*, 1

> For the first years they were lived in not by solicitors or barristers or doctors, but by people who worked or clerked for them: the respectable, aspirational no-longer-poor. Over the next decades, the demographics of the street wobbled up and down in age, up and down in class, as it became more or less popular with upwardly mobile young families, and as the area did well or less well. [...] The area was bombed in the Second World War [...] The gap stayed there for years, like a pair of missing front teeth, until a new property with balconies and French windows, looking very strange amid the Victorian architecture, was built there in the fifties. During that decade, four houses in the street were lived in by families recently arrived from the Caribbean; the fathers all worked for London Transport. (2)

The transformation of the streets evokes the historical, social and ethnical evolution of London society. People living there were those for whom the houses had been built - the "no-longer-poor." The homogeneity of the neighbourhood seemed to be continued even when some Caribbean families settled there. Indeed, the author states that, "Fathers all worked for London Transport." Therefore, even Caribbean families belonged to that working community integrated in the national system of services. They were not simply immigrants, or "invaders" or refugees; they were quite like their neighbours and seemed to have a similar identity - the "no longer poor" neighbour.

> It would be hard to put your finger on the exact point when Pepys Road began its climb up the economic ladder. A conventional answer would be to say that it tracked the change in Britain's prosperity, emerging from the dowdy chrysalis of the late 1970s and transforming itself into a vulgar, loud butterfly of the Thatcher decades and the long boom that followed them. [...] As house prices slowly rose, the working classes, indigenous and immigrant, cashed in and moved out, usually looking to find bigger houses in quieter places, with neighbours like themselves. The new arrivals were families in which both parents worked, and the children were in childcare either in the home or out of it. (3)

"Vulgar loud butterfly," the metaphorical description of the street's change during the Thatcher years, clearly foretells the negative consequences of the higher house prices - older families moved out and new families moved in. The fact that these new families had both parents working and children often out in childcare clearly depicts a

sort of "depletion" of the neighbourhood, whose houses stayed empty for most of the day.

"The movement into a formerly deteriorating community by middle-class or affluent residents […] which displaced earlier, usually poorer residents"[425] is technically called "gentrification." This process implies the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood). This is what actually happened in Pepys Road: "There were builders in the street, all the time, servicing the houses, doing up lofts and kitchens and knocking through and adding on, and there was always at least one skip parked in the street, and at least one set of scaffolding. The new craze was for doing up basements and turning them into rooms-kitchens, playrooms, utility rooms." (p. 6) This gentrification of residential urban spaces carried out by wealthier residents raised property values; and this not only led to the eviction of former residents, but also transformed neighbourhoods into new sites of social and political meaning, a sort of business districts.

> People began to do up the houses, not in the ad hoc way of previous decades but with systematic make-overs in the knocking-through, open-plan style that became fashionable in the seventies and never really went away. People converted their lofts; when the council veered to the left in the 1980s and stopped giving permission for that, a group of residents banded together and fought a test case for the right to expand their houses upwards, and won it. (3)

Lanchester also introduces in Pepys Road the prevailing issue of highness, moves the competiveness of financial markets to residential areas and establishes an authoritative vision of architecture, according to which the highest, that is, the most costly, wins. Traditionally, the physical and metaphorical increase in skyscrapers in London was a sign of economic growth and business expansion in the city. Indeed, skyscrapers are synonymous with offices, financial and legal services, together with recreational facilities addressed to rich consumers. Reflecting on the rush to build ever-taller buildings in London, Lanchester argues that:

[425]https://www.forbes.com/sites/petesaunders1/2016/08/29/understanding-gentrification/#2457fd2035ec., last accessed April 2020.

> These buildings […] are almost their own brand. Lorenzo Piano's Shard. Or what's known as the Gherkin, the Erotic Gherkin, a Norman Foster building which does look indeed like half a gherkin, half a penis, 40 stories high […] They're better without the humans. And when you interact with them you feel like one of those tiny model figures in an architect's diagram, and you're meant to. So there is an anti-humanistic aspect to those guys' buildings, and I think that's the kind of thing we'll look back on and say: oh well, that sums up that period.[426]

Lanchester defines skyscrapers and huge buildings as anti-humanistic. Indeed, these gigantic buildings are more and less observable. In fact,

> the mind does not get its impression of a skyscraper through the eye in a direct, effortless way, but from a laborious assembly of remembered parts - a portion of façade at the end of a street, the close-up of an ostensibly supporting base, the crest of a tower balanced five hundred or a thousand feet directly above one's head.[427]

London, like many other modern cities, overcame human dimension, because the focus of urban planning was no longer on the social necessities of the community but on the search for continuous growth. Indeed,

> As an architectural statement on prosperity visualised on the skyline, the skyscraper represents both the literal and metaphorical 'height' of the financial sector in 2007. Products of an economy of space but also symbols of economic power, skyscrapers define the identity and status of London as a global economic player. The semiotic capacity of the constructions Lanchester describes 'sum up' the pre-crunch period, representing not only the physical dominance of the financial sector over the skyline of London, but also of the global ideological reach of capitalism at the start of the 21st century.[428]

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[426] Lanchester, "*Capital*: London in an Age of Inequality." Radio Open Source. 10 Feb. 2014, http://radioopensource.org/john-lanchesters-capital-london-in-the-age-of-inequality, last accessed January 2020.

[427] John Irwin Bright, The City, *The American Magazine of Art*, 2, 1932, pp. 139-142, 140.

[428] Katy Shaw, "Capital City: London, Contemporary British Fiction and the Credit Crunch." *The Literary London Journal*, Volume 11, Number 1 (Spring 2014): 44–53, 46.

The fact that this ideological reach of capitalism, this rhetoric of highness, is not only present in the financial area of the city but also in the residential Pepys Road is quite significant. It is an eloquent message Lanchester sends about the dehumanization of the city.

> All this was part of a big change in the nature of Pepys Road [..] For the first time in history, the people who lived on the street were, by global and maybe even by local standards, rich. The thing which made them rich was the very fact that they lived in Pepys Road. They were rich simply because of that, because all of the houses in Pepys Road, as if by magic, were now worth millions of pounds. This caused a strange reversal. For most of its history, the street was lived in by more or less the kind of people it was built for: the aspiring not-too-well-off. They were happy to live there, and living there was part of a busy and determined attempt to do better, to make a good life for themselves and their families. But the houses were the backdrop to their lives. They were an important part of life but they were a set where events took place, rather than the principal characters. Now, however, the houses had become so valuable to people who already lived in them, and so expensive for people who had recently moved into them, that they had become central actors in their own right. (5)

As a further outcome of the process of gentrification, commodification and dehumanisation of the city and that road, Lanchester points out another overturning of values: houses are no longer the backdrop for people's lives but the protagonists, what people strive, work and sometimes struggle for. Houses are no longer places for families but investments, profitable business, capital assets.

> This happened at first slowly, gradually, as average process crept up through the lower hundred thousands, and then, as people from the financial industry discovered the area, and house prices in general began to rise sharply, and people began to be paid huge bonuses, bonuses that were three of four times their national average salary, and a general climate of hysteria affected everything to do with those prices - then, suddenly, prices began to go up so quickly that it was as if they had a will of their own. (5)

Houses were the beneficiaries of the huge bonuses rich people belonging to the financial industry started to receive. This also means that being able to buy such expensive houses was an indicator of the owner's economic power and consequently

social position. Therefore, in a sense, houses began to become those necessary masks that allowed people to be recognised in society as belonging to a certain social class.

> As the houses had got more expensive, it was as if they had come alive and had wishes and needs of their own. Vans from Berry Brothers and Rudd brought wine; there were two different vans of dog-walkers; there were florists, amazon parcels, personal trainers, cleaners, plumbers, yoga teachers, and all day long, all of them going up to them. There was laundry, there was dry-cleaning, there were FedEx, UPS deliveries, there were dog beds, print ribbons, garden chairs, vintage film posters, same-day DVD purchases [...] The houses were now like people, and rich people at that, imperious, with needs of their own that they were not shy about having serviced. (6)

Not only did the houses become the protagonists of Pepys Road, but, as a result of this, they were also serviced. The presence of vans and several kinds of services populating the street in order to satisfy the needs of the houses, transforms the street into a pivotal commercial sentence, much more similar to an area of malls or hotels than residential houses. It is so that a residential neighbourhood became a transitory place, very similar to those non-places described by Marc Augè, and very far from the idea of home. Indeed,

> Having a house in Pepys Road was like being in a casino in which you were guaranteed to be a winner. If you already lived there, you were rich. If you wanted to move there, you had to be rich. It was the first time in history this had ever been true. Britain had become a country of winners and losers, and all the people in the street, just by living there, had won. And the young man on the summer morning moved along the road, filming this street full of winners. (7)

Together with the idea of neighbour as a cohesive entity, and home as the place of family, the idea of community disappeared. Indeed, there was no longer a possibility for mutual help, sharing of values and commitment in Pepys Road, but just for competition and a distinction between winners and losers.

4.2.2 The inhabitants of Pepys Road.

PETUNIA HOWE

At number 42 lives Petunia Howe, an 82-year-old woman, the oldest person living on the street and the only person left on the street who was actually born there. Lanchester starts the mapping of Pepys Road residents by introducing the only person that embodies not only the story and the origins of Pepys Road but also the last sign of a dying community.

> Petunia was the oldest person living in Pepys Road, and the last person to have been born in the street and still be resident there. But her connection with the place went back further than that, because her grandfather had bought their house 'off the plan', before it was even built. (11)

Petunia seems to be the only person to have connections, not only with the street and its history, but also with her neighbours. Indeed, if other people's lives barely touch, she seems to create a sort of familiar atmosphere around her. Lanchester describes two particular episodes. The first, when Petunia suffers a sudden illness while in the shop of the Pakistani Ahmed Kamal.

> Ahmed [...] did seem to know her, because as he bent down to help, he said, 'Mrs Howe!' 'I'm all right, dear,' said the old lady, not sounding the least bit all right. […] 'Don't trouble yourself. Wobbly for a second but I'm fine. Right as rain!' 'Take your time,' said Ahmed. 'Sit for a moment.' He sat beside her. […] 'I'm going to help Mrs Howe home,' said Ahmed, coming behind the counter to pick up his jacket. 'She's just around the corner. Back in five. (49)

Ahmed's reaction seems not only to be simply kind, but also friendly and affectionate. He immediately worries about Mrs Howe's condition and takes care of her. He walks her home and makes sure she is safe. This ever-more-rare human gesture, a glimpse of the original nature of what a community used to be – caring, thoughtfulness and helpfulness - makes the absence of this kind of relationship among the street's inhabitants more obvious to the reader.

The second episode that describes a sort of community, or communal bond, regards Mrs. Howe's funeral. Lanchester describes the scene through the eyes of Mrs. Howe's daughter, who doesn't live in Pepy's Road:

> 'I'm so sorry' is what people mainly said, or sometimes 'I am sorry for your loss.' The Indian newsagent, whom Mary was surprised and pleased to see, said that, so did the man down the street whose name she didn't know, who'd been smiley and friendly; so did the two Albert's old colleagues who came. Greatly to Mary's surprise, so did the Polish builder who had come to the house to give a quote for renovations. (360)

The empathy and emotional involvement perceived by Mrs Howe's daughter seems to be the last feeble sign of a dying community which is about to disappear together with the last person who had experienced the street when it was not a negotiable commodity. In this sense, the character of Mrs Howe is the critical eye able to recognize how the city has been dehumanized. She sometimes feels like an alien, in a city that seems to be more focused on business than on people. She experiences a sense of dismay and detachment, particularly when she is forced to leave Pepys Road to go to the doctor and to the hospital. In the first case,

> Although Petunia was not a grumbler and a complainer-about-modern-life [...] there was nothing much about her doctor that she liked. For one thing, she did not like that it wasn't really her doctor at all – there wasn't such a person as her GP. […] There was something diminishing and impersonal about that and it certainly did not reduce the amount of time that the doctor would spend looking at the computer screen and reading about her, as opposed to looking at her and listening to what she had to say. Petunia disliked feeling such an alien, such an exotic, sitting here in the surgery, where everyone was in Lycra, or crop tops, or T-shirts, or texting, or nodding to just-audible music, or wearing headscarves (two women) or in full concealing hijab (one) or speaking Eastern European languages to each other or over their mobiles. We're all in this together: Petunia was the right age for that once to have been a very important idea, a defining idea, about what it meant to be British. Was it still true? Were they in it together? Could she look around the surgery and truthfully say that? (61-62)

Petunia's look describes that place, the surgery, which should be reassuring and familiar, but is actually a non-place. It seems to be a transitory place where the doctor

does not know her, he is not even her doctor, he does not pay attention to her but he is focused on the computer. People in the waiting room do not interact with each other but are wrapped up in their personal and isolated world. People are trapped in a sort of ghettoization that keeps them from behaving like a community. Petunia wonders if her idea of Britishness could still be true. But her rhetorical question seems to imply an issue broader than a simple ethnical or racial question. Indeed, strangely enough, while she lists all those things that make her feel like an alien, she pulls together the women with the headscarves and the people in Lycra, crop tops or those listening to audible music. Besides, when she wonders whether her idea of Britishness is still true or not, she also asks the question "Are they in it together?" Petunia's ultimate concern is not about the increasing rate of immigration or a growing transcultural society, but whether those people will still form a social community or not. The level of separation is so high that not even sharing the same place is able to make people really meet and be together. The problem of a dehumanized society seems to be the first problem, the first urgent issue people should debate, even before integration, post-multicultural policies or transnational identities, because the presence of a community is the essential and unavoidable precondition.

When Petunia has to go to the hospital, not only does she have to cope with a dehumanized and segregated urban atmosphere, but she has to deal with the inhuman dimensions of the hospital, which is a skyscraper.

> When she got there , having tried to be stoical, it was much worse than she had imagined, because the skyscraper forecourt of the hospital suffered from a wind-tunnel effect. There was a genuine gale force wind raging across the piazza, carrying near-horizontal rain into the chaos of ambulances and taxis and patients and visitors and wheelchairs. Every other person seemed to have a clear idea of where they were going and how to get there, a keen sense of their own rightness about the need to get there in a hurry, which was daunting for Petunia who had none of those things except an awareness that she needed to find the lifts and get to the eighteenth floor. The first lift had a huge crowd outside it. Petunia couldn't get in. For the second lift, she was closer to the front of the queue, but some people overtook and got in first and then a man with a wheelchair and a leg in plaster said 'Excuse me' and went in front of her and then there was no more room. She did manage to get in the third lift, because a nurse took pity on her and created a space by holding her arm in front of the door so Petunia could slip past. (116-117)

The image of the lift doors closing in front of Petunia and leaving her out is a clear metaphor of the competitiveness of a capitalist society. Even the hospital, which should be one of the urban places more focused on people and their needs, is actually inconvenient, confusing and not easily accessible. It seems rather the architectural statement of London prosperity and economic power.

Even though Petunia seems to be the only one to escape the progressive human aridity produced by the commodification of the city, she receives the mysterious "We Want What You Have" card as well. "She bent over, again carefully, and picked it up. The card was a photograph of 42 Pepys Road, her own house. She turned it over. There was no signature on the card, only a typed message. It said, 'We Want What You Have.' That made Petunia smile. Why on earth would anybody want what she had?"[429] Petunia's reaction again shows her unrelatedness to the general trend of a hysterical attachment to properties and assets. When Petunia speaks with Ahmed Kamal on the way home after fainting in his shop, she remarks, "When you're my age, nobody wants what you have." Ahmed had laughed, but "her question lingers throughout the pages of this nuanced portrait of a country in flux. What does anyone on Pepys Road possess that can be defended? And what can anyone, anywhere, be sure of in an age when "safe as houses" has lost all its meaning?"[430]

ROGER AND ARABELLA YOUNT

The Yount family lives at 51 Pepys Road just across the road from Petunia's house. Roger Yount is just 40 and works in a bank in the City and he is incredibly preoccupied with getting his next £1m bonus to cover the debts incurred by his appalling wife Arabella. They have two children and a Spanish and a Hungarian nanny. The Younts specifically represent those new residents who took part in the gentrification process of Pepys Road. They embody the typical stereotype of the rich and never satisfied

[429] Lanchester, *Capital*, 14

[430] Liesl Schillinger, "This Is London 'Capital,' a Novel by John Lanchester", *New York Times*, July 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/books/review/capital-a-novel-by-john-lanchester.html, last accessed January 2020.

family. Particularly Arabella, who is busy trying to be the social ideal of the rich woman. Indeed, describing her typical day, Lanchester narrates that

> She was looking after her two lovely children, Joshua and Conrad; she was shopping for clothes over the internet; and she was making plans to give her husband a nasty fright. Two of those tasks Arabella had subcontracted to other people. The shelves were being put up by her Pole, Bogdan the builder. […] He worked twice as hard as a British worker, was twice as reliable and cost half as much. Something similar could be said about Pilar, their Spanish nanny, who was looking after her two boys, Conrad and Joshua. Arabella had got Pilar through an agency. She had a qualification in childcare (in fact she had a degree. (41)

Arabella looks more like an employer or the manager of her house than a wife and mother. The house looks more like an office where everyone is hired for a different job than a home. The only trace of human interaction is represented by the friendly relationship between the nanny and Arabella's sons. "Conrad and Joshua positively doted on Pilar. They loved the games she made up for them, the Spanish nursery rhymes she taught them, and her willingness to submit to local custom." (42)

This unique example of human bond gives us a glimpse of what the effects of a real human community could be: cultural contamination and mutual enrichment. Arabella's nature as the perfect capitalist and never-satisfied woman, urged by a Promethean drive to obtain more money and more expensive houses is perfectly revealed by her reaction to the "We Want What You Have" postcard.

> Arabella noticed the postcard carried a second-class stamp. The printed text on the card said, 'We want what you have.' The postcard was a photograph of their front door. It must be a viral ad thing. There would be a follow-up and then another card finally revealing the point of the exercise. Some semi criminal estate agent confessed to a wish to sell her home for her. Arabella took the catalogues and the card upstairs, the catalogues to read and the card to keep for the rainy day when they decided to sell up and go somewhere bigger. (46)

Arabella appears to be perfectly accustomed to almost illegal and violent rules of the real estate market and above all she is well trained to play according to the same rules,

almost being thrilled to be part of the great capitalist life of London. The same enthusiasm was shared by Roger's deputy, who reflected on London life.

> Middle class mediocrity. Suburban mediocrity. A culture that openly worships the average. A society which allows the idea of the elite to exist only in relation to sport. A culture of lazy people who eat in the street, people who betray their ordinariness every time they open their mouths. The City of London is one of the few places in which this tyranny of the mediocre, the mean, the average, the banal, the ordinary, the complacent is challenged. The City is one of the few places in which you are allowed to be extraordinary. No. It was better than that. The City is one of the only places in which you are invited to demonstrate that you are extraordinary. It did not matter what you claimed; claiming to be this or that meant nothing. Claiming has no effect. You have to show it. (192)

This was the new spirit of the commercial and financial London, where it was no longer important who you were, what the values shared by people were, if you were integrated into a community or not, but what you could produce, what you could demonstrate to the market. This is exactly what Petunia pointed out when she wondered whether her idea of Britishness was still true. The answer seems to be: It has been replaced by the culture of the product and financial growth.

Differently from his wife, Roger soon began to hate those cards.

> They were starting to seriously get into his head and mess with it. He felt surveilled, watched over with ill intent. He felt envied, but not in the reassuring, warming way in which he quite liked being envied. The thought of other people wishing they had your level of material affluence was an idea you could sit in front of, like a hearth fire. But this wasn't like that. This was more like having someone keeping an eye on you and secretly wishing you ill. p. 278

In the post-modern competitive urban society even being envied can be reassuring and warming, as if it were the prove of one's success and importance within what could be called the "urban market." Yet, Roger perceives a sort of evil intent in the "We Want What You Have" postcards. Maybe because it was not a general message, addressing Roger's social position, but a more specific one aiming at Roger's house, that is his private space within the city, the place

that is the barrier between the competitive society and his life, family, and metaphorically speaking, his inner self. Thus, Roger's reaction can be considered a little crack in the impersonal consumerist urban logic described by Lanchester, which considers houses and the city itself simply as an asset, as a part of a huge economic machine.

AHMED, USMAN AND SHAHID KAMAL

Ahmed's family embodies the increasing transcultural nature of the post-multicultural London society, which is giving rise to a new transnational Britishness based on urban membership, on the sharing of democratic values, but also of symbols and customs, as Kamahl Ahmed depicted in his "Life and Times of a Very British Man." Ahmed's brothers, far from corresponding to Powell's stereotype of the monstrous stranger typically lazy, ignorant and distant from the British values of hard work and civilization, are described by Lanchester as perfectly integrated not only into London ways of life, but also into London education and culture. For instance, Usman was studying for an engineering doctorate and Shahid had been offered a place at Cambridge to read physics. Similarly, Ahmed, the shop owner at number 68 of Pepys Road, perfectly epitomizes the typical Londoner busy in taking part in the economic life of the city: an active actor of the new identity of the city seen as a huge market.

> Ahmed loved his shop, loved the profusion of it, the sheer amount of stuff in the narrow space and the sense of security it gave him- "The Daily Mail" and "The Daily Telegraph" and "The Men's Home Journal" and "Heat" and "Hello!" and "The Beano and Cosmopolitan" - the crazy proliferation of print, the dozens of baked beans and white bread and Marmite and Pot Noodles and the bin-liners and tinfoil and toothpaste and batteries [...] and the credit card machine and the Transport for London card-charging device and the Lottery terminal - it all felt snug and cosy and safe, his very own space, and never more so than first thing in the morning when the shop was his alone. Mine, he thought, all mine. (31)

The presence of the credit card machine, a Lottery terminal, and a Transport for London card-charging device shows that Ahmed's shop is part of the network of London services, therefore he is part of the inner workings of the urban system. Besides, he completely shares the taste for property ownership, which is clear when

Lanchester's underlines how Ahmed feels at home in his shop perceiving that it is "his very own space." The emphasis on this feeling of belonging to a business rather than to the city, or to a community, is quite significant in remarking how the commodification of the city has influenced the relation between inhabitants and their living place, and consequently, the integration process and the birth of a new transcultural community able to be the "new British community". Indeed, the urban transformation from the place for human interaction and cultural growth into an asset which needs to be invested leads to a pervasive rootlessness which impedes people to feel the city as their home and as a significant part of their identity.

Besides, the various English newspaper and magazine titles, purposely listed by Lanchester, clearly highlight the businessman Ahmed is a cog in the huge mechanism of London as a narrative or verbal dispositive, as Alberto Abruzzese defines it,[431] which produces narrations, symbols, images, concepts and practices. The city can be seen as "an immense communicative machine that imposes its own literary work through the most varied forms of medium,"[432] including internet. It is not by chance that Lanchester-chose to describe Shahid, Ahmed's brother, as a websites maker. By doing so, Lanchester makes Pepys Road live not only in the physical dimension of the London market but also in the virtual and narrative dimension of London meta-city, meant as a virtual meta-infrastructure[433] hosting and producing modern narrative forms potentially able to affect the lives, culture and sensibility of both long-time residents, who struggle to adapt to an ever-changing society and newcomers, strive to find their place and role in order to become part of the urban environment. Both require narrations to orient themselves. Interestingly enough, according to Lancheser's depiction on the city as a capital, the process of orientation triggered by the contemporary urban narrative system seems not be focused on the growth and development of the transnational urban community, but on helping the individuals to orient themselves in the urban market, just as actors of a huge financial system.

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431 Alberto Abruzzese, "Introduction," in Valeria Giordano (ed.), *Linguaggi della Metropoli*, (Napoli: Liguori, 2002).

432 "The City as a Narrative Dispositive," *Unità di Crisi. Observatory on Politics of Representation*, http://www.unitadicrisi.org/the-city-as-a-narrative-dispositive/, last accessed January 2020.

433 McGrath, B. and S. T. A. Pickett, "The Metacity: a Conceptual Framework for Integrating Ecology and Urban Design", in *Challenges* 2: 2011, 55-72.

QUENTINA

Another pivotal character in Lanchester's book *Capital* is not a resident, but she is still the most unpopular woman in Pepys Road. She is

> Quentina Mfkesi, BSc, MSc (Political Science, University of Zimbabwe, thesis subject: Post-conflict Resolution in Non-Post-Colonial Societies, with special reference to Northern Ireland, Spain and Chile), was on the lookout for non-residents parked in residents' parking areas, for business permit holders parked in residents' areas and vice versa, for expired permits of both types, for people who had overstayed their paid parking or- and this was a particularly fruitful issue in Pepys Road- for people who had misinterpreted the parking signs. (51)

Quentina is one of those complex identities that are part of London's super-diversity, according to Steven Vertovek's definition. Indeed, despite the initial description, she is a well-educated immigrant forced to accept any available job, a traffic warden in this case, in order to survive. Lancester lets us discover her personal and dramatic story, going beyond stereotypes and prejudices. She was a political refugee:

> In Harare in the summer of 2003 she had been arrested, interrogated, beaten, released by the police, snatched by goons on her way home, taken to a house, told that she had seventy hours to leave the country, then beaten and left by the roadside. After being treated in hospital she had been smuggled out of the country by missionaries, and came to England on a student visa which she had always intended to overstay. To make a long story short, she had overstayed on purpose, applied for asylum, been rejected, been arrested and sentenced to deportation, but the judge at the final appeal had ruled that she could not be sent back to Zimbabwe because there were grounds for thinking that if she was, she would be killed. At that point Quentina had entered a legal state of semi-existence. She had no right to work and could claim only subsistence-level benefits, but she couldn't be imprisoned and deported. She was not a citizen of the UK but she could not go anywhere else. She was a non-person. The Limbo state in which she was supposed to live did not correspond with reality: she had no right to do the things she needed to do to stay sane and solvent. [...] "Quentina found that she had no ability to do nothing all day and that sitting around the house, and not having any disposable income of her own, gave her acute claustrophobia – a sense of being trapped, powerless, inside her own head. This was

> made worse by the fact that she was, in actuality, genuinely powerless, with no ability to affect her own destiny in any of the relevant important ways. So she decided that she would have to do something with her days, would have to work, in order not to go insane. (133)

Quentina defines herself as a non-person. Because of her situation of semi-existence, she has no right to work or do things to stay "sane and solvent." She is not able to pay for her presence within London society; she has no income and consequently no economic power. Not only does this powerlessness make her invisible in London society, but it traps her in a condition where she is no one, because she can't determine her own destiny. She cannot be a social and *legal persona* until she wears the uniform of the control service society. Indeed, even though she must give part of her income to an African man who helped her to get the traffic warden job, thanks to "the friend of a friend of one of his friends", that job allows her to be socially recognized. Not only does she have a role in the community, but she is also feared, because through her job she has the power to affect inhabitants' properties - their cars and money.

Through Quentina's eyes Lanchester provides us with another, yet very similar, perspective of London to confirm the already clear image of a detached and dehumanized society. Quentina's portrayal of London appears particularly striking, since it is set during the Christmas period.

> On Friday the 21st at five o'clock, [...] London was full of pre-Christmas bustle, which Quentina approved of: in a place where there was so little natural brightness and colour, it was good to create it through neon and optic fibre and shop windows and Christmas trees. Quentina was still wearing her uniform; she was in a hurry and didn't want to change. As it was dark, she didn't trust the trip straight across the Common. […] The pub on the Common was already busy, people knocking off early to have a couple of pre-Christmas drinks.[...] she got past Balham, she cut left-right-left through domestic streets, Christmas wreaths on the doors and lights on, trees lit up too, this domestic version of London looking warmer and more welcoming than the city actually was. It looked cosy, like TV Dickens, whereas the real place was cold and disconnected. Quentina found that she liked the softening illusion. (129-130)

Walking through London, Quentina clearly perceives that Christmas gives a softening illusion to London. It is an artificial light that makes the city feel more familiar, more welcoming and warmer than it actually is. Indeed, according to Quentina's experience, and she has a close connection to London streets, the urban atmosphere is actually cold and detached. The reference to Dicken's stories seems to emphasize this sense of disillusionment. Indeed, if in Dickens' novels all the greyness and the inhuman laws of industrial London come to be "saved" and enlightened by the human relations and love in the end, Lanchester's London seems hopeless because it lacks a real human community, where people take care of each other.

MICKEY- MICHAEL LIPTON

The character of Mickey Lipton, the owner of 27 Pepys Road, "a factotum, fixer and odd-job man for a Premiership football club"[434] embodies the perfect example not only of the ongoing process of desertification that London is undergoing, but also of the dangerous speculative trend in the housing market. Indeed, he does not live in Pepys Road but the house was simply an investment property.

According to David Harvey, from the 1990 onward, capitalism is increasingly dependent upon a very rapid process of urbanization. Planetary urbanization is becoming one of the capital central strategies of development, a way to invest and money and make them profitable. According to this logic, capitalism is rebuilding and remaking the kind of city that the capital wants and needs. Capitalism has no interest in building cities for people but for profit, by shaping the kind of city the rich people want to live in. Capitalism builds high value housing for a limited market: in fact a lot of capital buildings are not actually lived in, they are considered investments and bought as speculation, not as a place to inhabit. London is essentially priced out of the market in terms of available housing for the mass of the population. There is a tremendous shortage of affordable and decent houses for the large amount of people and an overproduction of speculative property for the rich. There has been a scandal recently of one road in London with many mansions on it and when somebody enquired if anybody was living in there it turned out they were all empty. The result is that cities have been used over and over again for this endless capitalistic accumulation.

[434] Lanchester, *Capital*, 55

It represents an insane form of urbanization in which the mass of the people have nowhere to live.[435]

Perfectly matching Harvey's analysis, Mickey is one of those proprietors responsible for the gentrification of Pepys Road and, above all, for the desertification and the emptiness of the road. Indeed, his house-investment wasn't a home for anybody, no one lived there, it was like a sort of symbolic hole within the human community of Pepys road. By depicting Mickey's character and his speculative relation with Pepys Road, Lanchester masterfully brings to the fore one of the most dangerous trends of the contemporary urban environment: the increasingly disempowerment of the urban residential space, which rather than being the place of daily social interaction, familiarity and human sharing, becomes the hostage to a financial market which needs more and more room to grow.

PATRICK AND FREDRICK KAMO

Lanchester uses Patrick and Fredrik Kamo's impressions of London as two other filters through which the reader can dive into the London atmosphere. Tracing back the reference to a sort of google street-view-like experience evoked in the first introductive sentence of the novel, the different perspectives of London Lanchester provides the reader with are similar to the three hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the programme which allows users to enjoy an interactive panorama. In this case, the reader is brought around London thanks to Patrick's wandering around the city. This is not a totally neutral experience, though. Indeed, Patrick's perspective of London, as a foreigner with an outside perspective, helps the reader to notice even those things that may seem natural or meaningless.

> When he got to King's Cross Avenue, he discovered the reason: the helicopter was parked in the middle of the road, with two police cars either side of it, lights flashing. He had heard of this but never seen it, the Air Ambulance. An Asian police officer stood behind a cordon and allowed pedestrians past. There was a white van, askew across two lanes of the road, and a glimpse of something wedged under its front wheels; from the stoops and

[435] David Harvey, 2005 conference on "the right to the city.", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjyLWMSZ2nY, last accessed January 2020.

> frowns of the men around it, something was caught up in something else. A bicycle. Its rider could not have survived. This was a rich country, why would anyone choose to ride a bicycle? (230)

The dangerous nature of the city is revealed through Patrick's eyes. The roads, traffic, and fast pace of city life do not seem to be totally manageable by its inhabitants, who sometimes get submerged by such urban chaos, like the man on the bicycle. In this sense, the city was no longer the safe place where people could orient themselves and not feel lost, whose limits helped inhabitants to define their own identity; but it was a sort of independent, breathing being that imposed frenetic and inhuman rhythms on its residents. This was very clear to Patrick when, the following day, Patrick decides to get in touch with the city personally and he took a walk around the city.

> He went north-east, towards Stockwell, past people speaking a language he took time to realise was Portuguese, past busy roads and housing estates which looked like places he would not want to live. [...] The effect of his long solo foot trips through the city wasn't to make him suddenly love London, but he began to feel that he understood it a little better – understood where things were, understood the rhythm of the city. Patrick realised that what was disconcerting for him was the impression of everybody being busy all the time. People always seemed to be doing things. Even when they weren't doing anything, they were walking dogs, or going to betting shops, or reading newspapers at the bus stops, or listening to music through headphones, or skateboarding along the pavement, or eating fast food as they walked along the street – so even when they weren't doing things, they were doing things. (230-231)

Patrick would not like to live in London, in a place where there is no place for a 'human' community, because everyone seems to be constantly busy. Everyone seems to feel the necessity to demonstrate that they can be more and more productive, as if they had to obey an urban diktat.

On the other hand, Freddy got a completely different feeling while still observing the same things Patrick noticed. Indeed, according to the young football star,

> London was so rich, and also so green, and somehow so detailed: full of stuff that had been made, and bought, and placed, and groomed, and shaped, and washed clean, and put on display, behaving as if they were expecting to be looked at, as if they were on show: so many of them seemed to be wearing costumes, not just policemen and firemen and waiters and shop assistants, but people in their going to work costumes, their I'm-a-mother-pushing-a-pram costumes, babies and children in outfits that were like costumes; workers digging holes in their costume-bright orange vests; joggers in jogging costume; even the drinkers in the streets and parks, even the beggars, seemed to be wearing costumes, uniforms. Freddy thought it was delightful, every bit of it. (277)

Through Fredrick's descriptions, the reader can easily perceive the pleasure of someone who is enjoying the city like a sort of fun fair, with no real intentions of getting involved in the city's life and culture. Even here, the city seems devoid of any human or cultural value. It is just an instrument through which Fredrick can see his dream come true.

ZBIGNIEW – POLISH BUILDER

Like Fredrick Kamo, Zbigniew is another city-user, who moved to London with the sole purpose to take advantage of it and use its principle power: to produce money and business. He is not looking for any real human connection with London nor integration in it. As a matter of fact, he confesses to be happy about the fact that Mrs Yount and the other English employers call him Bogdan, since they can't pronounce his real name. He is happy because this nickname confirms that his life in London is just temporary. The person he is in London does not correspond to his real identity; but it is simply a role he has decided to play until he earns enough to return to Poland and begin the life he planned. This is perfectly connected to what Fredrick had noticed: everyone in London seems to wear a costume, living a life detached from their real identity. "Zbigniew's plan was as follows: to make enough money in London to cash in on the lift-maintenance business with his father. Warsaw was going to grow rapidly, anyone could see that, and modern cities grew upwards, and that meant lifts."[436]

On one hand, Zbigniew has a keen entrepreneurial mind, thus he understands well the London mood and that idea of highness, which epitomizes the "hunger" of

[436] Lanchester, *Capital*,75

the urban economy. Yet, on the other hand, he observes London society critically and notices that there is something unnatural and wrong about it, just like London's economy had lost its ethics and morality. "There was in Zbigniew's opinion something fundamentally wrong with a culture that had all this work and all this money going spare, just waiting for someone to come in and pick it up, almost as if the money were just left lying around in the street – but that was not his concern."[437]

Zbigniew notices the disconnectedness of London, which not only affects human relationships, but also the correspondence between things and their value, between work and money, as well as the loss of bonds between people and the place where they live. Indeed, also according to Zbigniew's description, the houses in London no longer appeared as homes, because the owners often used their houses just for investments, selling or renting or sub-renting them, and these tangible assets often became places where people simply stayed between one commitment and another. This way the connection between houses and familiar ties, human relationships, affectionate memories and a sense of belonging disappeared. This is also Zbigniew's case. Indeed, "Zbigniew, Piotr, and four friends lived in a two-bedroom flat in Croydon. The flat was sublet from an Italian who in turn sublet it from a British man who rented it from the council, and the rent was £200 a week."[438]

Interestingly enough, in this kind of situation even houses seemes to become non-places – those transitory places where people can hide without any connection to a community. Whereas other places like pubs, which should be the traditional "non-places," begins to be the only spaces where 'community' members meet, not geographical communities but ethnical or cultural groups as Lanchester highlights. And it felt like home.

> The bar was half-full. It was a popular spot with the older generation of London Poles, the ones who had come over during the war – there were even people here who remembered that time first-hand. Favourite fact: one-third of all the planes shot down during the Battle of Britain were shot down by Polish pilots. So it was a place for old men to play cards and watch Polish TV and generally carry on as if they were still back in the old country. The younger generation hadn't yet colonised the club which was one of the

[437] *Ibidem,* 72

[438] *Ibdem.*

> things Zbigniew liked about it. Without really examining the feeling, Zbigniew was aware that the club reminded him of his parents, of the evenings when his father had his friends over for Zechcyk and his mother pottered about in the kitchen, pretending to complain about how late they would keep her awake. (255)

The Pub was actually a club, as Zbigniew noticed. Therefore, it was a place where people shared something and behaved like a community: a place outside the commodified urban atmosphere, a sort of transnational and transcultural place, where even Zbigniew could feel a connection with his family. The transnational and transcultural role of pubs helped foster integration in London by making London's culture more approachable and familiar. For instance, Lanchester narrates that

> To celebrate last night's successful dumping – though now that it had happened Zbigniew in his mind was more gentle and named it the break-up – he took himself to the cafè round the corner for lunch. It was what the British called a 'greasy spoon' but in fact the food was not greasy at all, since it served salads and pasta as well as the large plates of fried food that British labourers ate. Zbigniew had acquired this taste and ordered a full English number 2, consisting of bacon, a herbed sausage which was not as good as Polish sausage but was still not bad, blood sausage, chips, fried bread, fried egg, mushrooms, tomatoes, and baked beans, a British speciality which Zbigniew had initially disliked but through repetition – they were often included as a standard ingredient – had come to like. As with many foods the British liked, their secret was that they were much sweeter than they pretended to be. There were also large mugs of not very good coffee. This meal cost £6 but on a special occasion was worth it. If Zbigniew finished the job today, as he fully intended to do, he would be half a day ahead of his work schedule (the real one, which he carried in his head, rather than the estimates he gave to costumers) so he could move on to other work, which meant he could move on to earning more money, which was almost as good as money in the bank. (294-295)

Through the description of the "greasy spoon" café and Zbigniew's favourite celebratory meal, Lanchester highlights how the process of integration is actually taking place in Zbigniew's life despite his attempt to remain outside the London community. Food is one of the most powerful cultural tools because it is a physical necessity. Indeed, food often represents traditions and habits. All these culturally framed aspects are deeply in contact with the innermost sphere of personal life since food must be

ingested, so it overcomes external appearances which could be disguised under social masks, and gets into touch with feelings. The strongest feeling and one of the foremost consequences of sharing food is that it evokes familiarity. As even Zbigniew notices, with repetition, he has come to like British food, and now for him eating at a "greasy spoon" café is not only something pleasant, but it brings happiness and celebration.

MATYA

One of the characters connected with the Yount family is Matya, their Hungarian nanny. Like Zbigniew, Matya embodies a sort of "London dream." Lanchester explains the idea that London can be the answer to people's dream of a better and wealthier life.

> Matya Balatu grew up in a Hungarian town called Kecskemèt. Her father was a teacher as was her mother, though she had given up work when Matya's little brother was born. […] She did well in school, and went to university to study mechanical engineering. After she graduated she worked as a secretary in a dentist's office while raising the money to come to London to pursue a dream of expensiveness. […] Matya had an ambivalent relationship with the currents of money on which much of London seemed to float. It was part of the reason she went there: she had come to this big city, this world city, to try her luck, and she would be lying if she said that the idea of making money was no part of that luck. She wasn't sure how to make money, exactly, but anyone with eyes could see that it was everywhere in London, in the cars, the clothes, the shops, the talk, the very air. People got it and spent it and thought about it and talked about it all the time. It was brash and horrible and vulgar, but also exciting and energetic and shameless and new and not like Kecsemèt in Hungary which had seemed, as the place we grow up in always seems, timeless and static. On the other hand, none of the money sloshing around London belonged to her. If the city was one huge shop window, she was outside on the pavement, looking in. Getting on for four years after moving to London, at the age of twenty-seven, she was still waiting for her life to begin. (337)

Matya'a perspective about London highlights its fluid nature: "London seems to float on currents of money**."** This is exactly what Zygmunt Baumann pointed out in his

analysis of post-modern society. According to Baumann, "in the post-modern period people are at the mercy of a ruthless capitalism constantly seeking new opportunities and groups to exploit: it has successfully moved from a society of producers to one of consumers, thus requiring the progressive commodification of life functions."[439] Indeed, if modernity was characterised by solidity, the distinctive characteristic of postmodernity is liquidity. "It is an existence where need gives way to desire that dismays men in the constant changes and transformations that affect their lives, and that turn identity from fact into a task: each of us runs into the self-building."[440] This self-building should meet the "standards of normality" imposed by a consumerist society in order for one to be recognized as a respectable member. In order to meet such "normality" each person should demonstrate that they are not only good "producers", but also good "consumers." "[People] must respond quickly and efficiently to the temptations of the consumer goods market. Today's poor [...] are defined primarily by the fact that they are bad consumers. Indeed, the most basic of social obligations, which they do not comply with, is their duty to be active and effective purchasers of goods and services offered by the market."[441] Money is the pivotal element on which everyone can build their own identity. This is what Matya understands and means when she says that money was everywhere in London, not only in physical things like cars, shops, but also in talk and in the very air.

> Being consumers and being consumed become, in fact, the most general determinations of an individual who is affected by the most problematic effects of the process of de-socialization, which began with globalization, now arrived at one of its most acute and extreme phases. Social aggregation and organization are deprived of their traditional tasks: they stop being identity dimensions of the subject capable of providing a set of standards and benchmarks.[442]

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[439] Mark Haugaard, "Liquid modernity and power: A dialogue with Zygmunt Bauman," in *Journal of Power*, August 2008, National University of Ireland, Galway, 156

[440] Emma Palese, "Zygmunt Bauman. Individual and society in the liquid modernity," in *SpringerPlus* 2013, 2:191, 45.

[441] *Ibidem.*

[442] *Ibidem.*

As a matter of fact, Baumann recalls Tönnies' idea of "community" and "society" by pointing out that nowadays just a commodified idea of society survives: a society meant as "common trends to follow, where the groups are directed almost anonymously in the pursuit of that happiness, whose traces are designed by external actors."[443] This corresponds also to Durkheim's idea of "mechanical solidarity,"[444] according to which the peculiarity and uniqueness of the individual is replaced by the flow of the needs of a group, which looks like a swarm. According to Baumann, the individual and the society in the liquid-consumerist society can be identified with the features of a swarm.

> The swarm tends to replace the group and its leaders, its hierarchy and its "pecking order." A swarm cannot do without all the ceremonial and tricks without which it would neither form nor survive. They come together, scatter and gather again, from an occasion to another, every time inevitably for a different reason, and are attracted by changeable aims. The seductive power of mobile objectives is a rule sufficient to coordinate movements, and this is enough to render superfluous any other command or imposition from above.[445]

According to this description, the individual consumer is just a single unit in a passing swarm, driven by the current of its liquid society; and it is one's economic power as a consumer that fulfils their need to belong. Indeed, Baumann claims that malls act as hives of swarms, by offering the illusion of an ideally imagined community - a place where the purpose of buying and selling aggregates. "The shopping/consumption places offer what no "real reality" outside can give: an almost perfect balance between liberty and security. Within their temples buyers/consumers may also find what they were searching for outside, uselessly and inexhaustibly: the comfortable feeling of belonging, the reassuring impression of being part of a community."[446]

By imagining the city as a shop, Matya describes her feeling of being an "outsider" looking into the shop through the shop window. Her role of outsider is defined by the fact that "none of the money sloshing around in London belonged to

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[443] *Ibidem.*

[444] É. Durkheim, "Individual and Collective Representation (1898)", in *Sociology and Philosophy*, (New York: Free Press, 1974).

[445] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 109-110.

[446] *Ibidem.*

her" and without this economic power she cannot go in and be part of the community within the shop. A community which is not defined by culture, language or customs, but only by consumerist laws. Therefore, purchasing or spending money is not only the primary activity of those who want to take part in urban life, as the principle of inclusion and exclusion, but it is also the practice that eliminates differences between individuals, as Levi-Strauss theorized[447]. Indeed, when he analysed the importance of supermarkets, he stated that they are in fact the privileged places of consumption where the aggregating power of purchasing is exercised and contradicts discrimination of others as aliens.

SMITTY- ARTIST AND PERFORMER

Smitty is the most peculiar character in the novel. Indeed, rather than being a city user in the usual sense, he is an artist who uses the city as the canvas on which he creates his artwork or as a theatre for his performances. His artworks have to do with the urban community itself; his aim is to shock and be provocative, and to 'play' with urban inhabitants and their reactions. He plays with the city itself and his disturbing, yet non-criminal artworks seem to arrest momentarily the predictable mechanism of urban life as a mechanical cycle of supply and demand. In this sense, the artist Smitty seems to be *super partes* or impartial to the commodified city and its consumerist logic; he is rather the champion of the principle of "art for art's sake." Smitty's impartial position is well described in the novel through a physical description. Indeed, the reader first meets Smitty in his office in one of those skyscrapers that dominate the London skyline. From there Smitty is able to observe London from a privileged position - that of someone who is part of the city but outside it at the same time. This physical distance is what metaphorically represents the critical distance of the artist.

> Looking out of the window, Smitty surveyed the London scene. [...] Smitty loved and approved of all he saw. London, life, London life. He felt an idea coming on. At the other end of the road, a group of workmen in bright orange safety jackets were standing around a hole they had dug about a week before. [...] and to one side of them their mechanical digger stood with its scoop pointing downwards. The way they were all grouped around

[447] C. Lévi Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, (Librairie Plon, Paris, 1964),311-12.

> the hole made it look as if the hole were their focus of attention, as if they were admiring it. That was what gave Smitty the idea: make a work of art about holes. Or, make holes the work of art. Yes, that was better. Dig some holes and make the hole the artwork, or rather the confusion and chaos the hole caused- people's reaction, not the thing itself. Yeah – bloody great hole, for no reason. Let the tossers argue about who fills it in. That's part of the artwork too. (79-80)

Note that holes are like interruptions in the urban landscape - a break. Metaphorically, they interpret the role of the artist whose first aim is to shock people, make them stop and think, argue and talk together about what happened. The hole becomes a means through which people interact and look away from their personal business to focus on a "common ground." Reasoning about the holes, people are forced to think about the city not as an asset to invest in, but as a real, physical place and a necessity for their existence. Smitty's artistic performance concretely transforms a small part of the city into a non-place - a place that no longer exists physically because the artist dug it and destroyed what was there before. In this sense the artist transforms the city into a gigantic, clearly tangible non-place, a transitory place where people just happen to work or pass through without settling down or building relationships.

Not only is Smitty the critical perspective which embodies many of the author's criticisms of post-modern urban life, but he is also the character who better observes the "We Want What You Have" phenomenon by tracing its origins to find out more about who was behind it.

As a matter of fact, the inhabitants of Pepys Road did not just receive a considerable number of postcards with their front doors on one side and the mysterious sentence of the other. The postcards were followed by videos and a blog where several other pictures were posted. Then the blog was no longer being updated, and one day

> every single person in the street got a fresh postcard of their own front door, with nothing written on the back except a short URL.[...] the blog was back up, hosted on a new platform and with all the content that had been there before – only now it was worse. The same photos were there, but they had been defaced by digital graffiti. Somebody had written swear words across the pictures; not all the pictures, just some of them; about one

> in three. The swear words focused on very simple, very direct abuse: 'Rich cunts', 'Wankers', 'Arsehole', 'Tory scum', 'Kill the rich', and so on. (351-352)

This vulgar, virtual graffiti had been escalated with offensive postcards, graffiti in the street and several other incidents like delivered envelopes containing truly disgusting things and cars scratched with someone's keys.

The fact that the "We Want What You Have" phenomenon has a double, parallel development in both real life and virtual reality highlights how much the virtual dimension of the post-modern cities is important and influent. Internet has a pivotal role in the structuring of social relations, by contributing to the new model of society which is individual centred. More and more people are part of social networks and communicate via computer.

> The illusion "of being included" that a virtual life seems to surrogate is the legacy of the real human need of "belonging" and sociability. These two aspects of human identity seem to be impossible in post-modern commodified urban life, where the individual becomes an isolated nomad always looking for new forms of socialization, which instead of providing safety and welfare, increase the gap between man and the self and between man and the other. It is a social system that - despite being in possession of increasingly innovative means to communicate and interact with their fellows - generates discomfort and loneliness.[448]

4.3 AFTER THE CRASH - THE POST-CRUNCH PERIOD

As previously mentioned, Lanchester chose to set his novel between the end of 2007 and 2008, describing both a pre- and post-phase of the financial crisis that hit the global financial market, making fiction and reality partly overlap. In Lanchester's *Capital*, Roger loses his job because his maths-wiz assistant Mark hacks the bank's computers by using Roger's accounts and attempts a major financial manipulation. The attempt

[448] Manuel Castells, *Internet Galaxy*, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2001), 129.

fails and, due to Mark's blunder, Roger gets fired and then the whole bank goes bankrupt.

At the same time when Lloyd's went bankrupt, newspapers reported the Lehman Brother's scandal. "The subhead said 'US Giant on Brink of Collapse.' The front-page details of the piece were fantastic. Basically, Lehman's were sitting on a pile of assets which weren't worth anything, and no one wanted to buy them or bail them out, so they were going to go under." (477) Roger explains that Pinker Lloyd's failure was similar to Lehman's situation: "People began to wonder about Pinker Lloyd's exposure to short-term loans and its reliance on borrowing money cheaply, easily and quickly on the international market. Credit dried up overnight: lenders withdrew their loans, clients withdrew their money, they had to ask the Bank of England for help, the Bank dithered and bingo, Pinker Lloyd was out of business." (p. 509) These two speculative financial crises demonstrate how London functions as a sort of microcosm, which reflects the world's financial macrocosm. As Lanchester reminds us, the world presses on London and London presses on its inhabitants, particularly on the inhabitants of Pepy's Road, in the case of Lanchester's *Capital*.

Lloyd's crunch, which led to the financial disintegration of the bank, can easily be compared to a sort of hole in the London financial system and, similarly to Smitty's holes, its effect was that people were shocked, which made them rethink what they trusted in, and, in Roger Yount's case, this financial hole made him rethink his whole life. Besides, the financial crash, this break in the financial urban mechanical harmony, marked a turning point in the novel, not only as far as Roger is concerned, but also for other characters and their perspectives on the city.

Roger's reaction not only to his dismissal but also to the realization that he would never get another job in the financial world was to take a walk around the city. The first after a long time. This action would have been defined by Lefebvre as an act of appropriation, the only possible solution to the commodified and depersonalized city:

> Roger needed to get some air. He turned and went out the door thinking, I know what I'll do: I'll go for a walk. In the five years he'd been living in Pepys Road, this was something he had never done, not once, in the midweek. He had never not been at work and in the holidays they'd always been expensively elsewhere. Roger strode out the door

> and down the road. [...] Down the road, Roger could see Bogdan the builder, the Pole Arabella used sometimes, throwing a piece of plaster into a skip. […] He turned the corner and headed out on the Common. This again was something he'd only ever done on the way to or from work, or wheeling the boys out at the weekend, a time quite a few other bankers could be seen, all in their various tribal uniforms, their pushchairs so big and unwieldy they were like infant SUVs. [...] On sunny days, huge numbers of young people would remove as much of their clothing as was legally possible and sprawl on the grass drinking alcohol. Simple pleasures are the best. There had been far less of that this summer than usual, a fact you could tell just by seeing how green the grass was. The sprawlers looked like yobs and proles, but Roger knew that appearances were deceptive; just because they had their kit off and were getting drunk didn't mean that they weren't web designers, secretaries, nurses, software engineers, chefs. It was a rue of London life that anybody could be anybody. (475)

Walking around London is an act that makes Roger exercise his right to the city, by inhabiting it. This process of appropriation leads to the identification and redefinition of one's own identity according to psychogeographers, because, as the founder of psychogeography Guy Debord states: "People can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves."[449] Moreover, Debord explains that "The sectors of a city[…] are decipherable, but the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable, as is the secrecy of private life in general."[450] Since the personal significance of the city is incommunicable, it must be experienced. For this reason, psychogeographers advocate the act of becoming lost in the city, through *dérive* (drifting), which leads the walker to better connect with the city. "In a *dérive*, during a certain period one or more persons drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there."[451] The act of wandering advocated by the psychogeographers has both a personal and social significance against the dehumanization and modern alienation of the city: "A means of dissolving the

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[449] Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* in *Les Lèvres Nues*, 6, (September *1955*), https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html, last accessed January 2020.

[450] Guy Debord, "A Critique of Separation" in *Situationalist International*, 1961, https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/separation.html, last accessed January 2020.

[451] Ken, *Situationist International Anthology*. (Berkley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), 50.

mechanised matrix which compresses the space-time continuum. […] The solitary walker is an insurgent against the contemporary world, an ambulatory time traveller."[452] This definition perfectly epitomizes the transformation that Rogers seems to undergo during his walk. Indeed, far from his financial reasoning typical of his pre-crunch phase, the "new" Roger is able now to see a new London, no longer created by business laws but by real people, like Bogdan the Polish builder. What is more, London does not look like a cruel financial market but a place for pleasure, where people can sprawl on the grass, and freedom, where people can disguise themselves, but also leave their uniforms and be someone completely different. This is the rule of London, where, as Roger comments, "anybody could be anybody."

The power of walking around London is demonstrated by the changes that were brought into Roger's life. Indeed, not only did he begin to see London under a new light, but he decided to sell his house in Pepy's Road. By doing so, he began to overturn completely the commercial logic of the city by renouncing what apparently no one would have ever before renounced. This new altered condition allows Roger to realize the absurdity of the relationship between Londoners and their houses. What "Roger hated most about all this house fandango was that it was insane. [...] The whole process had a frenzy to it – everybody seemed in a rush, everybody was somehow heated up." (512)

Like Roger, even Zbigniew and Matya totally changed their relationship to London. However, in their case, to cause change was not the financial crisis but the fact that they fell in love. The starting point of their changed perspectives is the London Eye, where Zbigniew and Matya spend the first part of their first date. Interestingly enough, the London Eye offers a top-down perspective of London, which opposes the already discussed rhetoric of highness of London architecture. Indeed, in this case the height of the London Eye is not an imposing sign of a controlling power, but just a means from which to take in London in all its unexpected beauty. Indeed, Zbigniew

[452] Siobhan Lyons, **"**Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city", in *The Conversation*, http://theconversation.com/psychogeography-a-way-to-delve-into-the-soul-of-a-city-78032, last accessed January 2020.

> had worked in London for three years now but had no idea about most of what he was looking at. London was big and low in the middle, with a higher edge in both directions, like a gigantic saucer. [...] Zbigniew, who had no feelings about London that he was aware of, was nonetheless impressed. One thing about London: There was a lot of it. (460-461)

The beauty of London that Zbigniew can perceive for the first time began to act as an antidote against Zbigniew's detached perspective as a "city user." Similarly, the irreverent and subversive call of the aestheticism to "art for art's sake" aimed at subverting the utilitarian logic of the industrial society. This changing process accelerates when

> he took her for a walk along the South Bank. [...] The river scene gave Zbigniew, for the first time, a feeling of being in the middle of London. It was like: London? Here it finally is! He had seen heaving pubs and bars, bodies strewn all over the Common during the freak intervals of good weather, packed Tube carriages, the high streets of South London in their full Saturday night; but this was different. This was people from all over the world, in the middle of the city, because they had come there to be there, with Parliament across the dark grey river, tourist buses coughing diesel on the access road, the theatres and museums and concert halls, the railway bridge, road bridge and pedestrian bridge, all busy in both directions, the restaurants packed, jugglers and mime artists wasting everybody's time and taking up space, children running about, a skateboard park for the teens to show off to each other, couples holding hands everywhere, [...] musicians, and lots of people not doing anything much, just being there because they wanted to be there. (463-464)

For the first time Zbigniew did not feel like an outsider, but he felt in the center, linked to the core of London: the river. Not only does the river, as a natural element, contrast the artificial and commodified nature of the post-modern city, but it also reminds people of the ancient origins of the city itself. Indeed, as Peter Ackroyd argues:

> The city itself owes its character and appearance to the Thames. It was a place of crowded wharfs and people-pestered shores, the water continually in motion with sholas of laboring oars. The movement and energy of London were the movement of horses and the energy of the river. The Thames brought in a thousand argosies. […] Most Londoners earned their living directly off the river, or by means of the goods which were transported

> along it. […] But then it first touched the imagination of poets and chroniclers. It became the river of magnificence, used as a golden highway by princes and diplomats. [453]

The Thames was not only that natural element which fostered the economic growth of the city, but it was almost seen as a sort of supernatural and mystical force, and, if the city has often been seen as the mother, Pope in his poem *Windsor Forest* in 1713 describes the Thames as the old father.[454] This mythical and ontological force of the Thames is confirmed by its inspirational power which forged the imagination of poets and artists like Turner. "The great world itself was for Turner was contained within the city and its river. The Thames flowed through him, giving him light and movement."[455]

Therefore, thanks to their strolling about, Maya and Zbigniew come in touch with the original identity of the city: this seems to establish a sort of deep and intimate relationship between the two and the city. The consumerist logic falls and opens the way to the beauty of being part of the urban community and of the city as a sort of huge organism full of life and history, where people must not necessarily be busy doing something, but they just choose and want to live within the city.

This perspective, very similar to Smitty's, opens up the human dimension of the urban place as that ontological place able to give birth to new identities by hosting and entailing a complex variety of different dimensions which may intertwine. Indeed, when it comes time for Zbigniew and Matya to think about their future together, they both realize that neither Poland nor Hungary would be suitable to their new complex, transcultural identity.

> So it was London, now and for the foreseeable future, and for Zbigniew that was about as unexpected as finding Matya had been. The fact that this had come to be the place where he lived, not just where he was passing through or cashing in, had not formed any part of his plan. (551)

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[453] Peter Acroyd, *Londond. The Biography*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 532.

[454] Alexander Pope, "Windsor Forest" [1713], in Savid Womersely, Christine Gerard (eds.), *A Companion to Literature from Milton to Blake*, (Oxford: Blackwell publisher, 2001).

[455] Peter Ackroyd, *London. The Biography*, 539.

This revelation of London as a place where a new family could grow, in a way answers the question that Petunia asks herself in the pre-crunch phase, looking at the people in the doctor's waiting room: 'Are they in it together?.' Petunia was worried about that separateness and detachment among people in the same place, which makes her think about the impossibility of any human sharing and relationship.

Now, in this new post-crunch and in-love phase, Matya and Zbigniew would answer 'yes' to Petunia's question. Indeed, they not only seem to feel like a part of London, but they feel at home. This new concept of "home" as opposed to the commercial idea of house-as-an-asset typical of the post-modern commodified city is also expressed by Usman, who remarked upon his return to London after two months in Pakistan that he was "much more relieved to be back than he wanted to admit. Usman was coming to think that your roots were not necessarily the same thing as your home, but he didn't yet know what to make of the thought."[456]

This idea of the city as a home, and not a financial market, seems to be the climax of the process of re-appropriation that began with the financial crisis. This also turns out to be the aim of the first author of the "We Want What You Have" cards. Indeed, the reader discovers at the end on the novel that there were two phases and two authors of the "We Want What You Have" issue: the author of the first stage was Usman, one of the three Pakistani brothers, who confides:

> I had no idea what was going on. I didn't mean things to get out of hand. I didn't think people would get themselves in such a twist. And all because they thought it might affect property prices! You make a point about Western obliviousness and they think it's about property prices. You tell them they're in a condition of complete moral unconsciousness and they worry about whether their house is still worth two million quid! Unbelievable. Then they decide you're a terrorist. (555)

The second author, that of the second phase and much more violent, vulgar and illegal, was Smitty's assistant, who, after Smitty fired him, wanted to take revenge against the society that seemed to have everything and cut him off from urban wealth.

Interestingly enough, the two phases are one the demonstration of the other. Indeed, Usman's aim was to shock people and make them aware of the moral fragility

[456] Lanchester, *Capital*, 553

and disconnectedness of urban society caused by the commodification of the city itself. Parker's envy and aggressiveness, however, is proof of the obliviousness and indifference of a society which is pleased by the desire it evokes, imposing competitiveness as a fundamental social rule.

Therefore, through his novel Lanchester is able to narrate the deep crisis of the contemporary city, whose growing commodification and speculation, is transforming the nurturing role of the city into a place of disconnectedness, exclusion and separateness, rather than being the place able to give rise to a new kind of hybrid Britishness rooted in the urban democratic values of citizenship and in what Lefebvre would call "The Right to the City", according to which the city belongs to those who inhabit it.

5. Tibor Fisher, Voyage to the End of the Room.

5.1 Introduction

Lanchester's analysis of commodified present-day London sets the basis to understand the psychological effects of the contemporary urban condition on people's minds. In this chapter, the focus will narrow down to how the transformation of the contemporary city into a negotiable commodity and the passage from the idea of citizen to that of city user and from community to society influence people's perception of the self and the city, leading to a progressive alienation of its inhabitants.

Tibor Fischer's London in his 2003 novel *Voyage to the End of the Room*[457] looks very much like that described by John Lanchester[458]: a *de facto* multiethnic and transcultural city with a chaotic atmosphere, where everything changes very quickly and where people live as separated atoms, free of any kind of familiar, social or cultural bonds. Criminality is the norm and institutions are powerless. The city appears to be a sort of living being with a disdainful attitude towards its inhabitants. In this sense, Fischer seems to agree with Lanchester's critical claim of the inexistence of an urban community because it has been destroyed by a consumeristic way of life and view of the city. As for Lanchester, the question of an integrated new kind of Britishness does not seem to be the most urgent issue since no integration and hybridization can take place if there is no community to accommodate them and no urban setting to be called home. Fischer's novel suggests a sort of "inverted trend" according to which the process of integration is replaced by a progressive alienation of citizens: a personal and psychological estrangement, a refusal to one's own right to the city due to the dehumanization of the urban community and the transformation of the city into a commodity. The city ends up no longer being a "mother" but an enemy, no longer hospitable but hostile, and strangers are no longer just the foreigners but all those inhabitants who feel lost and powerless within the city.

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[457] Tibor Fischer, *Voyage to the End of The Room*,(London: Vintage, 2004).

[458] John Lanchester, *Capital*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

Fischer's *Voyage to the End of the Room* narrates the story of Ocean, a computer graphic designer and former dancer, who lives in a flat in South London. Having made enough money from a work project and being shocked and frightened by the brutality, messiness and inhumanity of London life, she decides to stay in her flat and never leave it for any reason. Yet she maintains a sort of wanderlust and an inner desire to live in a borderless, transcultural world.

The ironic use of the terms *voyage* and *room* together in the novel's title, the main character's name, Ocean, and her agoraphobic condition, embody the crisis of a city that is proud to be an international metropolis, a "global city", but which fails to be an "ontological dispositive," as Kamal Ahmed calls the city in his book *Life and Times of a Very British Man*.[459] In this condition, the city renounces being the interface that provides space for cultural transformations and reshaping based on the universal and democratic idea of citizenship, a new evolving culture and social status generated by every-day urban interactions. Indeed, according to Sassen's analysis, "global cities"[460] are places where the wealth of the world passes through and where people crowd in, no longer desiring to be part of a community based on sharing and commitment, but to be part of a huge economic machine run by the philosophy of abundance and unlimited resourcefulness.

According to Lanchester's analysis in *Capital*, in these commodified cities, real contact among inhabitants seems totally out of reach because of the lack of cultural and familiar bonds and due to the transformation of the living spaces of the city - mainly considered vastly inflated financial assets turned into compounds of "non-places."[461] Thereby, the contemporary city becomes a transitory place able to host the frenetic masses, but not to be the home for a community. The city has become a place that is hostile to the growth of one's identity and collective consciousness. Indeed, as Lanchester pointed out, contemporary urban inhabitants seem to be the passive audience of the economic urban performance, which is gradually and progressively leading to the disenfranchisement and obliviousness of urban inhabitants. These

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[459] Kamal Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

[460] Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Introducing a Concept" in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Winter/Spring2005, XI, 2, 27-43.

[461] Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall", in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space*, ed Michael Sorokin, (New York: The Nooday Press, 1992), 3-30.

processes have deprived inhabitants of their performative power as citizens and have transformed them into city users, just as the *Gemeinschaft* has become a *Gesellschaft* and the contemporary capitalistic city has become the impoverished manifestation of the urban.[462]

Far from fulfilling the original, nurturing motherly role of ancient cities, whose boundaries also defined the boundaries of a citizen's identity and where people could settle and put down roots, the modern city has become a hostile place, where competitiveness, disconnectedness, criminality and the excessive fluidity of urban life threaten a person's stability, and which have all led to the progressive alienation and estrangement of urban dwellers.

The psychological effects of this urban crisis is the core of Fischer's novel, where the room is no longer a place where one can take shelter and find one's own voice and identity that can make a mark in human society, as Virginia Woolf intended it in "A Room of One's Own"[463] (1929), but it is a place of alienation. The room becomes a sort of microcosm, where Ocean can hide away and find a place where she can breathe freely, far from the monstrous city. Her room is where Ocean renounces her right to the city, her role as a citizen, and a part of her own identity, becoming a stranger in her own city. What remains of the outside world is the virtual and dematerialised dimension of the metacity.

The discussion that follows focuses on the relationship between the self and space, on how this condition challenges and questions the traditional idea of "stranger," and on the nature of mental effects that the urban crisis can produce, particularly that of alienation, and on how the dimensions of the metacity fit into this panorama. This theoretical background serves to better analyse Fischer's *Voyage to the End of the Room*.

[462]Ferdinand Toennies, *Community and Society*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1963).

[463] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1935).

5.2 Relationship between the self and space

It is essential to look closely at the value of the space we inhabit in order to understand why contemporary transformations of urban space have influenced people's self-awareness, mental health, relationships among inhabitants, and their sense of belonging to their city. Indeed, urban boundaries mark that safe place, where people invent themselves by both adapting to urban culture and re-ordering the space for themselves.[464] By hosting urban space and urban daily public life, the city becomes that familiar place that people feel they belong to and over which they exercise their right to occupy those spaces, use them and claim them as theirs.

Due to this culturally connotative trait of urban space, the city becomes at times a conflictual place where culture has been challenged, negotiated or defended. Sociologists Robert Park and Peter Burgess reckon that the urban environment tends to increase what they call the effects of crisis. Hence, the relationship of identity and belonging that exists between a human being and the space they inhabit, is on one hand, a source of self-awareness, order and stability, and on the other hand, a possible source of crisis, particularly of anxiety.[465]

Besides, the more the people-city relationship is familiar and human-sized, the more it is healthy and positive. But the more this relationship overcomes human dimension and becomes fragmented, fluid, chaotic, detached and disrupted, as has happened in most contemporary cities, the more the space loses its function as signifying space -an ordered and safe place - transforming itself into a non-space and being perceived as a terrifying threat. A clear demonstration of the therapeutic function of a close connection between the human being and urban space is what psychogeographers call *derivè* (drifiting) – a way to contrast the progressive dehumanization of urban space and a way for people to reassert their right to the city.

Specifically, in his seminal work "Theory of the Dérive" (1958), Guy Debord explains that the act of 'losing one's self' in the city (drifting) leads the walker to better connect with the city, which is "a means of dissolving the mechanised matrix which

[464] Otto F. Bollnow, *Human space, (*London: Hyphen Press, 1963).

[465] Robert, E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, *The City*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

compresses the space-time continuum. […] The solitary walker is an insurgent against the contemporary world, an ambulatory time traveler."[466] *Derivè* is also "a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the condition of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances."[467] The term 'ambiance' refers to the feeling or mood associated with a place. According to this definition, each place has a character and tone that affect human behaviour and psychology differently, by appealing to different cultural backgrounds, or symbolic meanings. The transformation process of urban space, which has led cities to overcome human limits, means that the new space loses its function as signifying space and provokes a progressive detachment and alienation of the community, against which psychogeographers have tried to react. This is the outcome of rapid urban development that has taken place over the past two centuries. Indeed, over this period, urban places have grown exponentially both vertically and horizontally, considerably exceeding the measure of a human-sized city.

Not only did contemporary urban structures expand their vertical and horizontal limits but they also came to overcome their physical boundaries, blurring them and transforming urban space into a sort of delocated space. This happened with the creation of the so-called metacities. The umbrella metaphor of metacities is a way to describe any city as a patchy "system of systems."[468] Specifically, the prefix 'meta' refers to a new landscape which is a dynamic aggregate of changing components linked by fluxes of matter, energy, organisms, information, and infrastructures constituted by social network technologies and digital tools. The metacity theory focuses on the spatial heterogeneity and dynamism of local neighbourhood patches connected globally through virtual social networks that enhance urban life through planetary stewardship. The architecture of a metacity can no longer be defined by physical infrastructures alone, but the term encompasses a complex system of "unseen buried support systems for cities; meta-structure is that which sits above and beyond everyday urban forms and activities."[469] Indeed, the contemporary urban world becomes less

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[466]Siobhan Lyons, **"**Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city", in *The Conversation*, http://theconversation.com/psychogeography-a-way-to-delve-into-the-soul-of-a-city-78032.

[467] *Ibid.*

[468] McGrath, Pickett "The Metacity: A Conceptual Framework for Integrating Ecology and Urban Design, 70.

[469] *Ibid.*

concrete and more virtual, characterised by an on-going process of sublimation and dematerialization of the metropolis, which has turned into an intangible and immaterial space created by media, which have been able to overcome the geographical limits of the city. Accordingly, Marshall McLuhan suggested the idea of a "global village" of communications, referring to a sort of Babelic metropolis with no clear borders, which even transcends the idea of nations due to its extension and ethnic composition.[470]

The urban geographer Manuel Castells pointed out that the modern network society shapes a new kind of *polis* built around a new virtual *agora*. The dynamics of the compression of space and time seems to be the new pivotal feature of the technologically-based society, which allows distant, simultaneous, real-time interactions. Actually, the space of flows is a sort of delocated space, which inverts the founding principle of the city – that of the fixed allocation of a community. "While organizations are located in places, organizational logic is placeless, being fundamentally dependent on the space of flows that characterize information networks."[471] According to Collin Ellard, this has "completely transformed many of the rules that govern the relationships between our minds and physical space. Now, more than ever before, we can build spaces simply by imagining them and then bringing them into being with our handheld devices."[472]

The lack of a real community based on familiarity and empathy fostered by daily interactions, where people share the same spaces and the same kind of information or narrations produced by newspapers, advertisements, cultural and political events, laws, and customs, turns citizens into strangers. So then, coming into contact with others is no longer a way of human sharing and a process of community building in which "each one becomes a small tendril link, knitting together to make something stronger,"[473] as Allport suggested in his "contact theory,"[474] but it becomes a source of anxiety and mental stress that may cause psychological disorders.

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[470] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The extension of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

[471] Manuel Castellas, *The Theory of Network Society*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 154.

[472] Collin Ellard, "Oppressive Spaces, Social Networks, and the Panopticon" in Psychology Today , Sep 15, 2012, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mind-wandering/201208/stress-and-the-city, last accessed March 2020.

[473] Ahmed, *Life and Times of a Very British Man*, 233.

[474] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

In particular, according to social psychologists, the twenty-first century is characterized by what they call 'cognitive business.' This term defines the widespread status of overload, overstimulation and multitasking typical of millenials. Under conditions of cognitive load (where processing resources are limited), people are more likely to give responses that come to mind quickly and easily, following what psychologists call "correspondence bias."[475] American sociologist William Isaac Thomas first identified this phenomenon in 1928, stating, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[476] Thereby, cognitive business is a condition of mental overload that necessarily favours stereotyping mechanisms, discrimination and social separation.

Another phenomenon featuring the contemporary urban space is the so called territorial distress or dysmorphia, which refers to the fast distortion of the shape of the city, which loses its stability and comes to be perceived as fluid and precarious. Indeed,

> the fragmentation of territories, the violent and fast changing landscapes, and the increase of sprawling peripheries with no centre cause individual and social diseases by threatening self-perception and the sense of belonging and safety which are usually favoured by the stability of the landscape. Today, a variant of this concept (usually applied to those who are uprooted from their homeland), referring to people who remain in their own territories but who no longer recognize them because of radical changes, is becoming commonplace. The distortion of the shape of the city provokes individual and social suffering and diseases.[477]

Besides, the compression of the time-space experience of the city which often problematizes people's sense of orientation, together with the increase in population density, fosters the so-called "privacy-territoriality syndrome: the fact that a lack of

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[475] Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor and Miles Hewstone eds., *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996).

[476] William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas, *The child in America: Behavior problems and programs,(* New York: Knopf, 1928), 571–572.

[477] Salvatore Settis, *Architettura e Democrazia. Paesaggio, città, diritti civili*, (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 2017),136-137.

privacy tends to produce short tempers and unpredictable outbursts of aggression."[478] To this regard, Collin Ellard explained that, "Living among millions of strangers is a very unnatural state of affairs for a human being. […] One of the jobs of a city is to accommodate that problem. How do you build a society where people treat each other kindly in that kind of setting? That is more likely to happen when people feel good. If you feel positive you're more likely to speak to a stranger."[479] This is particularly significant when social ties become so meaningless that every citizen in some way shares the condition of being a stranger to the other.

5.3 Alienation: who is the stranger?

Interestingly enough, the phenomenon of alienation is growing together with the increase in social integration and hybridization. Although this phenomenon may seem a paradox, it can easily be understood by analysing it from a psychoanalytical point of view. Lacan explained the original relationship between the self and the other by pointing out that the child finds its ego in and through the other, because the other provides us with a sort of reflection of our own internal ambivalence.[480] Therefore, the stranger, similarly to the concept of monster, is a paradox: a 'monster' is different, but at the same time it has something similar to me and speaks to me about myself. So the problem with 'foreign' is that foreigners resemble me without being completely identical. I am constantly at risk of being drawn into the vortex of that dynamic which is propelled by the 'je est un autre,' – by what is, necessarily, constitutively strange to me. That is why the more the stranger becomes similar to me (for instance, through

[478] Albert Eide Parr, "The City as Habitat", in *The Centennial Review*, 14.2, Spring 1970, 177-187, 183.

[479] Michael Bond, "The Hidden Ways That Architecture Affects How You Feel", in *Future*, BBC, http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170605-the-psychology-behind-your-citys-design, last access April 2019.

[480] Lacan, J. , "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I", in ID., *Écrits. A Selection*, (London, Routledge, 1989),1-7.

the process of integration), the scarier they are. This concept is clearly explained by the Freudian concept of "narcissism of minor differences,"[481] According to which

> In the undisguised antipathies and aversions, which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to deal, we may recognize the expressions of self-love, of narcissism. This self-love works for the preservation of the individual and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his own particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration.[482]

This tension between closeness and remoteness typical of the stranger was explained by Simmel as the outcome of certain constitutional features of "being strange:" not belonging, mobility, objectivity, and abstract commonality. A stranger's "not belonging" is established by the absence of their physical presence in a particular locality or group. Their mobility is marked by their fluidity of association: the likelihood that they will leave the area and discontinue the possibility of association. Objectivity is assured by a lack of long-term personal investment in the happenings of the group, being free from everyday customs and constraints of the group. Finally, the communal ties that the stranger establishes are abstract in nature.[483]

These features, which traditionally related to strangers defined by geographical limits, are now suitable to define certain complex relationships within the urban reality. Indeed, Simmel defined two types of alienation: social alienation meant as the isolation or estrangement from other people, norms and values of society and deviant behaviour; and self-alienation, which is the suppression of one's needs, turning the self into an object and a projection of, over-involvement in and identification with society.[484] According to Mizruchi, the process of self-alienation is fostered by fast and

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[481] Sigmund Freud, "Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), *in ID., Civilization, Society and Religion (The Pelican Freud Library vol. 12*), (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1985), 91-340, 92.

[482] *Ibid*, 131.

[483] George Simmel, "The Stranger," in Kurt Wolff (trans.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel. New York: The Free Press* , p. 406.

[484] *Ibid.*

continuous change, which produces instability and fear.[485] Therefore, the process of self-alienation is a sort of self-defense mechanism that leads people to progressively detach from a reality that is perceived as a threat. Becoming a foreigner in one's own city seems to be a necessary condition for people in order to avoid being overwhelmed by frenetic rhythms, no longer manageable dimensions and relations, and that dehumanized atmosphere typical of huge commodified urban space.

5.4 Alienation and the metacity

In the contemporary urban world, which is becoming less concrete and more virtual and turning into an intangible and immaterial space created by media (the Internet and information technology in general), the concept of stranger changes even more. Indeed, mediated virtual communication typical of the metacity fosters dematerialized associations and relationships that inevitably change the traditional idea of community, thereby creating a bond between the individual and the mass. This in turn has created a new kind of tension between closeness and remoteness, using Simmel's criteria, and eventually provided a new dimension in which users may choose who they want to be and when. The basic characteristics of Simmel's stranger (not belonging, mobility, objectivity, abstract commonality) help us understand how the stranger has been further transformed with the introduction of internet technologies because they make the stranger's borders even vaguer, more ambiguous and above all more common. This happens because users can share the condition of stranger depending on the moment and virtual place they occupy in the metacity. Moreover, the possibilities of encountering the stranger increase and are even favoured since "many Internet tools provide one-to-many forums that have been compared to cafes or cocktail parties."[486]

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[485] Mizruchi, H. "Romanticism, urbanism, and small town in mass society: an exploratory analysis." In P. Meadows and H. Mizruchi (eds.), *Urbanism, Urbanizaton, and Change: Comparative Perspectives*, (London:Addison-Wesley Publishing,1969) pp. 243-251.

[486] Mary E. Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," *Humboldt State University Social Thought & Research*, 2002, Vol. 24, 343-367: 356.

These new virtual spaces are perceived as safe spaces that recreate the conditions Simmel listed to define the stranger: not-belonging, mobility, objectivity and abstract commonality.

> The characteristics of not belonging and mobility can be understood as factors contributing to a perceived safe space for interaction. Safe space is constructed in mediated communication through variation in the synchronicity of exchanges (temporal separation), as well as actual and perceived spatial separation between those making the exchanges. In addition, spatial separation generates an assumption of objectivity. [...] Control over safe space comes in the form of perceived and actual anonymity.[487]

Interestingly enough, the interactions fostered by these virtual safe spaces rely more on an inverted development process than on co-presence interactions. Indeed, while traditional interactions are based on physical proximity and appearance, at least in the initial stages and then moving incrementally into disclosure, online relationships demand immediate disclosure, otherwise no interaction is possible at all.[488]

Even though this inverted process seems to be riskier, "research suggests that revelation is accelerated largely due to some level of anonymity online."[489] Anonymity, which allows total control over virtual space from which users can disconnect whenever they wish, and the power of asynchronic mediated communication "create distance between the physical and emotional aspects of communication."[490] For instance, "Various types of keyboard-based shorthand, including emoticons, have been developed also to assist the process (e.g. :(= sad face). […] While emoticons cannot fully substitute the nuances of hundreds of facial expressions, in some cases this may be exactly the point." [491]

Notwithstanding the intrinsic condition of not-belonging, objectivity, anonymity and abstract commonality of virtual relationships, J. B. Walther argued that in some contexts, participants communicating online could become more intimate than in co-

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[487] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," 350.

[488] *Ibid.*

[489] *Ibid.*

[490] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," 363.

[491] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," 362-363.

presence interactions. [492] This could be explained by the fact that virtual space is considered a safe space, starting with control of one's own identity, which this space provides digital users with. "Perceived anonymity facilitates impression management and the separation of front stage and backstage presentations of self. For example, text-based or written types of mediated communication may offer the greatest control over constructing gender, race and class and the degrees of anonymity that this offers."[493] Besides, the high rate of mobility due to the ease of breaking an association at any time by simply disconnecting from the interaction if the identity play becomes too much, is a reassuring feature which makes an individual feel safe within a context that they can manage. Yet, the outcomes of this kind of mediated and dematerialized connection do not always seem to be positive. Indeed, according to Sherry Turkle Internet interactions and digital mediated identities are taking part to a larger trend toward fractionalized beings.[494] Moreover, the movement between non-mediated and mediated spaces of interaction creates schizophrenic disclosure patterns.

Another element that makes digital inhabitants perceive the metacity's virtual space as a safe space is the possibility to select one's own kind of community, by opening the way to a sort of "shopping for a specialized stranger."

> Online forums can facilitate shopping for a specialized stranger: a person who meets specific criteria such as recently working through a divorce. Because some mediums tend to facilitate "stranger shopping" better than others, individuals can be much more selective about the stranger to whom they choose to disclose. One of the most obvious "advantages" of the Internet for stranger interactions is the ease with which one can be selective about engaging the stranger.[495]

In addition, the Internet provides the possibility for a "mass stranger."[496] Indeed, users are not obliged to choose a stranger to whom they want to disclose, but they can present themselves to thousands through posts or videos with the certainty that

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[492] Walther ,J. B., "Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal and Hyperpersonal Interaction." *Communication Research* 23:343.

[493] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," 351

[494] Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995)

[495] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclouure," 351

[496] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualizing On and Offline Stranger Disclosure," 358

someone will be looking. The fact that the receiver of the message is deliberately no one in particular highlights "the power of a one-to-many association; the tensions of near and far in the Internet create "intimacy in the mass." Sitting cosily at one's desk, hot tea in hand, Van Morrison singing in the background and dinner on the stove, one can feel cosy "speaking" to hundreds of people at once."[497] By deciding with whom and when we can associate with a stranger, we also increase the degree of intimacy found in stranger associations and within the mass.

The Internet and information technologies are vastly changing the nature of community, which, instead of being a trustworthy network of familiar human bonds based on the sharing of values and purposes, becomes a mass of strangers who decide when, how and with whom to get in touch and disclose themselves, often building unstable, schizophrenic and highly fragmented relationships. The mutual commitment that was fundamental to the existence of the urban community no longer appears to be necessary, since people seem to be open to engaging with no one in particular as if the reply on the other side were not relevant: mutual commitment is no longer required.

Together with the concept of community, even the idea of space meant as the binary opposition between in and out and the idea of travelling seems to change. Indeed, "Stranger associations exist simultaneously within the walls of your homes and that of the other. [...] This distortion of space perhaps lends itself to the ultimate of tension between perceived intimacy of bringing someone into your home and the real physical distance spanned by the connection."[498] Besides,

> on the Internet, one travels through an electronically constructed space that to some extent is neither here nor there (being virtual reality). Conversations scroll across your computer screen sitting just feet from the spaghetti cooking on the stove and the laundry which is still piled in the corner of your bedroom. The construction of near and far becomes further ambiguous as the stranger in a sense enters your house perhaps daily. You log onto the computer and she waits for the digital signal that you are "home" and available.[499]

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[497] *Ibid.*

[498] Virnoche, "The Stranger Transformed: Conceptualzing On and Offline Stranger Disclousure," 364.

[499] *Ibid.*

5.5 Literary analysis: Tibor Fischer's *Voyage at the End of the Room*

Fischer's novel well encompasses the progressive transformation of urban space from a meaningful framework able to orient people's behaviour and identity into a detached and dehumanized patchy conglomerate of "non-places," where the community is reduced to a mass of strangers, where every person can hide and be anonymous. Marc Augè introduced precisely this idea of non-places and people's anonymity within the crowd,[500] analising the life of the contemporary urban places. According to Augè living the city as an asset or as capital that must be used produced a new urban culture that required people "to move and not live in a city but between cities, leading to an internationalization and globalization of metropolitan areas."[501] The new population of city users required hotels, offices, meeting places, restaurants, and shopping malls, which are all transitory places, with which people do not engage any kind of relationship. In this sense, they are non-places, because they no longer correspond to the traditional nature of space, featured by three typical dimensions according to Henri Lefebvre: the perceived space, the spatial reality of a materially constructed environment, the conceived space, represented by planners, administrators, scientists and technocrats and the experienced space, formed when space is filled with images and symbols by the ordinary users of urban space, who try to give order and meaning to their reality.[502]

Another unsettling feature of the contemporary urban dimension is time-space compression.

> When we walked through the varied streetscapes of an old town, getting home was a gradual process. We began to feel at home when we passed the old house with the columns, six blocks away; [...] But, in a high-rise residential structure, set in the bland environs of a modern urban precinct, we do not even get any great feeling of having

[500] See Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall, in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space*, ed Michael Sorokin, (New York: The Nooday Press, 1992).

[501] Denis Duclos, "Une nouvelle classe s'emparedes leviers du povoir monidal. Naissance de l'hyperbourgeoisie", in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, n. 533, 1988, 16-17.

[502] Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'Espace.*

> reached home when we pass through the front entrance into the elevator lobby. The feeling comes only when we close the door to our own apartment behind us.[503]

Moving quickly from one part of the city to another, the sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters, have led to a progressive compression of the time-space experience of the city, which problematizes people's sense of orientation by substituting a gradual passage from an urban ambience to another one. The psychological and emotional effects between safe and familiar spaces, like one's own home, and public ones, mostly unfamiliar urban zones have brought about an impoverishment of an inhabitant's sense of belonging, depriving the city of its role of orientation through cultural symbols and physical reference points. This process is gradually destabilising people and creating a sense of estrangement from the city and the consequent difficulty of feeling part of urban space. In other words, inhabitants' comfort zones tend to be limited to closed private places. The increasing risk is that of alienation from the city, which is turning into an alien and strange place rather than the generative reassurance of a human community. Indeed, the voluntary self-alienation of Fischer's character Ocean is the consequence of a city that is no longer perceived as one's community, but as a hostile place marked by instability, criminality, and non-sense behaviour.

Fischer's narration begins with a description of the situation in London from the viewpoint of the main character Ocean, who loves travelling but chooses to estrange herself by living physically isolated in her apartment. Not only does Fischer use her words to describe the brutality, instability and inhumanity of London life, but also the negative effects that this urban condition has on people's mental health and on the idea of community. According to Ocean, London "is impossible and soon there will be no one left but investment bankers, asylum seekers and tourists. And herself."[504] London appears to be impossible not only because the economic aspects of life seem to take the place of the necessities of an urban community, but also because the rhythm and complexity of urban life seem to exceed human stamina, becoming absurd and inhuman.

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[503] Albert Eide Parr, "The City as Habitat", in *The Centennial Review*, 14.2, Spring 1970, 177-187, 184

[504] Fisher, *Voyage to the Endo of the Room*, 22-23.

> Sometimes I wonder what the commuters, who have been standing in the rain for an hour because their train has been cancelled three times in a row for the second day running because the drivers have not bothered to turn up, late for a doctor's appointment they have had to wait ten months for, unable to console themselves with the prospect of a holiday since living in the capital sucks every penny out of them. (22-23)

Ocean thinks that this chaotic, frenetic and messy condition "numbs you, it stuffs you like a turkey with everyday nonsense: hundreds of mundanities clog, fog, and then stops your mind."[505] Fischer's character seems to suffer from a paralysis caused by what psychologists would call cognitive business, a sort of over stimulation of the human mind, which needs to stop in order to contrast this overload. Another paralyzing factor Ocean points out is what experts would call "territorial distress" [506] , which refers to a feeling of anxiety, powerlessness and disorientation produced by rapid changes in the landscape, and more in general by a high rate of fluidity. Fischer tackles this issue by letting Ocean compare the condition of one of her friends to her own.

> Audley has one advantage over me; he has a starting point. To travel you have to have somewhere to start from. Sunk Island might be dispiriting and bare, but it has one great strength: It has fixity. The farms and cottages have been there for generations and have the intention of remaining. The name of the place where I grew up still exists; but the place itself is gone. Most of the streets persist, but the place has been razed. It was chipped away, day by day, disassembled, piece by piece. Men did this over twenty years. Most suburbs are like this, presumably, rebuilt out of recognition. Last time I went back, I had no idea where to find anything. Ironically, in many ways it was the same: the same services, but everything jumbled up and redesigned. Everything five or ten doors out of place. Someone threw my youth away. Even if the place had been carefully preserved, I wouldn't have wanted to go back very often, but it's disheartening to witness how disposable your past is. Elderly relatives lamenting change had always bored me, but at under half their age I find myself there. It's the small things that are often the most missed: the stairs you fell down, the alleyway where you had a kiss, the bench where you sat with your friends.

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[505] *Ibid*, 35.

[506] F. Amadeo e M. Tansella, "Ambiente urbano e schizofrenia. Dall'Associazioe Statistica alla Relazione Causale", in *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale*, XV2006, n4, 240

> You want something to hang on to, even if it's a dump. Apart from the big attractions, London has become fluid; a big soup where the meat and veg might stay the same, but everything moves, except the traffic. Responsibility of any sort seems antique. I have become the most stable thing I know. All you can do is watch. (184)

Ocean's thoughts on her hometown clearly highlight the instability of the place that was once her home. Everything has been torn down, redesigned and rebuilt. Fischer's choice of words like "raze," "chipped away," and "disassembled" make readers perceive the violence and shocking experience implied in the fast reshaping of the place, typical of territorial distress. Interestingly enough, Oceans juxtaposes the fixity of Audley's home, which is a stable and reliable starting point from which Audley can travel, and the disheartening fluidity of her hometown, which seems to confuse and paralyse her. She has lost her reference points, and does not know where to find anything because everything seems to be out of place and disordered. This makes Ocean feel anxious and disoriented - the space she describes has lost its role as an ordered framework. The urban characteristic of being a meaningful space is strictly linked to inhabitant's act of ordering. This attitude was discussed by Bollnow in "The Ordering of Space," where he claims that the process of ordering is very significant because through this act people assign a place in a space to every object and to themselves as well. This way, the ordered area becomes a clearly comprehensible and manageable space. Basically, by doing this, people are re-creating space for themselves.[507]

Moreover, those physical places, which were abruptly dismantled and reshaped, were so intimately linked to Ocean's past that she feels her past as something disposable, no longer there. This makes her feel rootless because something that is part of her identity seems to have been lost. "Someone threw my youth away," Ocean says. Again, the space she is describing, which epitomises London, has lost one of its most important functions: that of collective and personal memory, as Roland Barthes pointed out. Indeed, according to the French philosopher, another process that contributes to make urban space a significant space is based on the layering of historical and social events that leave a trace of their passage in the city. The city functions as the locus of the collective memory of its people, associating past events with objects

[507] Otto F. Bollnow, *Human space, (*London: Hyphen Press, 1963), 196.

and places.[508] Therefore, our articulations of space, as a meaningful shared language, as memorials to the past and combinatorial affordances for the future, teach us not only about ourselves but also about those around us, orient us and give us a safe space that we can manage.

Not only does the fluid condition of contemporary urban space menace the stability of one's personal identity, but it also seems to undermine the community itself. Indeed, according to Ocean's description, there is no real commitment, engagement or relationships in the fluidity of London. Everything and everyone share the same space but they barely touch each other, like in a soup where pieces may float together but they do not actually blend. People no longer feel responsibility of any sort and without responsibility there cannot be any kind of community, just a mass, or a *Gesellshaft* as Toennes would say[509].

This missing community appears clear also when Ocean describes an episode that happened one night:

> A woman explained she was 'from the end house' and that she needed money for electricity so she could warm up a bottle for her baby." […] "You say you're from 'the end house'; thus, you are not some feckless passer-by but a neighbour, but not a neighbour likely to be known. You don't want money for yourself, but for your baby. You can't ask anybody in your house, you have to come to me. I was 99.9 per cent sure she was lying, but in fact the end house did have a high turnover of transients and no-hopers and I've seen women with infants go completely insane and do stranger things than ring doorbells at four-thirty in the morning. I wanted to be able to return to a sound sleep. I gave her some money, which she said she would immediately repay. She didn't. I never saw her again, so at least I had the satisfaction of being proved right. (202)

In the fluid London the difference between a passerby and a neighbour seems to blur. Houses are sets for a fast "turnover of transients." There are no longer residents with whom there might be familiarity, closeness and trust, but mostly strangers who feel no commitment or responsibility, and who easily disappoint expectations of human relationships and gratitude.

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[508] Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities,* (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, 1995).

[509] Ferdinand Toennies, *Community and Society*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1963).

The lack of stability that provokes Ocean's territorial distress includes the lack of a sense of safety, which transforms one's living place into a sort of dangerous jungle with no rules.

> Outside my window is a living encyclopaedia of crime. From my window, without spending a lot of time, without any effort, I have witnessed robbery, assault, arson, drug-dealing, burglary, riot and rape. I've not seen a murder yet, though we do have murders galore, both domestic and professional, in the vicinity. It's easier to get killed here than almost anywhere else in London. [...] I list the many international criminal brotherhoods with representation locally: the Russians, the Jamaicans, the Italians, the Turks, the Colombians. (30)

Ocean takes the transcultural society of post-multicultural London for granted, but what appears significant to her is the criminal life everyone is involved in. Her comment does not appear to be discriminatory, since everyone is equally involved in such an illegitimate condition; she implicitly points out the degraded condition of a society where civic commitment typical of citizenship has been replaced by anomie and obliviousness typical of city users, transients and strangers, as already highlighted by John Lanchester in *Capital* and theorized by Ferdinand Toennes, who declared the passage from the concept of community to that of society.[510]
. In such a condition, without a real human community based on civic values, reciprocal commitment and common purposes aimed at the common good, no cultural integration and above all no post-multicultural identity seems possible.

The fluid, disorienting and violent condition of London is linked to a pervasive condition of non-sense, according to Ocean. Indeed, she narrates the strange event that she considers the last step before her self-isolation, highlighting the irrationality of urban life:

> It was the woman with the wedding-cake that was the end. I was walking down to the underground when I saw this woman teetering along on the pavement with an enormous three-tiered wedding cake. Baffled, because I knew there weren't any cake shops in the neighbourhood, and there weren't any parked cars or doorways nearby that she could be making for; it looked, implausibly enough, as if she was just taking her wedding-cake out for a walk, with considerable difficulty. As

[510] Guidi Martinotti, "Comment on Sharon Zukin", in *Sociologica* 3, dicembre 2011, 12

> I drew level with her, even more implausibly, she side-kicked me in the stomach. It was very painful, and I doubled up. The woman and cake continued on their way. (35)

The absurdity perceived by Ocean is the clear sign of her mental sufferance and the transformation of the urban community into an alienating place, which is strictly connected to people's perception of being meaningless and totally disconnected from each other. Indeed, the etymological meaning of the term absurd comes from *ab-*"off, away from," and "dull, deaf, mute." […] Thus the basic sense is perhaps "out of tune." Since 'deaf' often has two semantic sides, 'who cannot hear' and 'who is not heard,' *ab-surdus* can be explained as 'which is unheard of'. The modern English sese is the Latin figurative one, perhaps 'out of harmony with reason or property'"[511]

Therefore, absurdity refers to "being out of harmony,"strictly connected to the feeling of "not being heard," which corresponds to the identity of the alien according to Simmel's theory, which has been previously underlined. Indeed, the alien, or the stranger, is that who "does not belong," who is not recognized as part of the community, his presence is "fluid," unheard. The risk of contemporary urban communities is to make everyone feel unheard and rootless: an alien.

Indeed,once the city is no longer the ordered framework in which people can find their place and through which they can give order and meaning to their experience, reality no longer seems to be manageable or comprehensible; thus, it seems more and more irrational, unreasonable, and absurd causing instability, mental distress and, consequently, an increasing urge for self-alienation

> I had noticed for some time that I'd always return home in a worse mood than I'd left. At the very least I'd be tired, but usually furious about some outrage. Nothing works in London and you are asked for money or intercourse every three yards. My neighbourhood leads in this regard, but it's much the same all over London. The city, according to what I read, used to be for the benefit of the rich. Now it seems to be run for the benefit of vagrants, nutcases, drunks and thugs. If nothing else I have become a connoisseur of beginning tricks. (36)

Urban places have become hostile places since they have been deprived of all their original features. There is no longer any ordering space, nor a meaningful framework; urban places do not work as the collective memory anymore; they are not those safe

[511] https://www.etymonline.com/word/absurd, last accessed April, 2020.

spaces whose limits helped people define their identity. The dialogic relationship that occurs between people and their city appears to be highly different to that bond described by Roland Barthes, according to which: "The city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it."[512] Barthes explains that this language is what inevitably produces specific urban semiotics and semantics, which are able to describe a citizen's identity, imagery and behaviour. It is a sort of common "code" which defines a safe place, perceived by people as their own space, as home. A home, which is not just a neutral container that hosts human beings, but it is the outcome of several meaningful processes and human relationships that invest physical places with high symbolic value, as Lefebvre stated in his seminal work, *La Production de l'Espace* (1974).[513]

Unfortunately, Fisher's description of London depicts a city which is no longer able to be a home, but it appears to be a gigantic, inhuman economic machine that over-stimulates its inhabitants and allows the most violent or strong to win over the others. Because of this situation, Ocean realised she did not have enough energy to live the urban life. One day, she almost passed out in the underground. She made it home feeling completely drained and then decided never to go out again.

Her home became a sort of microcosm, where she organized her life in her personal ordered space – a manageable life. She describes her flat as more than adequate, spacious, sunny and comfortable. Even walking up and down the staircase with its chunky carpeting is soothing for her. The walls are solid enough to protect her from the "sonic invasion" of neighbours and the whole apartment is muffled by trees. Her little microcosm seems to be the opposite of the world outside, creating a meaningful contrast that highlights even more how dark and threatening she considers London outside to be. Moreover, she says she is not alone in her self-isolation: "I have thousands of slaves to do my bidding. I have Lithuania pianists, Korean violinists, Icelandic tenors, Dutch divas, American harpsichordists, Senegalese cellists, Balinese drummers, slaves living and dead of almost every nation to play music for me." (4-5) This comment underlines two significant aspects. The first is the technological dimension of contemporary life that is able to blur physical boundaries, but which

[512] Roland Barthes, "Semiology and Urbanism", in Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, (London, New York: Routledge,1997), 413.

[513] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

allows the world to be present even in her isolation. There is a part of the outside world that she chooses to let in. The second aspect is that of a distorted idea of multiculturality, according to which, again, there is no real human exchange and commitment but only useful relationships. Both these aspects are obvious again when Ocean describes her peculiar way of travelling. Indeed, she decides to hire a travel agent, Garba, who arranges some international meetings for her On each occasion, Garba customises the setting to make it as realistic as possible and he invites some foreign guests.

> I like to travel, but I never leave the house. In the last two years I have visited Japan, Ecuador, Jordan, Italy, Nigeria, Indonesia, Brazil and China. I like to immerse myself in a place, learn a bit of the language, read up and observe. The satellite on the roof gets me almost everything, and the net does the rest. I'll soak up stuff for a few months and then have one or two dinners arranged by Garba in my spare flat below. (34)

Technology allows her to have the illusion of travelling by letting her visit foreign places and virtually experience different cultures, while always maintaining objectivity, not-belonging, mobility, abstract commonality and anonymity typical of strangers, according to Simmel[514].

> I get ready for the evening. As I rise from the bathtub, I am faced with the perpetual puzzler of how much elegance I want to carry. I only dress up now when I go abroad. I stroll downstairs to Finland. […] I like the way Garba has done the place up. The other guests are a couple, Silja and Tuomas, international lawyers who work for a bank. My guidebook has told me to be prepared, that while Finns are sociable, they enjoy a good silence and like to share it in a way other nationalities share a beer. […] Silja and Tuomas quiz me about what is going on in terms of the theatre, exhibitions, concerts. I'm not a great one for going out. Partly because nothing works in London. Nothing. (22)

Travelling for Ocean is just an effortless pastime, characterised by a schizophrenic tension between farce and reality. This same schizophrenic condition appears to be even more emphasized when Ocean decides to hire Audley, a bounty hunter, to look for one of Oceans's ex-boyfriends, Chuck, she believes to be dead. One day Audely

[514] George Simmel, "The Stranger," in Kurt Wolff (trans.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: The Free Press , p. 406.

received a mysterious letter from Chuck inviting her to look for him by following some nstructions, he wrote in the letter, like a sort of treasure hunt. In order to satisfy her curiosity, Ocean decides to let Audley travel for her, staying connected through a computer and a webcam. During the narration of this virtual travelling, the reader can notice a schizofrenic alternation and overlapping of inside, Ocean's flat, and outside, Audely's travelling, till the use of the pronoun "we," which creates a sort of meta-condition typical of the metacity where the boundary between the two conditions, in and out, apparently disappears

> This is the great benefit of travelling from home. While Audley has to schlep around to find a hotel, I can have a bath or cook myself supper. Even ten years ago you would have to be a government to pull off a stunt like this. Now I can sit at home watching my big monitor, while Audley feeds me Chuck with equipment that's barely bulkier than a camera. With his earpiece, Audley appears to be inconspicuously listening to his personal stereo. The picture and sound quality aren't superb, but I can leave Chuck any second I want to and be instantly sleeping in my own bed. (199)

As Oceans clearly explains, the blurring of limits within the digital dimension of the metacity is actually just an illusion, which allows Ocean to disconnect herself whenever she likes or needs to, immediately feeling safe within her little microcosm. Her separate condition remains that of someone who has definitely renounced her place in the world and given up her right to the city by deciding to alienate herself and live as the perfect stranger. Ocean accepts to leave her safe haven and get in touch with the outside world again only when she discovers that Audley is getting depressed and has suicidal thoughts. At that moment she decides to help him by meeting him. The city she finds outside does not seem any different from the city she escaped from.

> Outside, I walk down the driveway which feels more like a driveway than any other I've walked down. I pass a tatty car which has a handwritten notice displayed. This car has been broken into three times already. 'There is nothing left worth stealing. Please leave it alone.' At the bus stop, there is a small queue. A woman with cropped hair. I had my hair as short as that most of the time when I was a dancer because it was more serious. She wears a 'We hate hate' T-shirt. A porky teenager talking into a phone, 'I'm not lazy. I'm just choosy about what I do.' A woman with two four-year-old girls in tow. Children that age are usually pleased, as if they know a wonderful secret, and so pleasing. One girl points at me, and whispers into the other's ear. Nastily, they laugh. I check for some embarrassing irregularity in my appearance, but can find none. The whisper notices

> my gaze, stops laughing, and beams me a big, imploring, let's-be-friends smile. The switch is instant and astonishing. My head is stretched by the light, the space and the sounds of the street. No sign of a bus, but I'm unflustered. The teenager complains loudly into his phone: 'This chaos is poorly organised, know what I mean?' I would never have left to save myself, I can see that. Never. But I'll leave to save Audley. (251)

Again, she finds merciless criminality, a queue of people at the bus stop, where they all seem to be isolated and busy minding their own business, more likely a disconnected mass of strangers than a group of people who belong to the same community. Besides, some of the passers-by she meets are not only indifferent, but they seem hostile, staring and laughing at her. Yet, she feels "unflustered." Somehow, her purpose of saving Audley seems to be more important than the urban chaos; it seems to give her a sort of ordering principle able to give sense even to the absurdity of the urban reality. Indeed, she reveals: "I understand that now. The battle is always with yourself, but that doesn't preclude having an ally. We all need our spiritual backs to be scrubbed every now and then. Home can never be a place, only a person." (251)

Ocean's statement points out what is at the core of the modern urban problem: the dehumanization of urban places and the consequent destruction of the urban community based on the values of citizenship and on one's right to the city. Indeed, it is simply by virtue of the presence of a real community, which relies on real human relationships and reciprocal commitments, that the city may regain its role as a meaningful framework, collective memory and common language and can be that ontological system that not only lets everyone's identity grow but which can also favour the birth of a new transcultural community.

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to analyse the relationship between the contemporary urban environment and a post-multicultural society, focusing specifically on London as the case in study. Indeed, London provides a peculiar model of a post-multicultural city, where particular historical, social and urban conditions are increasingly challenging the idea of citizenship, Britishness and identity. Therefore, this study initiated with a theoretical background regarding the historical, economical and sociological evolution of the urban space in order to discover how the concrete local dimension of the city may influence the evolution of a new integrated post-multicultural society characterised by an increasingly pervasive condition of superdiversity.

By combining the historical evolution of the city and a political and theoretical analysis of London's passage from multiculturalism and post-multiculturalism with various contemporary scientific studies on the urban dimension, including sociological theories and psychogeography, the thesis has aimed to a broad, interdisciplinary analysis of the enormous changes that physical urban spaces and urban societies underwent over the last century. Indeed, these contemporary new challenges are currently questioning important principles like the role of citizenship, a clear idea of community, the ambiguous identification of "who the stranger is," what Britishness means and what integration implies particularly now that third and fourth generations of immigrants or multi-racial families populate the city.

In order to bring the theoretical insights provided by the different scientific perspectives down to real human experience, this research narrowed its focus to an analysis of three significant contemporary literary works to provide a broader and more organic view able to comprehend and integrate all the various theoretical issues proposed by the individual disciplines, giving voice to human perspective and conscience.

The first chapter focused not only on the growth of urban spaces throughout history, but particularly on the evolution of the significance that cities have had for human beings over the centuries, from mythological tales to literary and philosophical insights up to contemporary theories and interpretations. The physical space of the community has been proved to be the first place where humanity grew and developed. The research has come up with the definition of it as "ontological space," since the

'city' was able to originate the semantics of culture, where personal identity was formed through the relationships between inhabitants and their community over the centuries. Indeed, within urban space, people can be recognized as active members of the community, as "legal personae," as part of a same cultural urban identity, because they share the same spaces, reading the city as if it were a text characterised by its own language, with shared reference points, shaped by specific symbols and semiotics. This ontological, generative and nurturing role of the city was particularly clear in ancient cultures like those in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where many believed the city was the birthplace of humanity. In fact, they associated the symbol for city with that for mother.[515]

This ontological nature of the city also acquired a transcendental meaning with the advent of Christian societies, beautifully expressed through the vertical urban structures of the Middle Ages when the cathedral spires continuously invited people to look upwards, recalling the strict connection with what St Augustine called "the city of God." This transcendental dimension of urban space was radically changed by the Industrial Revolution and technical innovations of the 17th and 18th centuries, which introduced large-scale production and, above all, a significant change in the perception of the city, which became a capitalistic machine and a negotiable commodity.

This change of perspective was the fundamental turning point that introduced man to the modern conception of city. Indeed, from that historical period, urban space has undergone a process of increasing commodification, transforming the "polis," the place that Aristotle specifically indicated as the place for human relationships and political partnership, into a vast international market. To describe this specific transformation, Lefebvre distinguishes between the city and "the urban." He held that the contemporary city is a capitalist city, which is merely an impoverished manifestation of the urban. Moreover, he argued that capitalist industrialization forced on the city the primacy of exchange value, which consequently made everything in the city, including space itself, reducible to economic exchange and a marketable commodity.

Even in this case, the close symbiosis between urban life and people's relationships and identity was demonstrated by Ferdinand Toennies, who claimed that urban

[515] Lewis Mumford, *City in History*, (New York, London: Harvest Book, 1961),13. A

communities were transformed into associations because of the depersonalisation of urban centres. Indeed, if community defines a set of relationships based on civic values and commitment, personal contacts, face-to-face daily contact, traditions, family ties and religion, the term society refers to a contract among abstract subjects and impersonal organisations.[516]

This progressive disenfranchisement of inhabitants from personal involvement in city life has led to a progressive alienation from urban space, leading people to voluntary estrangement and isolation. This phenomenon was widely studied by Henry Lefebvre who coined the term "the right to the city,"[517] referring to a struggle against the alienation of urban space through a process of appropriation. Not only does this refute property rights as a concept of ownership, but it also affirms a radical alternative: the city belongs to those who inhabit it. Appropriation is thus closely linked to the active participation of inhabitants in urban life and to personal contacts and sharing of civic values in order to make city space their own again. This idea was further developed by the economist and anthropologist David Harvey who explained that "the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city […] the freedom to make and remake our cities."[518] The importance of such a right has even been recognized by international organizations, since it has been proved that commodified urban space with its frenetic rhythm and dehumanized society is increasingly causing individual and social suffering and disease, as George Simmel explained in his seminal work, *Metropolis and Mental Life*.[519] As a matter of fact, "buildings and cities can affect our mood and well-being, and specialised cells in the hippocampal region of our brains are attuned to the geometry and arrangement of the spaces we inhabit."[520]

The issues related to the contemporary urban condition require even more attention today in the contemporary post-migration period, when urban societies are

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516 Ferdinand Toennes, *Community and Society*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1963).

517 Henry Lefebvre, "Le Droit a la Ville", in L'Homme et la société, 6, (1967): 29-35

518 Chendan Yan, "Who owns the 'Right to The City' Moving Towards Urban Inclusivity, in *Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies*, 2016, https://environment.yale.edu/blog/2016/06/who-owns-the-right-to-the-city-moving-towards-urban-inclusivity/, last access April 2019

519 George Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1950),72

520 Bond, "The Hidden Ways That Architecture Affects How You Feel"

facing a *de-facto* ethnical, cultural and sociological crisis meant as a period of major reshaping and evolution. Indeed, the urban scene profoundly characterised by superdiversity is undergoing a process of ethnical and cultural blending, leading to a new sort of urban DNA. The impact of this process on human relations, political and mental stability, and the possibility of a real integration process of constructing a new unified community, sense of belonging and shared citizenship is one of the biggest questions of the contemporary scene. This thesis has endeavoured to provide an insight on the issues.

After considering the nature of the city from different points of view, the second chapter focused on the nature of the post-multicultural society, and discussed the passage from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism and some of the main issues connected to it such as the idea of citizenship, Britishness and integration. Historical and political analyses of such a shift has shown how the irrefutable urban condition of a superdiverse society and, above all, the increased blurring of ethnical and cultural categorizations due to third and fourth generations of immigrants or mixed families, have revealed multicultural policies that are inadequate to deal with the current urban panorama. Indeed, the analysis showed that, by force of circumstances and beyond any political or ideological belief, the nature of urban space that provides people with daily contact, familiarity, common reference points, symbolic coordinates to give order to their lives, and an effective personal and historical memory crystallised in the physical dimension of the city. By virtue of this, most contemporary post-multicultural cities, especially London, are generating a sort of new cultural 'DNA', in which all the possible differences involved in the "multi-" identity are gradually becoming an integral, living and evolving organism.

This inevitable evolutionary process is surely challenging urban life, not only from a political point of view by requiring a redefinition of the concept of citizenship, but also by requiring an effort to provide a new reconfiguration of Britishness and Englishness, which is a gradual and emotionally demanding process. Indeed, according to Ian Baucom, "what is finally threatened by the growth of a black population in England is less the white body than the metropolitan landscape- which the immigrants remake" […] by "transforming" an imagined, idealized "once quiet street…into a place of noise and confusion" and thereby "fundamentally altering and remaking England

and Englishness."[521] The relevance of such a claim has been proved by the English government's effort to try and deal with this new urban condition. Indeed, *The Parekh Report*, the product of the Commission for the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain- which depicted Britain as marked by significant cultural hybridity and a concept of Britishness that is constantly evolving-[522] pointed out that in a society of multiple and overlapping identities, many enjoyed the diversity and complexity of life i "but also experienced conflicting loyalties".[523]

Again, urban space turns out to be fundamental in dealing with such a demanding evolutionary process, because if, on the one hand, urban space may amplify contrasts and cultural crises by bringing social differences together at a unique level of intensity,[524] research studies have shown that there is an increasing "need for the local," fulfilled by the city. Adrienne Rich and Elspeth Probyn deal with this issue in their "Notes Towards a Politics of Location"[525] and "Travels in Post-modern: Making Sense of the Local,"[526] respectively. Besides, this idea of location, which combines identity, place and culture, explains why the transformations that are occurring within the urban environment are deeply affecting not only one's own cultural and political identity but also the psychological and most intimate self.

Therefore, this universal need to feel part of the city brought about the urge to reconsider the concept of citizenship, traditionally based on universal and democratic ideas of partnership, sharing of civic values, social and political participation, emotional and moral ties, going beyond ethnical bonds. Paradoxically, this universal dimension of citizenship combines in itself the specific location of the city, requiring people to engage in urban life, and collaboration for a common welfare purpose. Seyla Benhabib claims that citizenship is a form of "social practice" not

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[521] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23-24.

[522] Bikhu Parekh, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).

[523] Ibidem.

[524] Geraldine Pratt, "Grids of difference: Place and identity formation"' in *Cities of Difference*, R. Fincher and J. M. Jacobs (eds), (New York: The Guilford Press,1998), 26-48.

[525] Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986).

[526] Probyn, Elspeth. "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local." in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

reducible to legality,[527] and Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose define citizenship as "a language by means of which people can make claims on the political community concerning rights and duties, political and moral or ethical practices, and criteria of membership."[528] Janice Ho considers

> citizenship as a discursive and narrative frame in which issues of membership (who counts as a citizen), of political subjectivity (of who is the citizen-subject), and of the practice of citizenship (of what counts as political) are often contested. [...] Citizenship as narrative is what exceeds and remains unprescribed by law [...] (It becomes) the locus of symbolic struggle.[529]

For this reason, this study particularly focused on an analysis of significant literary narrations able to map shifting boundaries and mould new changes into matter-of-fact truths, providing readers with the necessary time to digest and perhaps even understand them. Narrative fiction succeeds in making people aware of the set of relationships that make them a community, as in Kamal Ahmed's book, *Life and Times of a Very British Man* (analysed in the third chapter). It can also shed light on certain risks and dangers and envision possible future developments in order to suggest a new human, social and political ethics, as John Lanchester does in *Capital* (analysed in the fourth chapter). Finally, stories create the therapeutic space that enables people to deal with their anxieties, personal and psychological suffering, which such big urban changes may provoke. This is the case in Tibor Fischer's *Voyage to the End of the Room*, discussed in the last chapter.

Kamal Ahmed's *Life and Times of a Very British Man* engages in a sort of critical dialogue with those narrations about the city and urban identity inherited from the past, which still have resonance in urban culture through the imposition of symbols

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[527] Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[528] Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose, "Citizenship and Empire, 1867-1928,"in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 277.

[529] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2015), 8.

and stereotypes. As the author points out, those narrations affect people's feelings, judgements and actions. Some people feel like aliens in their own country, which contributes to a fear of the "other." The relevance of such narrations confirms that the city is not only the sum of physical places, but it is also a narrative dispositive, producing symbols, beliefs, traditions and habits. We can imagine the urban space as an immense machine that produces forms, significations, narrations, images, concepts and practices, beginning with the complex network of relationships that give life to it.[530] Ahmed's narration engages with this narrative meta-city and gives voice to that cultural transformation and reshaping that London underwent over the last century. Indeed, the act of narrating triggers a process of awareness of changing reality; it provides a sort of lens, a telescopic view, through which people can observe and see themselves as a community. Taking into consideration political and social events and his personal account of a new British man, half English and half Sudanese, deeply rooted in London life, Ahmed's book shows how British DNA is inevitably changing. This change is profoundly fostered by the sharing of the same spaces such as neighbourhoods, streets, undergrounds, squares, and supermarkets, sharing the same kind of information or narrations produced by newspapers, advertisements, cultural and political events, laws, and customs, together with physical and cultural contact, which fosters familiarity, empathy and openness. In this sense Ahmed's literary voice echoes Allport's contact theory according to which:

> It is contact that can help reconciliation. Start maybe with the sharing of sorrows. […] Although the sharing of sorrows may initially be necessary, soon groups will move on, the conversation will move on- if the process is working. Move on to what? The similar stories we all experience, the ordinariness of life rather than the extraordinariness of discrimination or resentment. The stories of parenthood, work, and hobbies, sport, who won at football, the Olympics, cricket.[...] Coming together means coming together as individuals, as mothers and fathers, as teachers, as the employed, the unemployed, the disabled, the young, the old, as people who want to build that new urban garden for the local community to enjoy, to repaint that graffiti-laden wall, to fix that fence, launch that

[530] "The City as a Narrative Dispositive," *Unità di Crisi. Observatory on Politics of Representation*, http://www.unitadicrisi.org/the-city-as-a-narrative-dispositive/, last accessed April 2020.

> sports project to bring schoolchildren together who may be living separate lives. Each one becomes a small tendril link, knitting together to make something stronger.[531]

Thus, becoming part of the urban community is the first step towards reconciliation. Ahmed's narration is an exact account of how the sharing of the same city by people with different ethnical backgrounds is producing a new community, where the border between in-groups and out-groups is no longer race-based, but location-based: the city is the defining criteria. Indeed, the city as a narrative dispositive can be defined as a sort of "ontological dispositive:" a system which gives rise to culture and identity through its narrations, symbols, and also through the contact and relationships it fosters, but also a system which is able to bind a community together.

Unfortunately, this role as an "ontological dispositive" has been undermined by the increasing commodification and depersonalization of urban space. Lanchester's novel *Capital*[532] depicts a city transformed into a commercial commodity with its negative implications that contradict the idea of community and citizenship. Indeed, Lanchester denies the possibility of an urban geographical community in the contemporary city characterised by a consumeristic way of life and the concept of urban space as a profitable investment rather than as a home, a place where community can exist. Through the experiences of his characters, who perfectly epitomize the superdiverse, transcultural London society, Lanchester has confirmed one of the fundamental points of this thesis: integration and hybridization cannot take place if there is no community to accommodate them and no urban setting that can be called home. One of the best examples of this is the story of Matya and Zbigniew, two immigrants who initially perceive London as the right opportunity to make their fortune, using the city exactly like a capitalistic machine. After falling in love, they start experiencing London outside the consumeristic logic, strolling about and coming into contact with that historical and cultural part of London they had never experienced before. They seem to escape the consumeristic logic that sees the city as an asset and are able to perceive the beauty of being part of the urban community and of the city as a sort of huge organism full of life and history. They find a city that appears to be the only possible place for them to build their future together. Indeed, they both realize

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[531] *Ibid*, 254.

[532] John Lanchester, *Capital*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

that neither Poland nor Hungary would be suitable to their new complex, transcultural identity.

Through his novel Lanchester was able to highlight one of the most dangerous challenges that contemporary urban space is facing, but he also envisions the possibility to change the current trend of commodification, speculation, disconnectedness and exclusion that is menacing the possibility of creating a new kind of hybrid Britishness. The possible way out is rooted in the urban democratic values of citizenship and in Lefebvre's "right to the city""; that is, the city belongs to those who inhabit it, and not to those who only use it.

As a demonstration of the tight connection between a person's most personal and intimate sphere and the surrounding urban space, it has also been shown that the transformation of the urban dimension into a commodified asset, where the landscape changes frenetically, where houses have a frequent turnover of owners, and where the community has been transformed into a mass of strangers, have all had a huge influence on the development of mental illnesses.

Tibor Fischer's *Voyage to the End of the Room* not only doubted the possibility of a community, but it brings to the fore the question "who is the stranger?" The story is about a Londoner who voluntarily alienates herself from urban society, considering herself to be a stranger in a city that has become a menace for her. The city ends up being an enemy, no longer hospitable but hostile, and strangers are no longer just the foreigners but all those inhabitants who feel lost and powerless within the city. As the idea of integration is a two-way process, even that of estrangement can be the same. What seems to be relevant in both situations is the role of the city, which influences people's self-awareness, mental health, relationships among inhabitants, and their sense of belonging and partnership. Indeed, urban boundaries mark that safe place where people invent themselves by both adapting to urban culture and re-ordering the space for themselves.[533]

Lanchester's novel shows that the more the people-city relationship is familiar and human-sized, the more healthy and positive it is, because urban space - the city - becomes that familiar place where people can exercise their right to occupy those spaces, use them and claim them as theirs. But the more this relationship overwhelms

[533] Otto F. Bollnow, *Human space, (*London: Hyphen Press, 1963).

the human dimension and becomes fragmented, fluid, chaotic, detached and disrupted, the more the space transforms itself into a non-space and is perceived as a threat and a danger.

Therefore, in the non-spaces of the commodified city, not only is integration impossible, but self-estrangement is fostered, transforming urban community dwellers into strangers, where the idea of "stranger" goes beyond the ethnical definition and refers to the more intimate feeling of "not belonging" due to the lack of a real community based on familiarity and empathy.

As Fisher's main character realises at the end of the novel: "Home can never be a place, only a person."[534] This statement points out one of the main points at the core of this research: it is thanks to the presence of a real community based on human relationships and reciprocal commitment that the city may regain its role as a meaningful framework, collective memory and common language and can function as the ontological system that can host the birth of a new transcultural community.

[534] Tibor Fischer, *Voyage to the End of The Room*,(London: Vintage, 2004), 251.

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