Diversity and Homogeneity

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The Politics of Nation, Ethnicity and Gender

Edited by

Joanna Kruczkowska
and Paulina Mirowska

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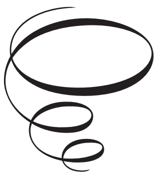

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INTRODUCTION

JOANNA KRUCZKOWSKA
AND PAULINA MIROWSKA

This collection of essays unites and explores a wide range of thematic areas, generic categories and geopolitical contexts with the common aim of addressing some of the fundamental concepts of contemporary civilization: nation, ethnicity and gender. Drawing specifically on British and American drama, theatre and film, this complex problematics is set against global, multicultural phenomena such as transnational migration, terrorism, social inequality, human rights issues, rampant urbanization, burgeoning consumerism, commercialization of culture, media manipulation, and many others. Through the analysis of literary texts, cinematic works and theatrical performance, the authors of the chapters delve into the dynamics of the binary opposition of diversity and homogeneity, drawing attention to the fact that the democratic culture of the West, often perceived as the carrier of universal standards, appears to be paradoxical in itself. On the one hand, it has been founded on a vital premise of individual freedom, and as such should embrace and celebrate diversity as a basis of social organisation. On the other, the objective of Western democracy is to normalize citizens' behaviour, which, in effect, often leads to marginalizing individuals who fail to conform with social standards imposed by the majority in order to create a homogeneously sanitized society.

Keenly attuned to questions of alterity, social and cultural fluidity, and heterogeneous forms of identity, yet also sensitive to contemporary unifying tendencies informing an increasingly globalized society, *Diversity and Homogeneity* provides a broad-spectrum overview of major theoretical and critical perspectives applied to the analysis of drama, fiction, film and performance. The analysis is anchored in a vast research area spanning diverse fields: from the theories of nationhood and citizenship (advocated, among others, by Benedict Anderson, Tom Nairn, Declan Kiberd, Ralf Dahrendorf, Bryan S. Turner, Christian Joppke, Samuel Huntington), through those of postcolonial criticism and postmodern nomadism (such as those of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, James Clifford, Vilém Flusser, Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari, Zygmunt Bauman, Rosi Braidotti), gender studies (encompassing theoretical postulations of Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, Luce Irigaray, Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Susan Faludi, Fintan Walsh, and others), to the practical and theoretical issues of globalization, labour market, social stratification, forms of violence (Slavoj Žižek) and exclusion (Lydia Morris, Jane Millar), performativity and theatrical practice. The authors of the chapters present evolving attitudes in these domains as juxtaposed with time-honoured, stereotypical or idealized notions of nation, ethnicity and gender. Moreover, blending high and popular culture, the wide-ranging thematic scope of the volume's contributions also includes investigations into various intriguing aspects of such popular genres as splatter horror or crime drama.

In Chapter One, Ewa Kębłowska-Ławniczak considers the issues of nationhood and citizenship in British theatre and criticism—the interest also noticeable in other media—from a historical and contemporary perspective. In the multicultural United Kingdom, ethnicity and cultural tradition seem to invalidate homogenizing narratives of nationhood. Contemporary British playwrights readily engage themselves in discussing the vexed questions of modern identity, highlighting the problematic overlap of Englishness and Britishness, interrogating the heritage of the past and the prelapsarian myth of England as well as imagining possible scenarios for the future (Mark Ravenhill's *Citizenship*, 2005; Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Let There Be Love*, 2008; Jezz Butterworth's *Jerusalem*, 2009; postcolonial plays by Oladipo Agboluaje, Shelagh Stephenson and Biyi Bandele). The shift from a politics of nation to a politics of citizenship is illustrated, among others, by Richard Bean's controversial *England People Very Nice* (2009) and David Edgar's *Testing the Echo* (2008). British theatre, as the author of the opening chapter postulates, exemplifies the fragmentation of society, a refusal to integrate around national stereotypes and a demand for a new shared vision.

The following two chapters of the volume offer an insight into how contemporary British playwriting engages with the nation, responding to the "moments of rupture, crisis or conflict" and seeking to generate "a creative dialogue with tensions in the national fabric," to quote Nadine Holdsworth. Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983), Chapter Two sets out to investigate Dennis Kelly's dramatisations of the British nation in the framework of the theory of theatre and social inclusion (Nadine Holdsworth, Jen Harvie). The author of the chapter, Maciej Wieczorek, examines Kelly's *Osama the Hero* (2005) and *Orphans* (2009), both of which address acts of ethnic brutality against citizens stigmatized after 9/11 as supportive of anti-Western

values. Wieczorek's analysis is placed within the context of Slavoj Žižek's thought-provoking typology of violence and sociological studies concerning the interrelation between social status, economic conditions, exclusion, family violence and other phenomena troubling modern societies.

Social crisis is brought to the fore in Chapter Three, in which Monika Sarul situates one of Simon Stephens' dramas within a concise overview of British plays on terrorism. Stephens' *Pornography* exposes the "tear in the fabric" of the UK's society, the members of which are involved in terrorism (the 7/7 London Underground bombings), industrial espionage and incestuous relationships. The dramatist, as Sarul demonstrates, traces back the motives of prospective perpetrators of the terrorist acts to the sense of frustration and alienation propelling them to transgress the boundaries of social norms, while the rest of the vacuous society indulge in consumerism skilfully manipulated by the media and in idealized moments of ostensible communal unity by celebrating, for instance, the winning of the bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics.

An interesting perspective on migrants and the intricate process of their assimilation in the United Kingdom is offered in Chapter Four, which focuses on theatrical representations of Polish migrants in the British Isles after Poland's accession to the European Union. Using the framework of Zygmunt Bauman's differentiation between a tourist and a vagabond, Katarzyna Ojrzyńska argues that the recent political and economic transformations have generated the question of the changing profile of Polish migrants: from the uprooted displaced vagabond to the more constructive attitude characteristic of Bauman's tourist. The author of the chapter interprets this shift of attitudes as a transition from the notion of homogeneity and fixity to that of diversity and fluidity, and examines the subject in detail in four plays: Nicola Werenowska's *Tu i Teraz ('Here and Now')* (2012), Dermot Bolger's *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006), Catherine Grosvenor's *Cherry Blossom* (2008) and Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Let There Be Love* (2008).

The juxtaposition of the next two plays, Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982) and Václav Havel's *Mistake* (1983), in Chapter Five serves to illustrate their authors' common struggle for human rights on a national and international level, in theatre and beyond. These two dramas, at once political and metatheatrical, illuminate the function of theatre in mapping power relationships. Referring to Maurice Duverger's distinction between micro- and macropolitics, Jadwiga Uchman posits that, while Havel's allegorical drama clearly situates itself both on the macro- and micropolitical level, the macropolitical dimension of Beckett's *Catastrophe* becomes

manifest only when its connections with Havel's work and biography are recognized.

The case study in Chapter Six, devoted to the problems of social diversity and representation in theatre, benefits from the first-hand experience of its author and theatre practitioner, Dara Weinberg. With a strong focus on performance, Weinberg compares American and Polish practices in handling representation issues related to such aspects of identity as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and so forth. Two alternative theatre companies have been selected for this creative juxtaposition: Cornerstone Theater Company based in Los Angeles, classified by the author as a "community-based" model in contrast to other American theatre companies failing short of the representation demands, and Teatr Chorea (Łódź, Poland) fostering a sense of community through using choral methods derived from the post-Grotowski theatre.

Two subsequent chapters share an interest in exploring American settings and identity even further, venturing comprehensive reflections on nation and ethnicity in the spheres of drama and film. In Chapter Seven, Paulina Mirowska probes into the questions of diversity and homogeneity in the context of Sam Shepard's work, discussing the dramatist's vision of the American nation and its problematic definition after 9/11 in one of his most conspicuously "committed" plays: a biting black satire *The God of Hell* (2004). The chapter addresses Shepard's position in the cultural battle over the control of national imagery and identity, taking account of his uneasiness about the implications of the early twenty-first century crisis and his apprehension about novel perceptions of patriotism, coercive democracy and conformist homogeneity founded on self-absorption, ignorance and fear.

Similarly concerned with American authors and locales, Chapter Eight presents the 2006 film adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* directed by Mira Nair as reaching beyond the concept of ethnicity. Relegated to the realm of the past, ethnicity has been replaced by new ecologies of belonging alongside the notion of transcultural nomadism, espoused by Homi Bhabha, Rosi Braidotti, James Clifford, Vilém Flusser and other theoreticians. The author of the chapter, Justyna Stępień, argues that Lahiri's characters, whose contact with diasporas results in misindentification, are contemporary nomads moving across the borders of class, gender and race, struggling to find a secure sense of self, place and identity in the world dominated by popular imagery and global economy.

Moving to a different geopolitical context, the author of Chapter Nine, Agnieszka Łowczanin, demonstrates how the essentialist notions of identity and identification are challenged in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha*

of Suburbia (1990) and its 1993 British television adaptation co-scripted by Kureishi and directed by Roger Michell. Łowczanin draws illuminating parallels between Kureishi's text and Judith Butler's groundbreaking *Gender Trouble* (1990) preoccupied with gender identification and performativity, the problems which in Butler intersect with racial, ethnic, sexual, regional and class modalities of discursively constituted identities. The chapter posits that, in both Kureishi's novel and its cinematic version, the "patchwork" national identity of two generations of immigrants undergoes, to use Jacques Derrida's terminology, an "interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification" in the UK's multicultural and class-ridden society.

Marking the shift to gender studies, the last chapters of this volume concentrate on the concepts of masculinity (Chapter Ten) and femininity (Chapter Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen). Roy Williams's *Lift Off* (1999) becomes a point of departure for the discussion of masculine identities in multicultural urban settings of Great Britain. In his panoramic analysis in Chapter Ten, Robert Kielawski draws upon the context of the 1990s New Writing—scrutinized by Aleks Sierz, David Edgar, Elaine Aston, Fintan Walsh and other critics—as well as postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, feminist thought and masculinity studies. Focusing on black masculinity acquired and formed as a social construct, reinforced by simulacra of machismo and the sexed black body which are disseminated by homogenizing popular culture, the author contends that Williams's play dramatizes the victimization and loss of the more vulnerable elements of male identity.

The problematics of female gender, in turn, find their expression in Chapter Eleven, which delves into recent developments in dramatic and narrative forms based on heteronormativity. Defining lesbian identity in terms of ghostly figures frequently used as its symbolic correlative, Edyta Lorek-Jezińska investigates the significance of the spectral in negotiating conventions and otherness in Bryony Lavery's *Nothing Compares to You* (1995) and *Two Marias* (1989). Paradoxically, as Lorek-Jezińska observes, the otherness of non-heteronormative identities and artistic forms has often been encapsulated in the sameness, or homogeneity, of generic structures and of human relationships presented in Lavery's plays.

The closing chapters of the volume offer a spotlight on gender issues in popular culture, namely crime TV series and splatter horror. Chapter Twelve addresses a breakthrough development in the female sleuth genre through the portrayal of the protagonists in the current "female cop" series *The Fall* (2013-2015), set against the backdrop of previous successful crime shows, including the influential *Prime Suspect* (1991). In the course

of her discussion, Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska looks into the paradoxes of female agency inherent in the genre which depicts violence against women while simultaneously reflecting the values of the allegedly post-feminist society.

A very controversial treatment of the theme of violence against women can be found in splatter horror: a "reactionary" genre engaging with taboos and controversies of gender politics. Dorota Wiśniewska in Chapter Thirteen asserts that Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door* (1989) and its 2007 film adaptation directed by Gregory Wilson not only revitalize gender dynamics of the genre but also elevate female characters onto another level of transgression—towards a more articulate and rebellious position, at the same time skillfully recycling exploitation conventions. In consequence, Ketchum's fiction and its adaptation resonate with and, simultaneously, violate universal cultural norms.

The volume owes much to those who helped us during its preparation. We are particularly indebted to Professor Agnieszka Salska, Professor Maria Edelson, Professor Jolanta Nałęcz-Wojtczak and Professor Andrzej Wicher for their involvement. We are also grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing, and especially Victoria Carruthers and Sam Baker, for their support and guidance in the publication procedures.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM A POLITICS OF NATION TO A POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP: HOMOGENEITY AND DIVERSITY ON STAGE

EWA KĘBŁOWSKA-ŁAWNICZAK

In the post-1989 political reality of new migrations, affecting not only Great Britain but also the whole of Europe, there has been a visible revival of discussions on the connections among such concepts as the *politics of nation*, *national identity* and *citizenship.* The concept of citizenship, defined, among others, by Ralf Dahrendorf, is historically rooted in the institution of a nation-state (qtd. in Joppke, loc. 164[1])—although, as Bryan S. Turner writes, paradoxically, *modern* citizenship enjoys a renaissance in "highly differentiated societies" where "the authority of the nation-state appears to be under question" (2). In the context of European unification, paralleled by devolutionary processes, the French invention of political national citizenry (Brubaker 52) tends to erode into diverse forms of hyphenated memberships in communities that would not have been associated with citizenship in the past. For example, Christian Joppke calls on the concepts of sexual, cultural and ecological forms of citizenship, to name but a few (loc. 94). The emergence of these "multiple subject-positions" and their demand for rights leads to the concept of a radical democratic citizenship, a common political identity of these subject-positions (Isin and Wood 12). Thus the earlier, homogeneous concept of citizenship mellows and becomes less exclusive once its cornerstone, "national identity," becomes a subject of debate rather than an indisputable foundation.

[1] Locations, abbreviated as loc., refer to Kindle book citations.

The politics of nation and the politics of citizenship in the theatre or/and in current theatre criticism

In the introduction to *Rewriting the Nation* (2011), Aleks Sierz expresses an opinion that the central theme pervading New Writing for the theatre is that of "national identity"—an explicitly political subject and a declaration of a nation and identity-oriented approach. Introducing the project, Sierz confirms the old belief that theatre provides a proper forum for a "widespread conversation about who we are as a nation, and where we might be going" (1). Hence, among other dilemmas, his investigation of the present condition of nationhood on the British stage converges also on an analysis of the problematic overlap of Englishness and Britishness, the concepts which undergo constant redefining.[2] Although the book documents multiple ways of understanding nationhood in the process of its re-writing, the title hints at a desire for a coherent and imaginable identity (even if placed somewhere in the background rather than neatly formulated) and, in that way, aptly reflects a paradoxical nature of a discussion oscillating between diversity and homogeneity. In reference to the immediate political context affecting theatre, Sierz invokes the famous essay "Government and the Value of Culture," published by New Labour Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, in 2004. Amidst discussions of ethnic diversity and cultural hybridity, as well as other forms of social fragmentation (gender, ecological), Jowell struggles to define a supposedly new New Labour cultural policy. Interestingly, in the course of her "lecture," the Labour representative supports a Conservative vision of a demand for one nation and its culture by asserting that "theatres, galleries or concert halls . . . need intelligent public subsidy if complex culture is to take its place at the heart of national life" (7).[3] Accordingly, "complex culture" is the protected

[2] Political documents to which the present chapter refers, either directly or indirectly, oscillate between the concepts of Englishness and Britishness. Even if other specific nations hide under these umbrella labels, not speaking of the problem of multiculturalism in general, the following discussion is limited to the concepts which dominate the political discourse selected for discussion.

[3] The experience of commercialization shows that the markets marginalize complex culture with its homogeneity to offer diversified, pulped and marketable products whose new homogeneity provides foundations for a global village rather than nationhood. As such they neither need nor deserve sponsorship. Jowell's proposition may seem surprising as her statement was made in the midst of a debate about a differently conceived "cultural value." While the Culture Secretary seemed to have focused on a politicized conservative "intrinsic quality," the New Labour government was moving fast to reconfigure its cultural policy in economic

cornerstone of a thus formulated construction of national identity. Significantly, both Sierz, as advocate of diversity and of a fuzzy concept of identity (9), and Jowell, who appoints "complex" culture as constitutive of national identity, decide on a somewhat similar selection of relevant cultural material. Although Jowell carefully avoids the discriminating differentiation between "high" and "low" (3), she argues that a "subsidy for 'high culture' activities is a proper task for government" (6). In line with a thus formulated cultural policy, the Secretary openly excludes "entertainment" and "mass public demand" (4) from the government's immediate involvement, though, at the same time, she does express interest in an accessibility of "complex culture" to young people, an accessibility the market does not guarantee. Like Jowell, Sierz chooses to concentrate on theatre that has "something urgent to say about Britain" (9) and poses, either formally or by its message, a challenge. To conclude, for both parties, the cultural material is complex when it shares in a resistance to commercialized establishment.

In its diagnosis of nationhood, *Rewriting the Nation* concentrates on New Writing excluding, in that way, a whole range of ongoing theatrical activities,[4] a necessary decision considering the long list of plays and productions the book already deals with. Still, from the viewpoint of a debate over nationhood, such a radical convergence on New Writing appears to be somewhat arbitrary in its focus on newness. Nationhood and citizenship are immersed in current life and politics traceable in the whole spectrum of writing. Considering the fact that government subsidies for theatre and for educational projects are politically interrelated, it is hard to ignore plays which either address young audiences or respond to the new project of participative citizenship,[5] the NT Connections plays being an

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terms (Hesmondhalgh et al. 108). Apparently, New Labour developed a "conservative suspicion of the public sector, and the often dubious Conservative view of the private sector as more efficient" (104), which resulted in the implementation of "instrumentalism," i.e., new public management policies auditing public expenditure and forcing cultural institutions to justify their consumption of public money against some "targetolatry." John Holden comments on the "targets" which overtly refer to culture but ultimately control the "cost-per-user" in terms of such policy agendas as social inclusion or crime prevention (13-14). This debate on culture brought together New Labour and Conservative views in the context of a neo-liberal tide.

[4] For reason of clarity, Sierz leaves out several forms of theatrical activity, for example, physical theatre, live art, site specific ventures, theatre-in-education, work with children, young people, prisoners and puppets.

[5] Adrienne Scullion reviews the citizenship debate going on in Scotland. In "The Citizenship Debate," she reflects on participatory projects which include critical

example in Mark Ravenhill's *Citizenship* (2005). As David Lane rightly observes, New Labour politicized culture as the government "approached the arts from a utilitarian point of view" (115) replacing *heritage* with *culture*. The current task of culture was to "mend social fractures" (Lane 115) and to address, once again, homogenizing concepts. Compulsory Citizenship classes needed the support of theatre for young audiences as it proved to be a useful tool in their social and political education. Theatre was expected to be more involved in the government's strategies, not to say subjected to, and become instrumental in social engineering. While the dominant critical and political discourse in the background of Sierz's study is national and thus unavoidably totalizing, Jowell and Ravenhill—considering all differences—look forward toward new conceptions of citizenship asking what, if anything, can we have in common?

What do we have in common? The future rather than the past

The idea of England, writes Declan Kiberd, who observes that there has been a strong demand for a return of nationhood ideologies since 1989, was "invented by Shakespeare" (22). Apparently, in the diverse pursuit of nationhood-oriented concepts, the blend of left-wing political affiliation and conservative ideology, traceable in Jowell's 2004 essay, ceases to be exceptional in providing a puzzling concoction of concepts. Kiberd quotes John Rutherford's 1997 "lament" over England "yet unmade and undefined" (22). Like the efforts made to repossess England, the endeavours to revive "Great Britain" posed, too, noticeable difficulties (Kiberd 23). For various reasons—such as inability to reach consensus on the basis of heritage, sometimes because of dual or multiple cultural identity (or dual citizenship), or due to the failure of international solidarity—some political scientists as well as writers concluded that what "we" had in common, in terms of national identity or citizenship, was located in the future rather than in the past. In the American context, the idea is more understandable. In a study published as early as 1912, Randolph C. Bourne, quoted by Claus Leggewie in his "Transnational Citizenship," locates the American identity in the future suggesting that "[o]ne should not seek the foundations of American collective identity in a mystified past, as was the case with European nationalism" (qtd. in

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reading and spectatorship rather than plays for young people. Ravenhill's *Citizenship* provides clearly a bitter comment on teaching citizenship "skills" although it shares in the benefits of sponsored educational projects.

Leggewie). In addition, Leggewie explains, "we must perpetrate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future." Bourne, Leggewie writes, draws the conclusion that "America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth with other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors."

In the British context, trans-nationality takes the form of transnational urbanism and becomes the object of, for example, John Clement Ball's insights into the narratives of postcolonial fiction where the life of migrants in metropolitan London is rendered. The identities of transnational urban inhabitants, following Michael Peter Smith's argument, can be defined as interstitial, located between more powerful and homogeneous discourses of nation-states, local communities and ethnoracial formations (142). Among contemporary playwrights, many focus on variously defined interstitial identities, for example, Tanika Gupta (*Sanctuary*, 2002; *The Country Wife*, 2004), Henry Adam (*The People Next Door*, 2003) or Kwame Kwei-Armah, who oscillates between emphasis on heritage and transnationality. While in a comment on *Fix Up* (2004), Kwei-Armah claims that a "community without knowledge of itself, its history, soon self-destructs" (xi), in the more universally-oriented *Let There Be Love* (2008), he reflects on the common experience of emigration and the new citizenship based on skills:

> Like most of the middle classes in London mid-noughties, your builder or cleaner, or both, were Polish. Actually they could have been from anywhere in Eastern Europe, but just as every West Indian was Jamaican when I was growing up, every Eastern European person was Polish. I found myself becoming almost like a teacher of Britishness for them. My builder especially would ask me how to pay this and that bill. (Kwei-Armah xiii)

As opposed to this trans-national, future-oriented complexity, in a 2007 attempt to redefine Great Britain in terms of consolidating images, Gordon Brown (quoted by David Edgar in *Testing the Echo*, 68) emphasizes that there is a single "golden thread which runs through British history" (Brown) rather than a diversity of transnational multiplicity. Still, in spite of a strong past-oriented desire for homogeneity in the British political discourse, the idea of a shared future, rather than a common past, gains momentum and has been increasingly adopted for both British and pan-European contexts. Already in 1997, Tom Nairn wrote about an ambivalent nature of a seemingly backward-looking concept of nationalism:

> I wrote years ago about 'The Modern Janus', likening nationalism to the two-headed Roman deity who couldn't help looking backwards into the past as well as forward into the future. Since then the whole world has come to resemble him more rather than less. But with an important difference. I believe that, on the whole, the forward-gazing side of the strange visage may be more prominent than it was in 1977. Perhaps because today the forward view is that much more open and more encouraging than it was then. (67)

On closer inspection, the future-oriented perspective, very much like the past, may be indicative of either diversity or homogeneity. In Oladipo Agboluaje's *The Christ of Coldharbour Lane* (staged in Soho, 2007), the playtext's cover presents a burning of the Union Jack, a gesture signalling a rejection of the post 1707 imperial identity "designed" by the Treaty of Utrecht. Neither a new approach nor a rare gesture, the play, staged in a revised context of multicultural London, signals a desire to obliterate the significance of a once defined heritage.[6] It was already John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) that put on stage such a nostalgic entanglement in a thus conceived heritage of British identity and, at the same time, its bitter rejection in the aftermath of imperial dissolution. As object of both hate and nostalgic possessiveness, the imperial past paradoxically homogenizes Osborne's narrative. Shelagh Stephenson's *Mappa Mundi* (2002), written many years later, oscillates in an analogous, though more consistently postcolonial, manner between a past and a future vision of the Empire. Referring to medieval symbolism and colonial cartography Stephenson shows the layers of past territorial mapping, symbolic and scientific, to reveal a preference for new, performative and liberating hyphenated subject identities. In Agboluaje's play this "new identity," Sierz writes, consists in a mixture of "street culture, black Christianity and traditional Englishness" (2), a formulation strongly though ironically reminiscent of Tony Blair's conclusion that being British means having the right to be different and the duty to integrate where "integration" takes place neither on the level of culture nor of lifestyle but "is about values"—which the Prime Minister defines as "common unifying British values" (Blair). Once again, diversity meets with an assertion of homogeneity. Quite apart from the puzzling forms of cultural hybridity to be transcended by a "common ground"—a dilemma present also in Robin Soans's *Mixed*

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[6] The Union Jack and St George's Cross appear on the covers and in the opening scenes of other recent plays as well. In Bean's *England People Very Nice* (Oberon edition), the Cross "segregates" the subsequent groups of emigrants. In *Jerusalem* by Butterworth, the celebration of St George's Day counterpoints an act of eviction which enables the community to exorcize its monsters and to oust its scapegoats.

Up North (2009), in David Edgar's *Testing the Echo* (2008), in the controversial *England People Very Nice* (2009) by Richard Bean, and in Biyi Bandele's *Brixton Stories* (2001)—there is a proposition to seek unity and homogeneity in some future-oriented vision labelled "Jerusalem." This dream is rooted, as it seems, in a blend of the biblical prelapsarian state and its Miltonian rendition—in Milton's classical dream of a national epic, perhaps, and in William Blake's later, romantic response to and reaction against current conceptualizations of British imperialism.

It was no later than in the 1960s that Arnold Wesker, in the socialist utopia of *Their Very Own and Golden City*, drew a vision of *new Englishness* and *citizenship* after World War II. The playwright locates the project in the New Jerusalem of Garden Cities and rural England. Invoking an ideal city-concept, the dream of a prelapsarian polis, Wesker cannot resist "frustration, bitterness, and pain of the failure" (Barker 89) to carry out the project of Centre 42. This utopian conceptualization of Englishness can be related to what Ponnuswami calls "Left histories, in which Englishness can be treated as an autonomous or independent figure, separable not only from the 'official' history . . . but also from the history of the rest of the world" (155). This utopian dream returns in Agboluaje's recent vision, *The Christ of Coldharbour Lane,* where Omo preaches in the streets of Brixton he familiarizes as "Brixistane" (159), a miraculously transformed territory "where streetlights first lit up the London night, the rock upon which New Jerusalem will be built. Brixton, a spill over of excessive dreams" (159). Brixton becomes a dreamscape also in Biyi Bandele's *Brixton Stories.* Both either born or rooted in Nigerian cultural background, Agboluaje and Bandele revive in their visions the figure of excess, a *cornucopia* of dreams, which refers us to what is presumably lost in the postlapsarian Brixistane. In that way, the writers incite a nostalgia after the land of plenty which, *ex definitione*, has no sense of excess even though it is immersed in it. Dreams of a New Jerusalem, inevitably, shuttle between the past Golden Age, the biblical Edenic, or the Ovidian pastoral, and the future. They all offer visions of a society pursuing an ideally balanced communitarian model where "[t]he earth herself . . . produce[s] everything from herself" (Ovid, Bk. I, 95) and where the reality remains untouched by the poisonous *cornucopia* of trade, excessive production of goods and commercialization of life. In Bandele's *Brixton Stories*, words become an object in a wordmonger's mysterious trade. Imagining Englishness as Brixtonian identity, as unity, simplicity and innocence in some imaginary times and places which have been lost, the playwrights posit, somewhat dangerously, identity as inevitably absent or lacking, and thus only nostalgically recoverable. Such a pairing of loss and absence

objectifies the seemingly ungraspable imaginary and, paradoxically, as Žižek writes, "enables us to assert our possession of the object" (660). Hence, looking forward to some quasi-utopian dream of a polis, the writers have us imagine the loss of what we have never possessed. Indeed, it is the desire to *possess*—Žižek would call it a "fixation" (660)—that twists a future-oriented vision and compels the seer to persist in tending the wound of imaginary loss, which fuels melancholy and nostalgia. Despite nostalgic traps, in Agboluaje's play, it is Sarah, the disabled English Rose now representing the "new black" (183), who while belonging to the past, successfully points to some common future:

> The people are still scratching around, looking for their little patch of Albion. Soon the scales will fall from their eyes. They will see the New Jerusalem on the horizon and raise a mighty shout! For Brixton! For England! For Britain. (*Christ* 81)

It is clear that for Sarah the local identity of Brixton's biblical dreamscape comes first, since it is capable of transcending the confusion of Albion. Like in the medieval *mappae mundi*, Brixton, taking the role of Jerusalem, is redeemed from its marginality to furnish the new spiritual centre. Jezz Butterworth, another playwright who evokes the concept of Jerusalem or a utopian polis, staged what the reviewers called a condition of England play.[7] The argument that the image is negative and confusing in its bleakness only points to its links with Blake's "Jerusalem" and to the poet's views on the effects of industrialization. Additionally, the play's indebtedness to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* justifies confusion as thematically and poetically essential. Butterworth speaks about the obliteration of differences between simulated and real tradition, a process which commercializes Englishness by merging complex with *event* culture. Event culture, sponsored in the play by a beer company, carries a potential for entertainment and subversion, together with the inherent component of audience desire (Rectanus 171). However, in combination with complex culture (here, the genuine tradition of carnival rather than masquerade), event culture may yield a counter-hegemonic space for creative forgetting instead of heritage-oriented memory. Bits and pieces of the past (giants, drums, fairies) are commercialized (become products), so that their origin and significance become obliterated. Hence, though Jerusalem is often evoked, the image provides no common ground. David Edgar, who also draws a vision of Jerusalem, stages a panorama of diverse approaches to the nexus of citizenship and nationhood where some

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[7] See, for example, Moore.

voices insist on the undisputable existence of a "national narrative" (21) or the "golden thread" (106), while other speakers emphasize its "borrowed" nature, resting on the claustrophobic echo-like diversity (106). In the multicultural *millieu*, Sirine locates the common ground firmly beyond the present, expressing a belief in the "notion, nonetheless, of a sacred land of brotherhood and justice, somewhere in the future" (107), while Jamal, a radical Muslim, calls it explicitly "Jerusalem" (107). The conclusion comes after Jamal saves Tetyana from the oppression of her husband. The citizenship certificate protects her against expulsion and oppression. Though future-oriented, the project appears to be less remote in Edgar's play. A revival of the medieval, but also Bunyanesque and Blakean Jerusalem, the City of God can be treated as a restorative yet future oriented promise of a "new covenant" after the state-centred citizenship has collapsed (Joppke, loc. 218). Theoretically at least, transnational cities like the new New Jerusalem enhance projects whose site is the civil society, not the national state: "City air liberates,"[8] reads the inscription on the gates leading to Hanse cities.

Variously defined identity, traditionally national, constitutes a significant, though controversial, element of citizenship. New Writing, Sierz claims, takes on national identity as a central subject embedded in many stories, imaginary locations and fictional ways of being (9), whose diversity he emphasizes. Butterworth, apart from Jerusalem, invokes a whole series of stories and characters—including the Green Man, Robin Hood, Peter Pan, Oberon, Puck and the giant who "built Stonehenge" (58) in its tribal past—locating his England in Wessex, Thomas Hardy's "dream country," and in a natural extension of the East End. Generalizing, Rebecca Scutt notes that England and Englishness are literary constructs, notably literary landscapes of pastoral idyll or of the rural where "the English countryside has become the image of the nation" (Scutt and Bonnett 1). The representation of England as prelapsarian, or Arcadian with magical gardens and enchanted forests, has been defined by Christine Berberich as common even in literature for children (214), though for Raymond Williams it had belonged to the past well before the arrival of

[8] "City air liberates" is classified as a medieval proverb, remembered as an inscription on the gates of Hanse cities, an aphorism quoted much later by Max Weber—Joppke refers to Weber's 1921 comment in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* in *Citizenship and Immigration* (loc. 224). The inscription is perceived as a response to serfdom and the constrictions of the feudal system (Sachs et al. 148). As opposed to the Eastern cities, the modern cities of Europe dissolved the bonds of seigneurial (semi-feudal) domination to become self-governing commercial and military organizations. They soon became international organizations.

Hardy's reversals of pastoralism (211). Re-evaluating the pastoral after 1950, Dominic Head notes a difference between the "state of England" and the "idea of England" literature, a dilemma surfacing also in Butterworth's play. The pastoral may seem innocently romantic but—like evocations of Milton and Blake—it feeds on political, often anti-imperial motivation. These concepts, frequently tinged with nostalgia—Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and Stephen Poliakoff's *Shooting the Past* (1999) being classical examples—may transcend the ideal or ironically challenge it, as in Martin Crimp's *The Country* (2005). Whether past or future-oriented, these re-visions of Englishness remain topographic. They admit undercurrents of diversity rather than impose homogenizing narratives.

Although the United Kingdom has not historically relied on a mythology of immigration to define its national identity, the idea pervades the recent writing—*England People Very Nice* (2009) or *Testing the Echo* (2008)—in the context of a shift from a politics of nation to a politics of citizenship, which ultimately focuses on urban communities. In *England People* citizenship assumes the form of a civic and participatory theatrical project[9] staged by asylum seekers in an immigration centre. The cultural policy of the National Theatre provided an additional frame for the project. The amateur pageant put together by Eastern European and Third World immigrants brings on the stage waves of their own predecessors to commence with the early history of Britain, with the "Angles, Vikings, Saxons and Celts" (9) followed, from the seventeenth century on, by four waves of immigration to London's East End: the French Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews and the Bangladeshis. The shift from national to post- or trans-national urban citizenship is reflected in the adaptation of Daniel Defoe's satirical poem, "The True Born Englishman" (1701), which closes the prologue, to become "A True Born Londoner" (14). Putting emphasis on the heterogeneity of Englishness, the offspring of multiple cross-breeding and lust, Defoe satirizes xenophobia. Bean refrains from satire in favour of what Neil Norman defines as "a deconstructed musical attached to a history lesson"—a more accessible form toying with popular culture. Even if Bean draws images of monstrous otherness epitomized by Mary's one-eyed monster-baby, the interest of *England People* concentrates on *integration* which Coveney, a theatre critic, defines in his review as

[9] Neil Norman intuitively senses the educational dimension of the play suggesting that "[t]he concept would have better suited the National Youth Theatre (who would have made a better fist of it) than the NT. A group of immigrants waiting in a holding centre devise a communal cross-ethnic play about their experiences and those of their predecessors."

assimilation, claiming that in Bean's play it is "reduced or distilled . . . to one of sexual convenience," a reduction crudely adapting Defoe's thesis. However, what Bean does evoke intertextually is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (69), a romantic tragedy where love fails in restoring civic peace—a bitter comment. On the other hand, *Romeo and Juliet* is of lesser importance for the heritage constructions of Englishness and, perhaps, therefore facilitates integration. In response to Taher's criticism (Taher is a character in *England People*) of the melodramatic quality of their play, Philippa explains that "[t]he truest measure of racial and cultural integration in any society is the rate of inter-marriage" (69): integration differs from assimilation. While the latter forces a culture and a homogenizing identity on immigrants, the former, Joppke asserts (loc. 2047), is associated with liberalism and individualism, "the music of hope," which Taher voices by stating that "love can free humanity from the shackles of history" (69). Each of the four acts stages a love story: of Danny and Camille, Carlo and Mary, Ruth and Aaron, Deborah and Mr Mushi. Deborah becomes pregnant for the sake of the community, giving birth to twins, a Muslim boy and a Christian girl, whose conception coincides with the collapse of the WTC, a symbolic landmark and a puzzling coincidence in a whole series of *events*.[10] Bean puts emphasis on the new beginning, in a language highly reminiscent of Jonathan Sacks,[11] and on the community whose members/citizens build a home, not a hotel. London has no oppressive cityscape once both the Tower and the WTC (the commercial transatlantic centre of commodification) disappear from view. It consists of a plethora of communities: East End, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields or Hampstead. Spitalfields is characterized in Camilla's

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[10] The birth of a new order imagined with reference to the terrorist attack on the WTC disregards the tragic death of innocent people, which is unacceptable. On the other hand, Bean draws the cityscape of London juxtaposing the "practice of everyday life," the horizontal street traffic and the vendors with the Tower of London which dominates the skyline (16) as a sign of oppressive heritage. Later, the "heritage" of the Tower is replaced by the WTC following the shift from a Hobbesian zone of war to a Lockean zone of trade after World War II. The WTC may be treated as a metaphor of a capitalist class society compared by Marshall to a skyscraper of inequality to be flattened (46-48), a dream of equality and safety in a welfare state.

[11] Jonathan Sacks distinguished three types of integration policy. The third, favoured by Sacks, is also voiced by Bean. According to this policy, settled citizens build a "home," a familiar environment, becoming its co-architects. But integration does not mean that they are expected to establish a homogeneous culture (Stoep 130). Analogous views were expressed by Sacks in an interview for *The Guardian* from 28 August 2002.

paradoxical juxtaposition as "eclectic mix" and "all humanity": the particular and the universal (96). East End remains incomprehensible to outsiders, an "inexplicable juxtaposition" of crime and care (82), while Bethnal Green is "a paradise" (85), another New Jerusalem—all of these being eclectic as opposed to the "sterile homogeneity" of Hampstead (96). Interestingly, although Bean's play involves ethnically and ideologically diverse groups of immigrants, emphasis is not so much on multicultural citizenship as on its post-national variant. The matrix of a nation state disintegrates in favour of a politics of citizenship which evolves towards a more inclusive/tolerant or liberal, yet, at the same time, surprisingly universalistic model.

The politics of nation meets the particularism of minority rights and multiculturalism. With a noticeable decline of interest in national identity, also as cornerstone of citizenship, central become the politics of difference and antidiscrimination issues challenged by the politics of universalism.[12] In *Testing the Echo*, David Edgar refers to a whole range of post-national identity markers including the postcode (40), membership in any social group[13] (like the "urban intelligentsia tribe," 41) and a myriad of identities Martin meticulously enumerates: "But I'm not a tribe. It's Monday, I'm a teacher. Saturday, I'm a Spurs supporter. Thursday, I'm a Labour voter. Friday, I'm a man" (42). Having exhausted the list, scene twenty-six juxtaposes two essential issues: liberalism and religious fundamentalism. Ian formulates liberalism as dependence of identity on "what you purchase" (42). In that way, citizenship is reduced to consumer rights. Fundamentalism appears in the context of antidiscrimination and segregation (43, 80). The latter is embedded intertextually in the speech delivered by Trevor Phillips[14] in Manchester in September 2005 and entitled "After 7/7: Sleepwalking to Segregation." In this speech, according to Brice, Phillips claimed that Britons "were becoming strangers to each other"—a dilemma tackled by Simon Stephens in *Pornography* (premiered in Germany in 2007)—while British Muslims belonged to the communities that had integrated the least. Whereas Tony Blair considered

[12] According to Joppke, the *politics of difference* insists that while all cultures are equally valuable, the *politics of universalism* is a form of particularism masquerading as universalism. Antidiscrimination policy is universalistic but it often seeks to erase difference and to render minority groups invisible (loc. 1783-1849).

[13] Citizenship is membership in a political group but, as Joppke observes, "the virus of individualism . . . eventually dissolves this limitation and reduces the import of political association to that of any other association" (loc. 180).

[14] Trevor Phillips held the speech as Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality.

integration a duty, some might consider a self-imposed segregation "a fact of modern, diverse life" (Brice 19).

Policies of nationhood have become increasingly difficult to maintain, a condition reflected on by the contemporary stage. Moreover, what politicians and playwrights notice in reference to citizenship is both a failure and a refusal to integrate around some generally unhelpful stereotypes and clichés like an attachment to democracy or, to put it somewhat evasively, "our" way of life. On the other hand, a more specific, pragmatically defined, policy of citizenship, which consists in the teaching of basic citizenship skills (Mark Ravenhill's *Citizenship*), or an acceptance of gender diversity (Jonathan Harvey's *The Beautiful Thing*, 1993), leads to further social fragmentation and segregation. Even though the sources of fragmentation and alienation remain diverse and powerful, there seems to persist a demand for a shared vision often inscribed into a quasi-Christian, ideal polis of a safely unreachable New Jerusalem. Citizenship thus conceived verges on yet another form of homogeneity which, as in Bandele's writing, yokes the local particular with the universal in some alternative dream reality. Most puzzling seem to be the recent endeavours to imagine some common ground that would escape the plights of former, notably the eighteenth-century, universalisms. In Simon Stephens's *Pornography*, Britishness boils down to an ethically charged ability to recognize "our boys" in the otherness of the terrorists, an act of recognition which fuels a universalism recovered from the medieval patterns of everyman's responsibility the play evokes by imagining London's underworld as either the Babel Tower or its reversal, the Dantesque *inferno*. Further on, Richard Bean appeals to a sense of *humanity* and *love*, or *compassion*, that transcend the eclectic mix of ethnicity. As a result, like in Kwei-Armah's *Let There Be Love*, authors bracket out tropes sustaining segregation (racism, ethnicity, gender, religion) to explore what it is like to be human: it is to live in a world of rediscovered ethical matrix, with common ground regained.

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CHAPTER TWO

HOLDING UP A MIRROR TO THE NATION? A FEW REMARKS ON DENNIS KELLY'S *OSAMA THE HERO* AND *ORPHANS*

MACIEJ WIECZOREK

With the benefit of hindsight, one would probably be right to claim that every age creates its own inequalities that lead to a lesser or greater degree of socio-political exclusion. Phenomena such as slavery, religious warfare, colonization and discrimination have all been an intrinsic part of the history of mankind. Despite numerous attempts to eradicate the problem of inequality and its multifaceted manifestations, it still persists in the contemporary world. This has, perhaps, become even more conspicuous in the aftermath of the tragic events that transpired on September 11, 2001. As a result of the terrorist attacks, the world was almost immediately divided into the West and the Rest[1] as politicians and academics fell over themselves to unearth the reasons underlying the conflict. George W. Bush, for instance, was quick to describe the Arab people as innately evil (Rockmore xi), thus perpetuating essentialist stereotypes about the Orient. By the same token, Samuel Huntington argued for a "Clash of Civilizations" and Bernard Lewis claimed that the conflict was caused by religious differences (Rockmore xi). By relegating the Muslim community to the position of the "Other," be it on the grounds of their culture and religion or because of essentialist preconceptions, such theories invariably prompted Western societies to mull over the ideals of tolerance and inclusiveness, and, indeed, to redefine the constituents of a nation.

Inevitably, art proved to be a helpful tool in recreating and submitting the nation to scrutiny. To explain why this was the case, one may have

[1] The phrase was invented by Kishore Mahbubani (Rockmore 27).

recourse to the enormously influential concept of the "imagined communities" as formulated by Benedict Anderson. He explains that he used the word "imagined" since "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Anderson argues that the awareness of nation-ness largely depends on participation in cultural acts like reading newspapers or novels (22-36)[2] as these practices develop the sense of simultaneity which is one of the prerequisites for a nation to exist. More importantly, just like the colonial maps and censuses that Anderson discusses later, newspapers and novels also seem to create a "classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to . . . peoples, regions, religions, languages . . . and so forth" in order "to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there" (184). The same may be said of dramatic texts, poetry, films and paintings and, as Jen Harvie puts it, the fact that such works have the power to define what warrants inclusion and what does not allows one to explore national identities and power relations that are produced "not in acts of parliament but rather in the cultural practices of performance" (4).

Following up on Harvie's claim, this chapter turns to the way in which the British nation is presented in Dennis Kelly's *Osama the Hero* and *Orphans*. It builds on Nadine Holdsworth's observation that "the vast majority of theatre practices that engage with the nation . . . do so to respond to moments of rupture, crisis or conflict" by generating "a creative dialogue with tensions in the national fabric" (6-7) and suggests that these two plays deal primarily with the influence that the ongoing conflict between the West and the Rest exerts on the power relations within the British society. Both *Osama the Hero* and *Orphans* are set in high-crime, problem-ridden areas and revolve around acts of extreme brutality directed against those who allegedly espouse an anti-Western set of values. In the case of the first play, it is Gary, a teenager who prepares a presentation that proclaims Osama bin Laden a hero, who falls victim to the violent outburst of the neighbourhood, while in *Orphans* a random Muslim man is assaulted and tortured. The basic thrust of this chapter is to suggest that the key to understanding these acts of violence is not to be sought solely in the innate prejudice of the perpetrators, but also in the economic conditions in which they find themselves. It will first turn to Slavoj Žižek's concepts of systemic, symbolic and subjective violence that will help to understand the core of the argument. This will be followed by an analysis of the socio-

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[2] Jen Harvie adds television and radio to the list. See Harvie 2.