Florida State University Libraries

2005

Support Structures: Envisioning the Post-Community in Contemporary British Fiction and Film

Rebecca S. Godlasky

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Support Structures:

Envisioning the Post-Community in Contemporary British Fiction and Film

By

REBECCA S. GODLASKY

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Fall Semester, 2005

The members of the Committee approve the

dissertation of Rebecca S. Godlasky

defended on 18 August 2005

S. E. Gontarski
Professor Directing Dissertation

William Cloonan
Outside Committee Member

Barry Faulk
Committee Member

Approved:

Bruce M. Boehrer
Director of Graduate Studies
English Department

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee
members.

For Hazel Spellman Beam,
who knew everything about
developing a caring community

ABSTRACT

       The starting point for this work is the exigency of community in the contemporary world. A number of British novels and films written and produced during Margaret Thatcher's term in office illustrate the deep social and economic divisions in Britain and the crippling effects of a society dedicated to possessive individualism rather than to altruism and community. The novels and films of this study present Britain as a nation whose social network has already collapsed, and individuals are left to fend for themselves. Those who cannot are suffering, and they reach out to one another for assistance. Community development becomes the natural response to combating the careless society created by the individualist ethos.

       The communities developed in Penelope Fitzgerald's *Offshore*, Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*, and Mike Leigh's film *High Hopes* are very different from previous considerations of community. Traditional communities tend to suppress differences. The communities that develop in these works, however, conceive of social organization in a way that collapses the binary between individualism and community and allows both to exist simultaneously. These communities are also significant because they are anything but homogeneous in terms of social rank, political leanings, or ethnicity. The only common ground between the members of each group represented is rather simple—none can survive on their own. Caring for one another supersedes any consideration of differences. These works suggest, however, that communities are only effective when their members allow for an interplay of difference between one another.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. [. . .] They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first.

—Margaret Thatcher

The only thing I'm going to do for you is to make you freer to do things for yourself. If you can't do it, I'm sorry. I'll have nothing to offer you.

—Margaret Thatcher[1]

We live in a world of niches, where each individual is separated from, wholly indifferent to and even hostile to the values, interests and wishes of those in other niches. A good society must offer the concept of citizenship that relates to others, sees citizens in the round, and adds what they have in common to what they are entitled to have for themselves.

—John Tusa, *Independent*, 30 January 1997

Margaret Thatcher was a polarizing figure during her tenure as Britain's Prime Minister, and she still receives a mixed public response. In 2002, the BBC conducted a poll for their *Great Britons* program, and they published the results in a list of "100 Great British Heroes." Margaret Thatcher was placed near the top of the list. Responding to the poll's popularity, Channel 4 proceeded to survey people for the "100 Worst Britons." Thatcher moved up to third place.[2] The poll results are relatively harmless, but other responses to Margaret Thatcher reveal a deep-seated hatred for her. Elvis Costello included a song entitled "Tramp the Dirt Down" on his 1989

album, *Spike*. In the lyrics, Costello refers directly to Margaret Thatcher, and he makes his distaste for her abundantly clear:

> There's one thing I know I'd like to live long enough to savour,
>
> That's when they finally put you in the ground,
>
> I'll stand on your grave and tramp the dirt down.

Costello was, by no means, the only person to feel strongly about the British Prime Minister whom many referred to as the "Iron Lady." Yasmin Alibhai-Brown vituperates, "Nearly two decades were wasted by a woman of dubious national aspirations and a thunderous disregard for the cultural and political needs of a modern nation. We all, black and white Britons, lost out" (78). When Margaret Thatcher resigned her position as Prime Minister, a large portion of the British population breathed a collective sigh of relief. Lester Friedman reveals that the working-class, in particular, felt as if a dark period of British history had finally ended: "'Mrs. Thatcher has resigned from No. 10. Thank God!' So read the scrawled message that greeted harried commuters at the Bethnal Green subway stop in the East end, a working-class section of London" (xii).

Although her legacy may be disputed, Thatcher's impact on British politics and culture cannot be denied. She effectively eliminated the postwar consensus and changed the social landscape. Those who hated Thatcher cited her callous disregard for anyone who needed and requested assistance from the government as the reason for their ire. Throughout her tenure as Britain's Prime Minister, Thatcher advocated a rugged individualism, and her government encouraged Britons to concern themselves with their own well-being and to accumulate property and goods in order to strengthen the British economy. What was lost, however, was the idea of a caring society.

Margaret Thatcher was once asked for the title of the most important book she had read. Her response was somewhat surprising—Herbert Agar's *A Time for Greatness*, which argued strongly that creating equality among people would resolve many of the world's problems. In *The Iron Lady: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher*, Hugo Young describes another aspect of Agar's ethos that runs counter to Thatcher's own ideology: "He was also scornful of the business culture—'The lives of many businessmen are pathetic because their emotional and imaginative

range is so immature'—and had a passionate mistrust of naked individualism, which he contrasted with the idea of society based on community and mutual support" (405). Thatcher writes in her memoir that her politics, however, were heavily influenced by Colm Brogan's anti-socialist satire, *Our New Masters*, and Friedrich von Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, in which Hayek views "economic planning as a threat to individual liberty" (Waugh 17). Shortly after she became the leader of the conservative party in 1975, Thatcher openly announced that Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* was the basis of her belief system and should be the basis of the conservative party's system, as well. She made the individual the center of her ideology and pushed collectivism to the margins of British society.

Margaret Thatcher faced serious challenges when she walked through the door of No. 10 Downing Street. She was the ninth Prime Minister elected since the end of World War II, and the high turnover rate was directly linked with Britain's continual deterioration. Leonard Quart enumerates the problems that Britain faced when Thatcher took office in 1979: "Margaret Thatcher took power during a time of profound economic trouble, government impotence, and declining national prestige. In dealing with these problems, she helped construct a much different social and political world than the one promoted in the fifties by the centrist consensual politics of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan" ("Religion of the Market" 16-17). Thatcher and her administrative officials mounted an attack on all contributors to Britain's decline, but they viewed the welfare state as the primary source of the nation's economic slide. Chris Pierson asserts in "Social Policy under Thatcher and Major": "[The Conservatives] argued that many of Britain's problems at the end of the 1970s, especially economic underperformance and social indiscipline, were directly attributable to the growth of the welfare state" (Pierson 205). Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Britain's Prime Minister marked a return to Victorian values, and she proudly referred to her values in the same terms. In particular, Thatcher sought to end the welfare state by returning to a Victorian economic system and extolling the virtues of the self-sufficient individual.

The Victorian system was based on *laissez-faire* principles, and Thatcher's administration endeavored to revive the ideals of *laissez-faire*. The government, according to the Thatcherites, could not create economic equality through intervention or through wealth

redistribution. Stuart Hall argues that the architects of Thatcherism held firmly to the principle that the problems with the economy would resolve themselves:

> There are civil servants in Sir Keith Joseph's[3] ministry who are busy reading *The Wealth of Nations* for the first time. They actually believe in the invisible hand which draws us all involuntarily into the market, produces what everyone needs and pays us what we all deserve. These ancient, preindustrial, prehistoric ideas are capitalist ideas making a later twentieth-century reprise to displace those outdated social-democratic nostrums about the benevolent state, the national interest and the "caring society." Calculating everything according to its pure market value and measuring the national interest in terms of gross self-interest are back in fashion. (186)

The Depression in the 1930s, however, revealed that the Victorian system was economically flawed. John Maynard Keynes studied the defects of *laissez-faire* in his seminal 1936 text, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. This work signaled a shift in economic policies in Britain as well as the United States, where Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration began to supplement the dwindling business investments in the workforce. Keynes's thesis concerning the economy and the government's role in stimulating it became the most influential economic theory in the years between the wars and beyond World War II, but conservatives began to question the validity of Keynesian economics as Britain fell into a financial tailspin in the years following the war. The conservatives were determined to resurrect Victorian economics and values in order to make Britain "great" once again. Margaret Thatcher concedes in her memoir that socialism is appealing because its basic tenet is that all people should be equal. She believes, however, that equality cannot be realized, and, for that reason, the dream of creating it should be abandoned:

> Some nostalgia for the austerity period apparently lingers. That is, I believe, an exercise in vicarious sacrifice, is always more palatable than the real thing. Seen from afar, or from above, whether by a socialist gentleman in Whitehall or by a High Tory, socialism has a certain nobility: equal sacrifice, fair shares, everyone pulling together. Fair shares somehow always turn out to be small shares. Then,

someone has to enforce their fairness; someone else has to check that this fairness

does not result in black markets or under-the-counter favouritism; and a third

person has to watch the first two to make sure that the administrators of fairness

end up with no more than their fair share. (*The Downing Street Years* 12)

Thatcher advocates abandoning efforts to create a more equal society because it is unnatural.

Socialism sounds noble to everyone, but they would only adhere to its principles by force. Since

no one can be trusted to defend everyone's best interests, Thatcher encouraged everyone to look

out for their own interests. In order to garner support for her policies, Thatcher developed a

political rhetoric based on binaries—between individual freedom and state intervention,

monetarism and communism, strength and weakness, "us" and "them."

Socialism was tantamount to communism, and Thatcher capitalized on people's fears of

communism to dismantle the welfare state. Howard Gardner reveals that the origins of

Thatcher's "Iron Lady" moniker are found in her rhetorical battle against socialism. "The term

Thatcherism was coined and recognized, within Britain, to denote the conviction that socialism

had failed and that Britain had to relinquish governmental interference in favor of privatization

and individual initiative" (230). Dubbed the "Iron Lady" by the Russians before she was elected

Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher had made her hatred for socialism abundantly clear in her

speeches and through her policies. Although the Soviet Union meant the nickname as a

pejorative, Thatcher found it flattering. She was unwavering in her views, and she prided herself

on her strength in the midst of trials.

Thatcher was willing to promote the idea of a British community rhetorically, but she

defined that community in narrow terms. Howard Gardner describes Thatcher's ability to divide

the nation into factions:

Thatcher had the task of addressing an entire population, with its diverse

backgrounds, anxieties, and goals. She did so by presenting a vision of what it

meant to be British and inviting her compatriots to join her; yet, when people

chose not to identify themselves with this vision, she showed little hesitation in

cutting them off. Ultimately, [. . .] her vision was exclusionary rather than

inclusionary: instead of continuing to seek compromise and rapprochement, Thatcher preferred to dichotomize into "us" and "them." (226)

Thatcher's vision of a British community was one situated in southern England, comprised of white Britons, and limited to individuals who were either already wealthy or were willing to aggressively pursue wealth through enterprise. With her exclusive definition, Thatcher automatically eliminated a large portion of the British population from becoming members of the community, namely, immigrants and their families, and those who relied on the welfare state. Citizens who were willing to work hard and contribute to Britain's economic recovery were set up in the Thatcherite ideology as true Britons, the "us" to whom Thatcher referred. Michael Bidiss in "Thatcherism: Concept and Interpretations" reveals, "She has presented herself as the champion of those keenest to exercise personal responsibility, to exhibit self-reliance and initiative, to maintain the traditional structure and role of the family, and to recognize the demands of duty as well as the allure of entitlements" (2). Stuart Hall asserts, "The essence of the British people was identified with self-reliance and personal responsibility, as against the image of the over-taxed individual, enervated by welfare-state 'coddling', his or her moral fibre irrevocably sapped by 'state handouts'" (47). Those who relied on the welfare state were held up as being largely responsible for Britain's economic decline. Philip Dodd claims in *The Battle Over Britain*, "In her British story, enemies were here, there and everywhere" (26). She exercised this policy with the nation and with her own cabinet members. Leonard Quart argues: "Thatcher operated as an ideological, autocratic politician who polarized opponents and tolerated no dissent from her cabinet colleagues, invoking both hostility and devotion from members of her own party, rather than seeking to mute conflict and create a political consensus" (17). Thatcher allowed no negotiation in her war of ideas. Individuals who could not support themselves were merely another part of the enemy within, and Thatcher's army of "us" was expected to eliminate "them."

Thatcher believed that socialism engendered weakness. She referred to the welfare state dismissively as the "Nanny State," and anyone who needed or requested assistance was nothing more than a weak and helpless child. Chris Pierson reveals that "the welfare state was seen to be complicit in a more general erosion of individual responsibility and self-discipline, underwriting

not just idleness but also immoral and even unlawful behavior" (215). Under the influence of the Thatcherite ethos, Britons began to view welfare recipients as burdens rather than individuals who deserved aid. Patricia Waugh asserts that Thatcher was able to shift the nation's focus away from its poor citizens by establishing them as the enemy and by claiming that the problem of poverty could not be remedied by the state. In fact, the previous administrations' attempts to relieve poverty only served to compound Britain's problems:

> Poverty was conceived not as a correctable social evil but as a fact of life. Indeed the pursuit of social justice was actually claimed by some theorists of the New Right to be destructive of morality, for, in eroding individual incentive, socialist policies were seen to remove freedom of choice and to allow one social group to impose its own criteria of redistribution on others. (13)

Left to choose between free will and social justice, Britons were encouraged to defend their individual agency. Thatcher's administration lightened the moral burden of such a decision by claiming that leaving people in poverty would strengthen their resolve to change their economic position. Stuart Hall claims, "They have always been poor and disadvantaged. But now, in Mrs. Thatcher's Britain, it is 'right and proper' that they should be poor, because, otherwise, how are they to toughen their moral fibres, acquire self-sufficiency, stop leaning on the welfare state, get on their bikes and off Tebbit's unemployment list, 'put Britain back to work' or 'start up a small business'?" (78).[4] If the poor wanted a better life for themselves, they would have to build it on their own. They could no longer expect the state or their fellow citizens to assist. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques explain in "People Aid—A New Politics Sweeps the Land" that Britons had only one option left to them: "The road to salvation lay through people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. The only acceptable motive for action was self-interest" (251).

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Although Margaret Thatcher is often credited with Britain's economic recovery in the mid-1980s, many people attribute a number of social and cultural setbacks to her as well. In her attempts to revive the Victorian age, Thatcher reversed the progress that had been made in closing the gap between the rich and the poor in Britain. In *British Cinema in the 1980s* John Hill indicates that the reversal was severe:

Indeed, there was only one group who clearly benefited from the Conservatives' tax reforms and this was the very rich. This constituted a reversal of the redistributive attitude which had been a feature of previous post-war governments and contributed to greater inequality in the UK during the 1980s. Thus, between 1979 and the early 1990s, the share of income, after housing costs, of the top fifth of households increased by 23 per cent (and the top tenth by over 60 per cent) while the income of the bottom 10 per cent dropped by 40 per cent. (7)

The gulf that developed between the rich and poor was difficult to find in many statistical reports, however. In order to present a more positive economic picture, Thatcher's finance ministers found ways to understate unemployment figures. [5] People who could not find jobs were taken off of the unemployment rolls. They became the unseen victims of the enterprise culture. In effect, they, as well as their needs, no longer existed. Jeffrey Weeks explains, "During the years of the social-democratic consensus, welfarism, with its commitment to altruism and caring, provided a framework for social policy" (90). The new social policy, Leonard Quart asserts, "promoted the avaricious pursuit of personal profit as a moral virtue" ("Religion" 17). Thatcher's ethos amounted to nothing more than social Darwinism, and many Britons were simply not strong enough to survive on their own.

Although Thatcher attempted to sweep many Britons' difficulties out of view, people felt the cultural sea change. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, formed a commission to study the problems faced by Britons living in urban areas. In December 1985, Dr. Runcie presented the commission's final report, entitled *Faith in the City*, which described a crisis in the inner cities. In its report, the commission placed the greatest responsibility on Margaret Thatcher and the selfish individualist ideology that she promoted. "The problem with the inner cities, said the Archbishop's investigators, was that they were victims of the overall philosophy of modern Conservatism, which gave too much emphasis to individualism and not enough to the collective obligations of society" (Young 417). The emphasis on individualism had brought the death of community. The solution, they recommended, was in reviving a culture of mutual support and concern. Thatcher's supporters attempted to delegitimize the report and the Archbishop by

claiming that *Faith in the City* smacked of Marxist rhetoric. Thatcher argued that the real reason things were so bad for the inner cities was because families were not doing their fair share.

Thatcher's administration claimed that the welfare state "had not only failed to eliminate deprivation, it had actually made the position worse by displacing traditional community- and family-based forms of support…" (Pierson 205). Once Thatcher began rolling back the welfare state, however, community and family support did not reemerge. The individualist ethos thrived in every area of society, effectively eliminating the possibility of community development. If individuals were expected to fend for themselves in Thatcher's Britain, they certainly would not have much incentive to offer assistance to others. Families, comprised of individuals, were no exception, yet Thatcher continued to extol the virtues of family life even while she promoted "the self-reliant individual" (Hall 144). In an interview with Julie Cockroft for the *Daily Mail*, Margaret Thatcher asserted the necessity of family in maintaining the nation: "The family and its maintenance really is the most important thing not only in your personal life but in the life of any community, because this is the unit on which the whole nation is built" (4 May 1989). Thatcher's nation, however, was not built on family or community; instead, it was built on the individual. As a result, families began to splinter.

Thatcherite rhetoric and policies also created a deep divide between racial and ethnic groups in Britain. Imperialist and jingoistic rhetoric revived after the victory at the Faulkland Islands, as Britain sought to rebuild its former glory. Various social critics have asserted that the motivation for reviving racist definitions of "Englishness" was to resurrect the British Empire. The Empire had disintegrated before Thatcher came to power, but Thatcher's plan for reestablishing Britain as a world power, if only in the minds of its citizens, involved reminding Britons of their ability to rule "the fluttered folk and wild." Salman Rushdie asserts in "The New Empire within Britain" that Thatcher attempted to reincarnate the dead empire within Britain by including Britons of color as "them." In his 1984 essay "Outside the Whale," Salman Rushdie argues that "there can be little doubt that in Britain today the refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image is under way. The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourages many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence" (91-2). British blacks and Asians were treated as outsiders in

their own country in order to increase white Britons' self-worth even in the midst of their greatest hardships. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues: "So she told the people of this country, those with and without bicycles,[6] as they were losing their jobs that they still had the best country in the world because of their glorious past. She was determined to put back the 'great' in Britain and this included pride in the Empire" (79). Minorities could only find relief from the racist, imperialist attitudes and attacks by retreating into their ethnic communities. In drawing the borders around themselves, they were able to develop support networks. Their retreat, however, created drawbacks for British blacks and Asians, as well. As small isolated units, ethnic minorities were easily contained and controlled, and the government was able to further refine a monolithic identity for non-white Britons. In addition, individuals within the communities were expected to forfeit their individual concerns for the greater concerns of the group, reinforcing the individual/community binary.

<center>*   *   *</center>

The starting point for this work is the exigency of community in the contemporary world. A number of novels and films written and produced during Margaret Thatcher's term in office illustrate the deep social and economic divisions in Britain and the crippling effects of a society dedicated to possessive individualism rather than to altruism and community. Patricia Waugh argues: "If writers of the sixties and early seventies reveal a profound disaffection with the inadequacies of consensus, those of the later seventies and eighties respond similarly to the brutal acquisitiveness of the Thatcher years" (*Harvest of the Sixties* 20). Dominic Head claims that "the changes to British society and culture were dramatic, generating a spirit of either adventurous entrepreneurship or deplorable avarice, depending on your point of view. Novelists tended to take the latter view, lamenting the imminent collapse of the welfare state, and a new era of inequality and social division" (30). The novels and films of this study present Britain as a nation whose social network has already collapsed, and individuals are left to fend for themselves. Those who cannot are suffering, and they reach out to one another for assistance. Community development becomes the natural response to combating the careless society created by the individualist ethos.

<center>10</center>

In the midst of rising possessive individualism, the individual subject suffers a loss of support from the social apparatus as well as from other individuals around him. This individualism presents two drawbacks to the individual subject. First, he can no longer rely on family, the government, or other individuals for assistance. Dysfunctional families are the norm in the novels and films of this era. Family members offer one another support, but their assistance is contingent upon specific conditions that often ignore individual identity and agency. As a result, people look outside of their families to develop communities of support. The second impact of the individualist society is no less damaging. Without giving something back to others, without being needed by others, the subject is ultimately left without purpose outside of his own material gains. Community is necessary means of assuring that people in need receive support, but it also creates connections between people, giving them a purpose and a sense of being complete. Malcolm Bradbury asserts, "many of the writers of the age of Thatcherism and social discommunity saw it as a time of division, decay, human neglect and lost wholeness" (401). In the midst of this era, however, the works in this study envision a way to reclaim community and repair the divisions between people. They reveal that community is not only desired, but also necessary in order to provide a place of belonging, support, and compassion in a world that no longer offers such support.

The communities developed in these texts, however, are very different from previous considerations of community. Traditional communities tend to suppress differences. The communities that develop in these works, however, conceive of social organization in a way that collapses the binary between individualism and community and allows both to exist simultaneously. These communities are also significant because they are anything but homogeneous in terms of social rank, political leanings, or ethnicity. The only common ground between the members of each group represented is rather simple—none can survive on their own. Caring for one another supersedes any consideration of differences. These works suggest, however, that communities are only effective when their members allow for an interplay of difference between one another.

Penelope Fitzgerald's *Offshore* is the earliest work in this study, and it reveals the trend toward a society based on the individual as the "central ideological figure" (Hall 98). In this

novel, Fitzgerald clearly illustrates the ways in which family and society begin to turn against the individuals that constitute them. Either each member is for the family and the rules of society, or she is treated as an outcast, an aberration. The outcasts, in the case of *Offshore*, retreat to the Battersea Reach area on the banks of the Thames and develop an eclectic community of barge dwellers.

A retired Royal Navy sailor, an artist, a single mother, and a male prostitute comprise the motley barge community on the Reach. Although they seem to have nothing in common, their experiences with the world onshore are similar. The members of the community are estranged in some way from their families, largely because they do not meet their families' expectations. Nenna, for example, needs support from her sister, Louise, but Louise will only help Nenna if she forfeits control of her life to Louise and her better judgment. Assistance, even from family members, comes with conditions attached. The barge dwellers also share an inability to function successfully in the society on land. No one seems to fit completely into the landscape or the seascape, and the banks of the river serve as a middle-ground for them. The group comes together out of necessity, and although they may not attempt to understand one another completely, they are willing to offer assistance to any member of the group. Their relationships are not intimate, and they do not know a great deal about one another, but they are committed to doing whatever they can to make the difficult life on the Thames easier for each other.

Nick Hornby's novel *About A Boy*—and the subsequent film adaptation—emphasizes the debilitating and destructive forces of possessive individualism for everyone, including those who seem to be thriving from living a self-absorbed lifestyle. It also reveals that connections to other people are necessary in order to find any meaning or worth in life. The characters in *About A Boy*, unlike those in *Offshore*, truly have nothing in common other than the fact that they are alone. One character in particular, however, Will Freeman, does not believe that living without human connections is a bad way to live. In fact, he constantly attempts to avoid making real connections with other people because he believes that it is simply too much work for too little a return.

Will and the other characters in the novel do, however, share some similarities with those in *Offshore*. None of them receive any support from their families. In fact, Hornby does not

mention their extended families. Will, Marcus, Fiona, and the other characters must fend for themselves, but this isolation is literally killing Fiona and, by extension, her son, Marcus. Community is necessary in this case in order to save Fiona from killing herself, to save Will from continuing in his meaningless, selfish existence, and to save Marcus from falling victim to the very real terrors of being an outcast among his peers. Hornby, like Fitzgerald, reveals that community is necessary in a world in which everyone is expected to care only for himself. Marcus teaches Will an important lesson about being a caring human being—that connections with others makes his life worth living, that they give his life purpose. The purpose of his life is, as Maurice Blanchot describes it, "to be therefore essentially for the other: 'If I want my life to have meaning for myself, it must have meaning *for someone else*" (*Unavowable Community* 21-2).

Although Hanif Kurieshi's novel *The Black Album* illustrates the negative impact of possessive individualism and the resulting need for community, it reveals the added difficulty of developing community as a member of a minority in Britain. Kureishi's main character, Shahid Hasan, is a young man who has to make a choice between his entrepreneurial—and therefore, Thatcherite—family, with their strict demands and high expectations for him, or the equally demanding Muslim community, and neither option is acceptable for Shahid because they refuse to acknowledge his individuality. The members of his family have attempted to assimilate into the English culture, but they are denied their Englishness, even while they are active participants in the enterprise culture. Shahid turns to the Muslim community because they are the only people who welcome him and give him a sense of belonging, but he must deny his differences and his opinions in order to be included in this community. Both his family and the Muslim community, in their own ways, attempt to eliminate Shahid's agency by enforcing rigid rules of belief and conduct and refuse to allow for individual differences. *The Black Album* ultimately reveals that developing and maintaining a support community is possible, but community cannot succeed if it insists on a monolithic group identity. If the community refuses to nurture the differences that exist between individuals, the project will eventually fail.

In his 1988 film, *High Hopes*, Mike Leigh portrays London as the capital of selfish individuals. Not only are most of the characters in the film unwilling to concern themselves with

the people in the world outside their homes, but they are equally cold and dismissive with their own family members. Lester Friedman asserts that Leigh's presentation is one of many films that "directly attacked the Thatcher government, seeing her free-market philosophy as a callous disregard for everyone but the entrepreneurial buccaneers who plundered the economy (xv). Mindless, thoughtless Thatcherites who enjoy a comfortable lifestyle are the norm in *High Hopes*' London. Within each household, couples spar with one another for supremacy, which is a result of their narcissism. Rupert and Laetitia Booth-Braine and Martin and Valerie Burke have made their individual opinions and desires the center of their own isolated universes, and they attempt to force everyone else to behave as they do. Only one prevailing opinion can exist for each problem presented to them, but they must win the battle to determine whose opinions and approach will prevail. *High Hopes* puts a human face on the victims of Thatcher's social Darwinism.

Only one couple in the film creates an alternative to this constant struggle. While others attempt to bully everyone around them to behave and think just as they do, Cyril and Shirley recognize and celebrate the particularities in everyone around them. They demonstrate an ability to love and care for anyone who needs their support. Their ability to welcome others into their world provides a roadmap for escaping a careless society that does nothing but damage people. The community that they develop is fluid and open to differences. They provide a safe place for people who have been neglected and abused and set the example for a new, caring society.

This work focuses on representations of a new kind of community. One which is, as Jean-Luc Nancy explains, a "community formed by an articulation of 'particularities,' and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular beings into itself" (75). The successful community is one that does not seek singularity. It still functions as the place of fulfillment, concern, and support, but there are no prerequisites to belonging. Individuals maintain their separate identities and control over their own lives, and these differences are celebrated rather than treated as weaknesses in the community. The members of this may have little in common other than a need to give and receive support, and that care and concern is given unconditionally.

CHAPTER ONE

Rethinking Community

This community, however, is constituted only in the ever-present act of an ever-dynamic effort of public self-assertion that yields a sharp sense of selfhood. Collectivity thus melds with individuality to produce rounded human beings in a rounded society.

—Murray Bookchin, "Were We Wrong?"

The notion of "community" is much abused and probably meaningless.

—Hanif Kureishi, "A Buddy from Suburbia"

In 1989, the Labour Party in Britain launched a campaign with a new slogan. Their posters read: "The Labour Party. *Our* party."[1] The slogan served as a reminder that Britons shared a common identity and that the Labour Party could meet the British community's needs. The slogan's "our" rhetorically integrated the diverse British population and welcomed individuals, drawn to the promise of a unified Britain, to the emerging community. In "The Value of Difference," Jeffrey Weeks argues that this campaign and other suggestions of a communal membership have a major impact on individuals because such slogans "[articulate] a sense of shared values, of communal spirit, lying latent in the collective unconscious" (91). Weeks reveals that such appeals were necessary as the 1980s drew to a close:

>It is impossible to underestimate the power of these various (and perhaps
>
>sometimes contradictory) appeals to human solidarity after a decade dominated by

an ethic of human selfishness. We are reminded that what we have in common as

human beings is more important than what divides us as individuals or members

of other collectivities.[2] (91)

As individuals feel ever more divided, separated, or cut-off from others, the appeal for

community becomes more pronounced because it promises order, security, and aid. In fact,

Linda Singer suggests in her essay "Recalling a Community at Loose Ends" that community is

an appeal that is only heard in the absence of community. Yet the call for community seems

ever-present, its disappearance perhaps a natural fact of our contemporary world. Our present

reality is one of division. Suburban commutes into cities, extended workdays, and technology all

contribute to the sense that people are disconnected. Although technology keeps people in

contact with one another, it also essentially eliminates face-to-face, personal contact. As a result

of these social and technological changes, we have become more isolated from one another.

Linda Singer describes our current ironic situation: "The condition of being situated in the

contemporary world order, marked as a 'global village' linked by technologies of transport,

communication, and information systems that reconfigure spatiotemporal distances and limits, is

a complex affair of overdeterminations and polymorphous affiliations" (121). People can contact

one another in an instant, yet they feel isolated from one another.

Seymour Bernard Sarason explains that people need a "psychological sense of

community," and the emphasis on building community increases as people feel disconnected.

Sarason's depiction of this need is not isolated to the 1980s, either. He argues that we naturally

go through phases in which the longing for support and concern is greater:

There are times in a society when a myriad of social phenomena indicate that a

particular human need is so seriously frustrated, with consequences sufficiently

widespread and ominous, as to force us to give it special emphasis. We are living

in such times. The young and the old; residents of any geographic area; the more

or less educated; the political left, right, and center; the professional and the non-

professional; the rich and the poor—within each of these groupings sizable

numbers of people feel alone, unwanted, and unneeded. They may spend a large

part of their time in densely populated settings, interacting with other people in a

transient or sustained way, and yet be plagued by feelings of aloneness and the

stabbing knowledge that physical proximity and psychological closeness can be

amazingly unrelated.[3] (214)

This psychological distance is caused by numerous factors. David B. Schwartz proposes in *Who Cares?: Rediscovering Community* that the separation felt by individuals is a natural product of governments assuming the community's traditional responsibilities: "The habit of response by systems is our modern reality, and we lament the loss of family bonds and small-town life as we yearn for the sense of community they represented, itself a signal of their disappearance" (45). Schwartz believes that governmental intervention has become necessary as a result of community's disintegration, and the disappearance of community is a result of our movement toward urbanization. The call for community, however, amounts to considerably more than a mere lamentation, as Schwartz calls it. No one is willing to proclaim the death of community; on the contrary, the call for a revival of community has only increased.

People desire community largely because they need support. In his essay "Individualism—Within History," Amitai Etzioni provides evidence that reveals the significance of connections to others:

Mountains of data, recently reviewed and augmented by Robert Putnam and

Francis Fukuyama, show that when there is little or no community, people suffer

physically (e.g., are more prone to have major illnesses) and psychologically (e.g.,

are more prone to be depressed). Moreover, communities reinforce our moral

commitments and provide a measure of voluntary social order, greatly curtailing

the state's need to provide it through its often coercive resources.[4] (53)

That community is necessary is difficult to ignore, but what it might look like or how it might function is nebulous at best. Political parties, minority groups, and individuals have all made widespread calls for community, ultimately bringing about the declension of the term. Twenty years prior to Kureishi sounding the death-knell for community, Raymond Williams attempted to clearly define the term in his *Keywords*, but his definition reveals community's inherent contradictions:

> Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of
> relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of
> relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of
> social organization (*state*, *nation*, *society*, etc.) it seems never to be used
> unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.
> (76)

Williams avoids invoking the alluring promise of community, merely calling it a term used in
reference to relationships, but these relationships promise comfort, understanding, and
belonging. Although his definition reveals the underlying contradictions of community, the term
has never gone out of use, as if everyone accepts that community's promises are merely empty
ones, but still believes in the dream.

These observations are obvious enough, but they run counter to the prevailing theoretical
notions of community, particularly that community is in a perpetual state of undoing itself, that it
is an unworkable practice. In fact, James F. English asserts that "The very ubiquity of
'community' in modern social and political thought makes it at once an obtrusive and an elusive
object of inquiry. For under the least scrutiny the discourse of community begins to break apart,
shattering into a thousand microdiscourses, each with its own declared aims and affiliations"
(20). Attempting to investigate the meaning of community only reveals a theoretical house of
cards that collapses into confusion. As a result, we have little reason to wonder why Hanif
Kureishi and others are ambivalent toward the notion of community. In *The Sufficient
Community: Putting People First*, Chris Wright reluctantly confirms Kureishi's suspicions:
"Unfortunately, it is a concept that has become devalued with usage, obscuring as much as it
reveals. Indeed, for many it represents a chocolate-box study of a past that never existed. For the
word to offer a genuine signpost to the future requires a fundamental re-examination of its many
meanings" (4). Although the term has been overused and devalued, it nevertheless retains its
appeal. Georges van den Abbeele argues that we cannot disregard the need for supportive
communities, however, simply because the term no longer has a definitive meaning:

> Given such a climate, the deconstruction of community would appear insensitive
> if not pernicious in an age marked by the widespread apprehension that the 'old'

forms of collectivity are disappearing or have already disappeared, that

impersonality, anonymity, and solitude are the lot of a modern humanity crowded

into ever-expanding urban conglomerates, that the very bonds of social interaction

are sundered by the multifarious dislocations, disruptions, and disappropriations

that characterize life in postindustrial societies. For many, the celebration of

difference and the suspicion of absolutes that characterize poststructuralism and

postmodernism seem a mere ideological correlative of the ceaseless upheavals

and relentlessly splintering effects exerted on the material level under modern

capitalism. Yet it is within this ambiance of vertiginous transformation and

individualization that the call for a return to community has reemerged as both a

necessity and a banality of contemporary political rhetoric, no matter what the

persuasion. (Abbeele x)

Although community, in its traditional sense, does not ultimately provide any benefit to individuals, the desire for what the notion itself promises ensures that the longing for community will never cease. The re-examination of community that Chris Wright proposes is necessary—as well as a revision—in order to reclaim community as a positive social structure.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Definitions of community have traditionally assumed a binary relationship with individualism. In his definition of community, Raymond Williams claims that community has no positive opposing term, yet he overlooks the alternate appeal to individualism, which, in many philosophical circles, has more value than community does. Just as people are comforted by the promise of community, so too are they drawn to the strength that individualism represents.

The rise of the individual can be traced back to the feudal system's decline. Amitai Etzioni explains:

As the control of feudal lords, kings, and churches weakened due to the rise of

merchant, and later industrial, classes—the bourgeoisie—the stage was set for the

appearance of an ideology that legitimated the removal of power from established

authorities. The very notions of individual rights and individual autonomy were

served up to restrain the powers that be—the government. (51)

Individualism developed as a subject's means of resisting governmental control and asserting autonomy. Raymond Williams's contribution to defining "individuality" reveals similar beginnings: "The emergence of notions of individuality, in the modern sense, can be related to the break-up of the medieval social, economic and religious order. In the general movement against feudalism there was a new stress on man's personal existence over and above his place or function in a rigid hierarchical society" (163). At its inception, individualism was a necessary positive step, but it has the potential to go too far. Stressing the individual's rights rather than his place within society eliminates his relationship to others.

The demand for individualism is often as urgent as the desire for community, and individualism has become an equally appealing ideal. Comprised of its own abundance of microdiscourses, individualism presents itself as a necessary means of combating a commonality that has the potential to eliminate agency. In his attempts to understand the allure of individualism, Amitai Etzioni suggests:

> Possibly individualism feeds on its being a highly flattering view of human nature, certainly compared to most, if not all, other views. Individualism promises those who believe in it that they are free-standing agents, able to formulate their own conceptions of the good, pursue a life that is guided by reasonable deliberations, and render rational decisions in their self-interest. And, as bearers of inalienable rights, they have a long list of entitlements, but no inherent duties or obligations unless they choose to embrace them. (49)

In the shadow of individualism's promise, community takes on new meaning; individuals who need community are weak or cannot make decisions on their own, and those who can survive without support are strong and to be admired. In addition, community requires duty, sacrifice, and responsibility from individual members, while individualism requires nothing and ensures the freedom and free will of the individual.

In its most pessimistic rendering, community damages the individual, and the individual who succumbs to the dream of community is merely being lured into a falsehood. Describing this cynical viewpoint, Linda Singer writes:

It is a theme with many variations. One version, initiated by thinkers like

Thoreau, Emerson, and Rand, constitutes the sphere of commonality as that which

promises false comforts and threatens loss of vision, ingenuity, and power. The

heroic thinker is the one who maintains the integrity of his isolation, and whose

stature and authority arise from his refusal of association, his willingness to stand

alone. This figure sets in motion an imaginary ideal of intellectual independence

that is metaphorized solipsistically, and where the common is only that which is

to be overcome, or at least resisted. (129-30)

The difference between individualism and community, then, becomes a battle for one's very

soul. For Rand and others like her, egoistic self-absorption is necessary in order to function in a

world that is incapable of providing comfort. Community, in these terms, becomes a lie, a dream

that individuals can strive to achieve but only at the cost of their identity, ability, and security.

Those individuals who can resist such advances maintain their right to pursue their own desires

aggressively. Every man must fend for himself.

Alexis de Tocqueville feared that this blind individualism would become a natural

extension to the people's demand for relative autonomy from the government. In *Democracy in

America*, Tocqueville envisioned a world overtaken by individualism:

I want to imagine with what new features despotism could be produced in the

world: I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on

themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which

they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the

destiny of all the others: his children and his particular friends form the whole

human species for him; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them,

but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only

in himself and for himself alone, and if a family still remains for him, one can at

least say that he no longer has a native country. (663)

Tocqueville's concern here is that the individual subject simply separates himself from everyone

else, thus making an entire nation vulnerable to a dictatorship. The threat is that individuals, in

only seeing their own limited situations, put themselves at risk collectively to be overtaken by a

tyrannical ruler. Without a connection to anyone else, the individual is vulnerable, according to Tocqueville. Yet something equally significant is at work here. The individualism that Tocqueville describes has the potential to divide a nation, and, perhaps even more threatening, it has the ability to divide families. If each person is only concerned with himself, the natural bonds and support of family become strained. The common response to this aggressive and damaging individualism, however, is a call for community.

Patrick J. Deneen argues in "Lonesome No More!: Individualism and the Rise of Democratic Despotism" that liberty and equality are at odds with one another, just as individualism and community are, and choosing one necessarily entails rejecting the other:

> Liberty furthers other goals, such as autonomy, mobility, economic growth, and perhaps above all, individualism. Equality reinforces other ends that are more communal in nature, such as solidarity, mutual reliance, self-sacrifice, and civic spirit. These baskets of "goods," centered around conceptions of the good life that result from primary allegiance to either liberty or equality, co-exist in considerable tension, even to the point that two prominent schools of thought [Liberalism and Communitarianism] have now coalesced in defense of the respective virtues. (59)

Individualism, then, is fraught with problems, both dividing people and denying difference between individual subjects. The lone subject cannot have any control over his own existence because his voice is lost in the crowd of disparate voices. In addition, the individual is not seen as distinct, separate, or self-sufficient, though he may convince himself that he is. In reality, he is merely viewed as one part of a group of individuals with the same rights, the same responsibilities, and the same tendencies as all other separate individuals. Even in Tocqueville's depiction of disconnected subjects, he sees the individual as part of a common group of "like and equal men," all acting identically by acting in their own interests. Because individualism reduces difference, Amitai Etzioni declares it a fiction: "Most people are unaware that what they see as individuals are behaving bodies that can just as readily be thought of as members of groups of people guided by some shared bonds rather than merely by inner selves" (50-1). Individualism, then, itself becomes nearly impossible to maintain, a dream of ultimate independence.

The prevailing problem with community is that it denies difference, eliminates individual subjectivity for the more important work of joining similarities. Both community and individualism are inherently contradictory, however. Community is necessary, many argue, because it allows individuals to give shape to their identity. They recognize their similarities with one set of people and define themselves in opposition to those who are different. Jeffrey Weeks asserts, "Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality" (88). These contradictions are precisely why our current conceptions of community shatter under the slightest investigation. In order to develop a sense of identity, the individual must relate to others around him who are similar, thus causing him to deny anyone who is different. But in so doing, he risks his own subjectivity by reducing his identity to the group's collective identity. It is a continual process of uniting and dividing in the same instant. People are drawn together by the promise of mutual understanding, but in the same instant, the creation of innumerable small communities creates a fractured society, resembling little more than an individualistic culture.

Boundaries, according to A. P. Cohen in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, are necessary, however, for the community to remain intact: "Such contrastive marking is exactly what makes the notion of 'boundary' so central to an understanding of community. Looking outwards across the boundary, people construct what they see in terms of their own stereotypes, this outward view forming a 'self-reflexive portion' of their culture" (109). Like Weeks, Cohen claims that people can only define their own identity by finding it in the group. This is inherently contradictory. If the community itself creates a collective identity, then individual identity cannot possibly exist in community. Cohen, nevertheless, claims that the word community "seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference," yet this "difference" does not respect different identities within a community (12). Instead, he argues that community includes similarities and differences merely because members of a group come together as a result of what they have in common, and that something in common is contrary to the characteristics of another group, hence the "difference" in his definition.

These considerations of community suggest that the dividing lines between similarities and differences are very clear, yet they are blurred at best. Although community formation may be the necessary foundation for articulating identity, communities that inherently exclude difference force the individual to choose only one identity. Jeffery Weeks reveals the problems with such a demand: "Each of us live with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled, 'British' or 'European'. . . The list is potentially infinite, and so therefore are our possible belongings" (88). These competing identities, or the insistence that each person proclaim only one, create division. The categories for inclusion, and therefore for the development of identity, are so limited, so circumscribed that they ultimately create an identity conflict. A community that can only be produced through boundaries, creates division rather than unity. Even in our political groups we attempt to develop a collective identity for ourselves, and our membership in such groups helps to define our own individual identities further. The drawback to such a project, however, is that in attempting to create that identity, we attempt to eliminate those who do not share our political leanings. The splintering can only continue. A person who shares the political opinions of one group but is from a different economic background may very well feel alienated from the rest of the group. These differences create a continual splintering and separation, and they ultimately reproduce the alienation that most individuals seek to overcome by joining a community. What we are left with are individuals who are acutely aware of their exclusion and a fractured society. Weeks asserts, "Behind the quest for identity are different, and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities, but within individuals themselves" (89).

For members of a minority group, community becomes necessary for many reasons, not merely for developing an identity. "For a member of a marginalized group, the invocation of community marks an existentially and politically vital site of affiliation, and a refusal of false inclusion or erasure" (Singer 125). London's Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane, for example, provides both a place to belong and a source of mutual support, but such communities

also function in politically significant ways as well. The lone individual is easily lost in the majority crowd, but a collective voice demands recognition and more power. It becomes a means of survival for many people who are part of a marginalized group. Identifying with a community also provides the individual the support that may not be offered from the majority group or the government. Many British Asians identify with other British Asians because they naturally believe that they can understand one another, given their similar situations. They have something in common—their cultural or ethnic background, or merely their marginalization—and that something in common suggests that they can truly understand each other.

Developing these communities, however, is politically expedient for more than the minority groups alone. In fact, forces are continually at work to push people into associating with these groups in order to contain them and to maintain the division between groups. Marginalization simply becomes easier through these affiliations. Margaret Thatcher's government promoted "community policing" in the 1980s, suggesting that minority communities could claim more control over their day to day existence in Britain, but in reality, these communities only policed themselves for the benefit of local authorities and the broader government. They participated in their own containment. The tensions that develop between groups can also be exploited to maintain division between people. Kobena Mercer argues that in the early to middle 1980s in Britain, "The rationing of meager resources became a means of regulating and controlling 'difference' because, as the various actors perceived it, one group's loss was another group's gain. In this zero-sum game the only tangible consequence of diversity was dividedness" (47).

Rhetorically, community is now a term often used to create that division by isolating a group of people from a majority population, yet its "warmly persuasive" connotation conceals these divisive intentions—or perhaps merely reassures us that we are giving outsiders a place to belong. Rather than being a notion of unity, community becomes a tool for exclusion. The media refers on a regular basis to the Asian community, the Muslim community, the African American community and so on. Religious, ethnic, and social considerations determine, for the most part, in which community each person will be placed. We have seen the detrimental effects of forcing such categorizations onto people. The categorization provides a ready-made identity for anyone

who might exhibit any of the stereotypical characteristics. Arabs are now, to Western eyes, suspicious people, every member of this ethnic group a radical, fundamentalist terrorist. These monolithic considerations bear a strong resemblance to the "new-caught, sullen peoples" Kipling refers to in "The White Man's Burden," and such representations allow a majority population to maintain control and contain opposition, but they also produce an identity for people, a way of "reading" their motivations and anticipating their behavior. These produced identities are not merely limited to ethnic groups, either. If a woman describes herself as a feminist, an entire body of stereotypes is deployed to give shape to her identity. She then simply becomes another face in a crowd of feminists, and she can be nullified through marginalization.

Linda Singer explains that using the term community is politically expedient for hegemony as well:

> The term circulates promiscuously through a variety of discourses—often with the effect of muddying the ideological waters. One may find appeals to community as an authorizing force of exclusion, when the U.S. Supreme Court uses the language of 'community standards' as the basis on which particular cultural artifacts may be removed from circulation. One may hear in the totalizing discourses associated with hegemonic forms of authority the appropriation of community as a way of marginalizing the effects of structuring difference, like race, gender, and class, precisely in order to pacify those disadvantageously positioned by those differences. (124-5)

The prevailing ideology assumes that if people have a place to belong, they will be content, no matter how poorly they are treated. If individuals feel as if they are part of a community, they will not recognize their marginalization.

Both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan appropriated the term as a means to dismantle the welfare state. Thatcher advanced the virtues of "local communities," small groups of neighbors who would care for one another. If local communities would step in and provide support to their members—primarily financial support— then the welfare state would be no longer needed. The term "local communities" seems familiar, even comforting, perhaps. Yet removing an individual's safety net—in this case the welfare state—is nothing more than a return

to laissez-faire economics, which only serves to create a more insular individual. The idea may sound promising, yet few people would actually participate in such a project. Rather than fostering a new system of mutual support, the dissolution of the welfare state demands that every individual ensures his own safety.

Communities are not simply monolithic from the outsider's perspective. When individual members of a community are reduced to a single group identity, the particularities of each individual are dissolved. Such a problem exists from without—as evidenced by the current suspicion of non-Westerners—as well as from within the community. These categorizations eliminate the agency and individuality of each member of such a group. Within the monolithic community, individual rights cannot supercede group rights. Groups demand that individual members forfeit their own interests for more significant group interests, and in so doing, individuals deny their own differences from other members. In addition, various political and religious groups often expect that everyone should believe and behave as they do. Jeffrey Weeks asserts that "Groups and communities become potentially undemocratic [. . .] when they begin to proclaim the universal truth of their particular experiences. The freedom to live your own life in the way you choose must imply an acceptance of other ways of life" (98). In reality, however, the community's insistence on homogeneity makes no allowance for other identities or worldviews, both within and outside the group.

Monolithic manifestations of community are not simply limited to ethnic, political, or religious groups, either. Families, too, fall prey to the desire to create unity. One family member becomes the leader of the community and sets the standards for appropriate behavior. All other members must either function within these narrow rules or face exclusion. As Margaret Thatcher argued in an interview with the *Daily Mail* in 1989, the family is responsible for developing the framework for community, and community provides the foundation for a nation. The family dictates appropriate behavior and a community identity. Essentially, the family, according to Thatcher, must participate in hegemony. Iris Marion Young argues:

> The ideal of community [. . .] privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view. Community is an understandable dream,

27

expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic [. . .] because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify. (300)

Identifying with people who are similar and creating a community from those similarities may, in fact, provide a person with means of solidifying and articulating her identity, but the individual develops her identity by denying any differences she may have with the collective group identity. That constructed identity is false or at least provisional rather than definitive.

The monolithic community creates problems for individuals, but it also creates a culture in which one group's distrust of other groups is the standard. Frank G. Kirkpatrick suggests in *The Ethics of Community* that this division naturally produces a fear of others, widening the divide between people:

In such a society, because the self fears the other, its freedom to express itself fully is inhibited. It is afraid to open itself to others, to share its goods, to sacrifice some of its narrow interests for the sake of others because it fears that everything it gives away will diminish it and will entail a loss of self-identity and meaning. It can only assume that the others are just as negatively motivated toward it as it is toward them. In this kind of society, basic trust has been eroded, and the necessary conditions for other-regarding behavior. The result can only be the further disintegration and alienation of the society and its members in relation to each other. (72-3)

Ultimately, small enclaves of people, who draw the boundaries around themselves in order to reject others, continue to splinter until what remains is individualism.

* * *

Although individualism and community are treated as mutually exclusive terms, in practice, they produce the same outcome—they both deny difference. Iris Marion Young explains that individualism and community both function as a means of creating homogeneity:

> Each entails a denial of difference and desire to bring multiplicity and
> heterogeneity into unity, although in opposing ways. Liberal individualism denies
> difference by positing the self as a self-sufficient unity, not defined by or in need
> of anything or anyone other than itself. Its formalistic ethic of rights denies
> difference by leveling all such separated individuals under a common measure of
> rights. Community, on the other hand, denies difference by positing fusion rather
> than separation as the social ideal (307).

Individualism will only produce like members of a consumerist society, dissolving each person into a collective identity, and community, in its attempts to create unity and to develop a response to individualism, will produce yet another collective identity. In addition, the individual who cannot survive without support will either suffer or give in to the demands of community.

Many schools of thought, including Marxism and Christianity, have attempted to reclaim community from its limited construction. The various iterations of community, however, often come to the same conclusion. No matter how desperately we might attempt to create a brand of community that fits our understanding of the term—a safe place, a place to belong, a place of support—the end result is nearly always a refusal to acknowledge or respect individual subjectivities. The sameness, the continuity of community finally reduces individuals' differences to the point where they can no longer exist. The welcoming, warmly persuasive community, or what Young refers to as the "ideal of community," always teeters on the edge of a kind of totalitarianism.

Community theorists, such as Georges Van den Abbeele and Jean-Luc Nancy, insist that the communist, humanist, and Christian communities have failed, and their failures are a result of the desire to create unity by denying difference. Linda Singer posits, "As two hegemonic formations constitutive of our contemporary conception of community, Christianity and liberalism represent historical efforts to initiate visions of a social order founded on a model of community in which differences are harmoniously sutured or drastically diminished in their effect and significance" (Singer 124). Religion looks to regulate differences in order to maintain a kind of control, to give order to what is naturally disorderly, yet its appeal to community promises support and mutual understanding. Frank G. Kirkpatrick argues that

> Community is the locus of ultimate personal fulfillment: communion, fellowship,
> mutuality, and intimacy. The relationships that constitute a Christian communion
> are between them and the divine Person. Personal relations in the community are
> generally direct, intimate, loving, and mutual. Friendship or fellowship among
> equals characterizes such gatherings. (xii)

Love is the basis of relationships in the Christian community; it informs the interactions between individuals in the group. Kirkpatrick suggests that love overcomes the differences that are inherent in a gathering of disparate individuals. This rendering of community—as a group of equals—assumes that people who love one another can also completely understand one another. The belief that a person can truly understand another person, however, denies differences between individual subjects. Iris Marion Young explains that this is a common characteristic of the community ideal:

> I argue that the ideal of community participates in what Derrida calls the
> metaphysics of presence and Adorno calls the logic of identity, a metaphysics that
> denies difference. The ideal of community presumes subjects can understand one
> another as they understand themselves. It thus denies the difference between
> subjects. The desire for community relies on the same desire for social wholeness
> and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism on the one hand
> and political sectarianism on the other. (302)

These communities offer hope to individuals who are suffering on their own by promising love and understanding, but presuming that individuals can understand each other entails ignoring or rejecting particularity. Very little, then, separates the loving communities of Christianity and liberal humanism from racism because they seek to merge difference into unity.

Marxism, too, has offered a kind of salvation for the individual subject suffering from alienation. Linda Singer describes Marxism's appeal for the isolated individual:

> Marxism provides an account of the origins of the myth of community in the
> needs created by a system in which labor is alienated and human relationships are
> governed by laws of competitive individualism, possession, and exploitation.
> Because individuation is produced as a consequence of social relationships of

domination, individuation emerges as a form of suffering from which one seeks relief, salvation" (126-7).

The individual, however, views his alienation as a direct result of his difference. If he rejects his individual identity, then close, supportive relationships should develop. The Marxist community eliminates differences by viewing everyone as equally exploited. This desire for a universal community identity, however, is at the heart of Marxism's failure to articulate an inclusive community. Later discussions of Marxism attempt to address this tendency to reject individuality. In *Marx's Social Ontology*, Carol Gould explains that the final step in Marx's vision of social evolution makes allowances for the individual within a community: "These individuals therefore form a communal but differentiated subject that expresses itself in and through each individual. The whole or unity that is reconstituted in these internal relations among the individuals is thus mediated or differentiated by their individuality, but unified by their commonality" (9). Although varied individuals comprise this community, they form a collective identity that then informs the individual subject. Ultimately, Gould's vision of community works only by regulating difference and redeploying a unified community subject.

*   *   *

Both community and individualism, in their traditional forms, create an untenable situation for the subject because they are presented as an either/or proposition. Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "What is given, what is signified today is much more on the order of a tirelessly dialecticized identity of identity and nonidentity (one/multiple, individual/collective, conscious/unconscious, will/material forces, ethics/economics, and so forth)" (9-10). Individualism and community stand as yet another binary pair. Maintaining the dichotomy between individualism and community places strict limitations on their social functions, each merely defined by absence. As a result, community can only be the absence of individualism, and vice versa. In the individual/community binary, individualism promotes the free development of individual subjectivity, the free will of the individual. Community is responsible for controlling and containing a free and varied population. Both poles require the forfeiture of something significant. The either/or proposition only means compromising on a less than perfect situation. If a person chooses community, he is expected to forfeit his liberty, his right to speak

31

for himself. If, instead, he determines that he will maintain his individuality, he must give up all rights to assistance. Any attempts to rethink community fail if they do not break through the limitations created by the individual/community dichotomy. Iris Marion Young explains in "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference":

> For many writers, the rejection of individualism logically entails asserting community, and conversely any rejection of community entails that one necessarily supports individuals. [. . .] The possibility that there could be other conceptions of social organization does not appear because all possibilities have been reduced to the mutually exclusive opposition between individualism and community. (307)

If the dichotomy between individual and community remains intact, the result of the two will remain the same. In order to escape this trap, a post-community, one that eliminates the divide between individual and community, must be developed.

Ferdinand Tönnies, the German sociologist and political activist, studied an important sociological shift that occurred near the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to this shift, people developed communities as a means of providing support to one another. Tönnies noticed a clear movement away from community and toward the individual's self-interest superseding any consideration of others.[5] Tönnies refers to his primary research interest as an organic community. He explains:

> The wills of human beings interact in many different ways. Every such relationship is reciprocal—on the one side active or assertive, on the other passive or acquiescent. These interactions are of such a kind that they tend either to support the mental and physical well-being of the other party or destroy them— they are either positive or negative. My theory will concentrate on investigating only the relationships that are based on positive mutual affirmation. Every relationship of this kind involves some kind of balance between unity and diversity. This consists of mutual encouragement and the sharing of burdens and achievements, which can be seen as expressions of people's energies and wills. The social group brought into existence by this positive relationship, envisaged as

functioning both inwardly and outwardly as a unified living entity, is known by

some collective term such as a *union*, *fraternity*, or *association*.[6] (17)

Tönnies' organic community entails a clear balance between individuality and commonality. Those interactions between individuals that require commonality are destructive, ultimately destroying individual subjectivity. Rather than maintaining the bipolar relationship between individual and community, Tönnies views each as informing the other. Both particularities and similarities are present in the organic, supportive community. By including both, the binary opposition shatters, and a post-community develops.

Jean-Luc Nancy articulates the characteristics of this post-community in *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy's interpretation does not view community as a group determined by geography, language, politics, ethnicity, or social class. Such communities have limits, and they impose these limits on their members. Instead, Nancy argues that the basis for community formation and membership is nothing more than our existence. George Van Den Abbeele describes this as "what is given and what happens to 'singular beings,' the exhibiting or presenting of their singularity, which is to say, the copresenting of their *finitude* as the very basis or condition for their commonality" (xiv). This revision of community eliminates the individual/community binary. If community can only form on the basis of commonality, then, as Nancy argues, by reducing the commonality to something as primary as being alive, anyone can become a member of the community, as each individual possesses the required common trait. Such a vision of community discards the rigid prerequisites of membership that social, ethnic, religious, or political communities impose. Nancy's vision of community is a welcoming one in which differences cannot be viewed as running counter to the composition of the community, for membership is determined by the most basic principle—that each person belongs the community of humankind.

James F. English argues in *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor, and the Politics of Community in Twentieth-Century Britain* that new considerations of community must respond to "the question of a *different* community, a community in and of difference, a community, as Nancy expresses it, 'formed by an articulation of "particularities," and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular

beings into itself'" (23). Amitai Etzioni asserts that the only effective community construction is one in which the individual maintains his subjectivity and agency while being a member of a collective group:

> There is a strong tendency to assume that if individualism champions the individual, then its critics, communitarians, must champion the community. They must extol social order instead of liberty, duties instead of rights. Granted that communitarians vary, like all philosophical camps, responsive communitarianism must be understood nonetheless as seeking a synthesis between individualism and communal collectivism, a carefully crafted balance between liberty and social order rights and responsibilities. It is a synthesis that takes the "-ism" but not the "individual" out of "individualism." (52).

This post-community collapses the divide between individualism and community and allows for both. Rather than being mutually exclusive terms, they exist within the same sphere, each informing the other. Iris Marion Young argues that the post-community functions like a large city: "The city consists in a great diversity of people and groups, with a multitude of subcultures and differentiated activities and functions, whose lives and movements mingle and overlap in public spaces" (319). The diverse population is one of the most celebrated aspects of the city. Groups exist within the city, yet they are not isolated from one another, and their boundaries are not insurmountable. In fact, they bleed into one another. In the post-community, people would not concern themselves with differences or similarities, or, if they recognized difference, they would simply make note of it and move on. The city, as well as this new community, is defined by particularities. Jean-Luc Nancy describes this post-community based on "being in common" as a kind of impersonal group, always between being a clearly defined community and a crowd of individuals:

> To begin with, the logic of being-with corresponds to nothing other than what we could call the banal phenomenology of unorganized groups of people. Passengers in the same train compartment are simply seated next to each other in an accidental, arbitrary, and completely exterior manner. They are not linked. But they are also quite together inasmuch as they are travelers on this train, in this

same space for this same period of time. They are between the disintegration of the "crowd" and the aggregation of the group, both extremes remaining possible, virtual, and near at every moment. (7)

In this space between individuals and the group, the post-community takes up residence. This new community is less persuasive, perhaps, because it does not promise that individuals will understand each other as they understand themselves, yet by rejecting such promises, the post-community does not attempt to regulate difference. Diversity is expected and celebrated in the post-community, which is the singular element that separates it from earlier articulations.

Reducing the basis of community to "being in common," however, may overlook the importance of more specific commonalities in identity formation. A category as broad as "being" potentially can confuse an already difficult undertaking such as articulating one's identity. As A.P. Cohen insists, that in "[l]ooking outwards across the boundary" individuals develop their own identities (109). Without clearly defined boundaries, however, individuals are no longer required to choose some identity traits while denying the existence of others' that do not fit the category. Assimilation is no longer necessary. As a result, the post-community engenders equality because no singular identity has any more or less value than another.

Britain has made attempts in the past to foster a culture of unassimilated otherness. Jeffrey Weeks reveals that "Multi-culturalism, as it was articulated from the 1960s in the legislation on racial equality, embodied a notion of different communities evolving gradually into a harmonious society where difference was both acknowledged and irrelevant" (92). The harmonious society, however, has not developed. Few are willing to take the next step in community's evolution, and the demands for assimilation continue. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown illustrates the ways in which minorities are continually rejected by the majority population or by their own communities: "Thus we became adept at chiseling off any bits that might cause offence, trigger off painful rejections. But they came anyway. To add insult, the more we tried to belong the less we were respected"[7] (7). The post-community must be a post-nation as well in order to overcome these demands. Jean-Luc Nancy asks, "What could be more common than to be, than being? We are. Being, or existence, is what we share" (1). With this one question, Nancy erases community's artificial borders. Assimilation is eliminated, because there are no

particularities to parse. There is no commonality between individuals except that we have our being in common. Individual subjects maintain their separate, distinct identities and agency and are still recognized as qualified to participate in the community.

Globalization has made rethinking community all the more necessary. As Jeffrey Weeks insists, "If ever-growing social complexity, cultural diversity and a proliferation of identities are indeed a mark of the postmodern world, then all appeals to our common interest as humans will be as naught unless we can at the same time learn to live with difference" (92). In the post-community diverse cultures are respected and welcomed by citizens because individuality is respected. This is the singular element that makes the post-community successful. If the post-community refuses to respect the individual identities of its members, the project will ultimately fail, retreating to a monolithic group identity. We must, instead, insist on a "community of existence" (Nancy 1).

Perhaps Hanif Kureishi's assessment of community is correct. The overuse—and abuse—of community has the potential to vitiate any meaningful discussion of what community should provide and how it should function. Iris Marion Young echoes Kureishi's sentiment. She argues that we should abandon the use of community as a signifier of mutual support and acceptance: "Because most articulations of the ideal of community carry the urge to unity I have criticized, however, I think it is less confusing to use a term other than community rather than to redefine the term. Whatever the label, the concept of social relations that embody openness to unassimilated otherness with justice and appreciation needs to be developed" (320). The term carries so much rhetorical baggage that reclaiming it as a meaningful term becomes a difficult exercise. The word community, however, still retains its overwhelming appeal, which provides a useful foundation for moving forward. Jeffrey Weeks claims:

> It is impossible to underestimate the power of these various (and perhaps sometimes contradictory) appeals to human solidarity[8] after a decade dominated by an ethic of human selfishness. We are reminded that what we have in common as human beings is more important than what divides us as individuals or members of other collectivities. (91)

Rather than abandoning community as a signifier, we must work to liberate it from its limiting construction. Balancing the individual and the communal overcomes the restrictive nature of the traditional community.

Considering how to move forward effectively, Linda Singer poses these questions regarding a field now called community studies:

> Is community to be figured as that which can be celebrated or strived for as an antidote to alienation and subjugation? Or ought it be challenged for its politics of false inclusion, its denial of difference, and its utility as an apparatus of hegemony? Should the writing of community work to facilitate or obstruct the formation of community in thought and practice? (126)

The novels and films in this study attempt to do both. They propose a new fluid and inclusive community, while some openly reject the totalizing, monolithic community. Singer explains the significance of these representations:

> The community at loose ends works against this elective refusal of the common by insisting on its differences in ways that disrupt the circuitry by which the call of community is made and heard, especially by those engaged in the production of cultural signs, which is largely as a call for the denial of difference. Rather than a disciplinary call to mass mobilization, the community at loose ends seduces by its looseness, its willingness to exhibit its differences face to face, in public and in print. (130)

Creating the post-community in reality is, perhaps, as impossible a task as creating a community originally. By contesting our idealized, failed vision of community and replacing it with an inclusive community, however, these novels and films underscore the import of such a project.

CHAPTER TWO

Between Two Worlds:

The Community of Outsiders in Penelope Fitzgerald's *Offshore*

It was a pity that the title was translated into various European languages with words meaning "far away" or "far from the shore," which mean the exact opposite of what I intended. By "offshore" I meant to suggest the boats at anchor, still in touch with t, he land, and also the emotional restlessness of my characters, halfway between the need for security and the doubtful attraction of danger. Their indecision is a kind of reflection of the rising and falling tide, which the craft at anchor must, of course, follow.

—Penelope Fitzgerald

I have remained true to my deepest convictions, I mean to the courage of those who are born to be defeated, the weaknesses of the strong, and the tragedy of misunderstandings and missed opportunities, which I have done my best to treat as comedy, for otherwise how can we manage to bear it?

—Penelope Fitzgerald

Penelope Fitzgerald's widespread critical acclaim is incontestable. Her second novel, *The Bookshop* (1978), was short-listed for the Booker Prize, as were *The Beginning of Spring* (1988) and *The Gate of Angels* (1990). Her third novel, *Offshore*, won the Booker in 1979, and *The Blue Flower* (1995) was "named Book of the Year by 19 British newspapers in 1995" and won the National Book Critics' Circle Award in 1997 (Hoffert 101). Reviewers have hailed her as a masterful writer, yet, inexplicably, little criticism on her impressive body of work exists. The few

critical considerations of her work are limited to brief overviews of her entire collection, rather than focused on a single novel.

Many of Penelope Fitzgerald's novels share a number similarities, however, perhaps inviting critics to discuss her body of work as a whole. Her protagonists seem alone in the world, never completely happy and never quite acceptable to the rest of society. In *The Beginning of Spring*, Frank Reid, an Englishman who was raised in Moscow, is abandoned by his wife and left to care for his children and pick up the pieces of his life on his own. In *The Bookshop*, Florence Green, a widow determined to open a bookstore in a small village, is regularly under attack from her neighbors to vacate the store and the town. In *Offshore*, most of the characters are either abandoned by family and friends or coping with strained family relationships. Fitzgerald's novels follow these characters as they attempt to survive and remedy their isolation.

Although *Offshore* won the Booker Prize, it is the novel that has received the least attention. Critics who have written about the novel seem preoccupied with the unique setting and pay little attention to anything else. In a brief analysis of the novel, Jean Sudrann describes the setting as "the Thames barge world of *Offshore*" and focuses on "its home-setting [of] a derelict barge named *Grace* moored in the Thames Reach near London's Battersea Bridge" (111, 105). Tess Lewis remarks that *Offshore* is "Fitzgerald's third novel [. . .] set on the Battersea Reach of the Thames where Fitzgerald herself lived on an old wooden barge until it sank" and asserts that Fitzgerald's "early novels owe much of their success [. . .] to the quaint charm of their settings" (29). The unique "Thames barge world" begs some attention, but a discussion of *Offshore* that is limited to its setting alone misses the opportunity to analyze Fitzgerald's endearing portrait of people who are struggling to survive in an uncaring world. The community that develops among the barge residents in *Offshore* is unique, not because it is on the banks of the Thames, but because it is a classless, diverse community built on the basis of the residents' mutual concern for one another. The community that the characters in the novel build in this setting and the circumstances that create the need for this community are what make *Offshore* worthy of more attention. The characters in the novel retreat to Battersea Reach, this area between land and sea, partially as a result of their inability to function successfully on land, but primarily because they

cannot survive on their own, and the barge community provides continual assistance to its members in need.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The events of the novel take place in the 1960s, a time when Britain was still attempting to regain its footing after World War II. The intention in implementing a social government after the war was to provide assistance to those who could not support themselves. It was a government built on the ideals of liberal humanism, in which each member of the society must work to assist others. That support system is noticeably absent in the pages of *Offshore*. In "Social Policy under Thatcher and Major," Chris Pierson asserts that the welfare state failed to engender a British society based on mutual support and equality. He explains that the social system "had not only failed to eliminate deprivation, it had actually made the position worse by displacing traditional community- and family-based forms of support, entrapping the poorest in a 'cycle of dependence'" (205). Nenna James, the female protagonist in *Offshore*, is barely surviving financially, but more importantly, she is suffering from a lack of support from her own family. Just as Pierson claims, traditional forms of community do not exist in *Offshore*, either, but a unique community develops on the banks of the Thames.

The residents of Battersea Reach retreat to the margins of London society because they are forced to survive on their own. The circumstances surrounding each person's abandonment vary slightly, but every member of the barge community has been rejected in some way by family members. Fitzgerald paints a particularly bleak picture of family relations and underscores the need to build community as a result of family members refusing to support one another. This is one of the most striking aspects of the novel. Every member of the barge community is estranged from his or her family in some fashion. In the *Philosophy of Right* G. W. F. Hegel ascribes love as the predominant characteristic of the family. Love distinguishes the family as the opposite of the state. John Brenkman explains,

> Consider Hegel's reflection on the meaning of family and love in the *Philosophy of Right* at just the point where he is concerned to establish the qualitative and unbridgeable distinction between the family and the state. The family achieves unity through the feeling of love, which is "ethical life in the form of something

natural," in contradistinction to the state, in which "we are conscious of unity as law." (945)

The family members in *Offshore*, however, express no love for one another. Instead, they function like the state, attempting to enforce social standards on each other. They make demands of each other, and they only offer support to one another when those demands have been met.

Nenna James has lost all assistance from her family. She has been left to take care of herself and her daughters on her own. It is clear to Nenna's neighbors that her entire family has failed her, but they operate from the understanding that family members are duty-bound to help their relatives. The other members of the barge community believe that if Edward, Nenna's husband, has abandoned her, then someone else in her family should step in and provide her some assistance, preferably a male relative: "If her husband had let her down, as was apparently the case, she ought to have a male relation of some kind, to see to things. [. . .] Nenna appeared to have no-one" (60). The only remaining connections to family that she has are to her sister and brother-in-law and her husband, but these connections do not amount to supportive relationships. Instead, her sister scolds her on a regular basis, and her husband has made no contact with her in months. The unfortunate and damaging reality of Nenna's life is that her family displays no love, no affection, and no concern for her welfare.

Nenna has no opportunity to talk openly with any of her family members about the difficulties she faces because they do not respect the fact that she is different from them. As a result, she is essentially alone, and she is left with limited options for building a future for herself and her children. No one in Nenna's family will bear her burdens. Instead, they often contribute to her already difficult life by insisting that she behave in a more respectable manner. Living apart from her husband and on a retired barge does not qualify for respectability. Emotions are apparently unacceptable as well. Nenna is without contact from family members for an extended period of time, further isolating her and increasing her emotional fragility. What Nenna's sister, Louise, requires of her is a level head and an ability to communicate without emotion. When Nenna finally speaks to her sister on the telephone, Louise stifles the happiness and relief Nenna feels from receiving the phone call:

'Oh, Lou, you don't know how it is to hear your voice. . .'

'Nenna, you're becoming emotional. Wouldn't you agree it's just about time that

somebody helped you to restore some kind of order into your life?'

'Oh, please don't do that!' (83)

Louise denies Nenna even the most natural response to hearing from her. Nenna needs Louise to commiserate with her, but Louise either does not recognize this need or completely disregards it. Nenna only receives admonishments from Louise. The families onshore are only concerned with whether their relatives are living respectable, orderly lives, not with whether they are experiencing difficulties and if they are able to cope with them. Moments in the novel such as this illustrate that this family's primary role is undergoing a shift from being a constant source of comfort, love, and aid to being a constant source of pressure to conform to social expectations and norms.

Louise creates an atmosphere in which Nenna cannot feel safe by criticizing Nenna at every turn. She is an impersonal figure in Nenna's life, no different than the magistrate who tells Nenna, "Your life story so far, Mrs. James, has had a certain lack of distinction" (34). Nenna notices that "the magistrate had become a judge," and Louise takes up the same position (34). She takes a very accusatory tone with Nenna, which immediately puts Nenna on the defensive. Every choice that Nenna has made is unacceptable to Louise. She holds Nenna responsible for the failure of her marriage to Edward, and she scolds Nenna for purchasing the *Grace*, the barge Nenna purchases after Edward abandons her and the children. Nenna cannot confide in Louise because Louise displays no real concern for her sister. She simply reinforces her insistence on Nenna's being a more respectable member of the family. The characteristics of support, compassion, and concern that typically apply to familial relationships do not exist in Nenna's relationship with Louise. Nenna, however, needs someone to show some concern for her, and the members of the barge community, ironically almost complete strangers to Nenna, are the only people who display any regard for her.

Although many members of the barge community find themselves in similar situations with their own families, they still expect other families to function normally. Nenna's neighbors find it difficult to believe that Louise is part of Nenna's family given her apparent disregard for Nenna. Richard, the assumed leader of the barge community, has the opportunity to speak with

Louise on the phone when she calls to speak with Nenna, and he comments on how insensitive Louise is. He mentions to Nenna later that Louise is very demanding, and he asks Nenna, "Are you sure she's your sister?" (84). Richard cannot comprehend how a sister could treat her sibling with such disrespect, and he cannot reconcile what he knows of Nenna—her generosity and kindness—with what he has experienced with Louise—her insistence on others following her instructions. As Richard correctly deduces, Louise is not "used to being contradicted" (84). In order to be accepted by her family members, Nenna must do exactly as they require. Support from family is something to be earned rather than something given freely.

Louise is not the only family member to have failed Nenna, however. Nenna's husband, Edward, is equally dismissive. Edward is another cold, unfeeling person in Nenna's life, and his family history lacks any sign of nurturing among family members. He has learned his dismissive behavior from his own family's example. They are incapable of affection in even the simplest terms, such as giving gifts to one another: "His family, it seemed, had not been in the habit of exchanging presents, almost inconceivably to Nenna, whose childhood had been gift-ridden, with much atonement, love and reconciliation conveyed in the bright wrappings" (37). Their daughters reveal that Edward has carried on the family tradition. At one point when the girls are in town, they think that they should purchase a nice gift for their mother because "Daddy always used to forget to give her anything" (72). Although the lack of gift-giving may seem an insignificant oversight on Edward's part, it is merely one piece of his pattern of being inconsiderate toward his wife. Nenna is in such desperate need of any sign of affection from her husband, but he is incapable of giving anything.

Family members in *Offshore*, and Nenna's in particular, are incapable of showing any amount of genuine concern or love for one another. Nenna experiences this loss of support acutely. She expects her family to be her first source of support and her ultimate defense, but no one is willing to give her what she needs most. Edward scolds her when she pleads for him to join her on the barge; he views her behavior, and her neediness in particular, as weak and childish. In fact, Edward responds to her as if she is a lunatic:

> "I want you, Eddie, that's the one and only thing I came about. I want you every
>> moment of the day and night and every time I try to fold up a map."

"You're raving, Nenna."

"Please give."

"Give you what? You're always saying that. I don't know what meaning you
attach to it."

"Give anything."

She didn't know why she wanted this so much, either. Not presents, not for
themselves, it was the sensation of being given to, she was homesick for that. (94)

The people in Nenna's family, in the past, were generous with one another, and her ideas of
home and family are directly linked to family members providing care and concern for one
another. Home and family have disintegrated for Nenna, and her homesickness is primarily a
result of her family's disregard for her, rather than her physical location. There is a significant
shift in family relations from Nenna's childhood to her current life. This shift, however, does not
occur simply as a result of joining Edward's family, as her own sister behaves in the same cold
manner.

Every member of Nenna's family fails her. Just as Nenna's sister dismisses her,
Edward's parents show no regard for Nenna or her daughters, either. In fact, they seem to want
no contact with Nenna or their grandchildren. Nenna can expect no help or consideration from
any family member, especially not Edward's family. Leaving the children with their
grandparents while Nenna attempts to reconcile with Edward is not an option, as his parents have
made their feelings very clear. The magistrate reminds her that they will have no part in caring
for her and her children: "'You know perfectly well that your husband's mother lives at a
considerable distance, in point of fact in a suburb of Sheffield, and that she has never at any time
offered to look after your children.' Edward had made the same objection" (38). The relationship
is so dysfunctional that asking for assistance from Edward's family is inconceivable, and his
parents would never offer to help on their own. It is this ultimate failure on the part of Nenna's
family that drives her to the barge community on the banks of the Thames.

Tess Lewis asserts that "In *Offshore*, Fitzgerald's focus was drawn to what, in her later
novels, proved to be her true subject: the intimate relations between people and the ways in
which they make each other miserable despite their very best intentions" (32). Lewis gives the

various family members the benefit of the doubt in this remark. The only figures who make others miserable are those who attempt to force a particular way of life onto others, and they rarely appear to have others' best interests at heart. That is ultimately the failure of family and of oppressive forms of community, such as the religious community, in the novel. The family communicates what is acceptable in society, and those who do not fit within the narrow confines of respectability are driven to the margins of society. Lewis's remarks seem to be an accusation against people, such as Nenna and Richard, who believe that life on the Thames is a good life and who attempt to convince their spouses of the same. The members of the barge community, however, do not make each other miserable. Instead, they do everything possible to make life easier for each other without placing any demands on one another.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The setting in *Offshore* is more than a mere curiosity, as some critics suggest. Life offshore is a binary of life on dry land. Onshore, individuals are considered successful if they can take care of themselves. The legitimate society exists on land, primarily in London, rather than on the banks of the Thames. The metropolis is the locus of what is acceptable. Those people who live onshore dictate appropriate behavior and appearances. Nenna and her neighbors find freedom from these rigid social codes in their community on the Thames. Each member of the community is respected as an individual and is not expected to behave according to any social codes. Peter Wolfe asserts in *Understanding Penelope Fitzgerald*, "*Offshore* conveys an awareness of existence at a precise geographical spot. Rendering offshore life with intimacy, it includes specific details that set the Reach off from the rest of London" (134). The Battersea Reach community is not particularly intimate, but it does afford individuals the opportunity to live their lives the way that they want to live them free of recrimination. Onshore, family members, religious leaders, and government officials may pressure them to conform, but on their barges and in the presence of their neighbors, the barge residents continually resist those pressures. Their ability to resist, however, is only made certain by their connections to one another.

Nenna flees with her daughters to this space on the margins of society because she cannot function successfully on her own. She purchases a derelict barge, appropriately named *Grace*.

Nenna has never known grace while living onshore. No one has been generous or helpful toward her; no one has shown her mercy or kindness. Once she becomes a member of the barge community, however, she is granted a reprieve from others' expectations; the people who live on the Thames with her seem to understand her as well as her needs, and they give her support without question. Although life on a leaky barge is difficult and demanding, with the aid of others and with the freedom to be herself, Nenna seems capable of surviving.

Although individuals are expected to fend for themselves onshore, their individuality is not respected. Being a successful person is about being like everyone else. These individuals who live on the Thames have rejected the thought of living on land for this very reason. The Battersea Reach of the Thames is a middle-ground for them, as they are geographically positioned between a life out on the open waters and a life on land. They have not completely disavowed society, but they are unwilling to become full-fledged members of it:

> The barge-dwellers, creatures neither of firm land nor water, would have liked to be more respectable than they were. They aspired towards the Chelsea shore, where, in the early 1960's, many thousands lived with sensible occupations and adequate amounts of money. But a certain failure, distressing to themselves, to be like other people, cause them to sink back, with so much else that drifted or was washed up, into the mud moorings of the great tideway. (10)

These people have not so much rejected the society on shore, but they recognize the price that they must pay in order to function well. Individuality is not welcome in the society that operates on shore. In order to be accepted in such a place, the members of the barge community realize that they must forfeit their individuality and desires. This is simply too high of a price to pay, and they choose a more difficult life on the river.

During trips into the city, the barge residents are painfully aware of their inability to fit in. They are conspicuously out of place to everyone else: "The other passengers drew back from the dishevelled [*sic*] river dwellers, so far out of their element" (50). When Nenna goes to find Edward, she finds momentary relief from the accusations of her sister, the priest, and the judge, but her freedom does not last. Once she is surrounded by people who seem to effortlessly fit into the social landscape, Nenna begins to pass judgment on herself and finds herself inferior:

"Although as she changed from bus to bus she was free at last from the accusing voices, she had time for a number of second thoughts, wishing in particular that she had put on other clothes, and had had her hair cut" (86). Separated from her community, Nenna feels inappropriate or unacceptable. The rest of society, her family included, accuses her at every turn and places exceptions on their acceptance of her.

Trips to the shore are thus unpleasant for Nenna; she is essentially abused by nearly everyone she encounters. Her experience with Edward and his friends illustrates this point. Edward is no different from Louise or the magistrate who berates Nenna for her current situation. He cannot accept Nenna's unconventional decision to purchase *Grace* and live on Battersea Reach. Edward, however, has given Nenna no alternative. He only has a very small room for himself. During her visit with him, Nenna must follow unspoken rules of behavior, and she falters at every step. Uncertain of or unused to these rules, Nenna recognizes that they exist, but cannot figure them out. This only serves to paralyze her and her ability to communicate with Edward. She is willing initially to give in to his demands because she misses him, but his cold treatment of her only pushes her away and makes her resolute.

The barge residents' strangeness, their existence outside of society, is palpable. They are a curiosity, as evidenced by the running commentary from tour guides on the scenic river trips: "Battersea Reach, ladies and gentlemen. On your right, the artistic colony. Folk live on those boats like they do on the Seine, it's the artist's life they're leading there. Yes, there's people living on those boats" (16). Only one person in the group, Willis, is actually an artist. The others are employed or unemployed in other things, yet the sentiment by the society on shore is that the artist demands to exist on the fringes, refusing to abide by any rules. They are synonymous with the curious French people who have that bohemian spirit. In reality, there is simply nothing artistic about life on the Thames. It is terribly difficult, and it requires a lot of work, patience, and assistance from others, but those people and institutions that operate on land employ such characterizations to compartmentalize the communities and marginalize them.

The position of the barges shifts from land to water as the tide ebbs and flows, illustrating the way in which the members of the community are pulled between the two poles of the individual/community binary. "For the next six hours—or a little less, because at Battersea the

flood lasts five and a half hours, and the ebb six and a half—they would be living not on land, but on water" (12-13). The constant shifting of position creates the impression that they are all in a sort of social purgatory. Maurice tells Nenna:

> You know very well that we're two of the same kind, Nenna. It's right for us to live where we do, between land and water. You, my dear, you're half in love with your husband, then there's Martha, who's half a child and half a girl, Richard who can't give up being half in the Navy, Willis who's half an artist and half a longshoreman, a cat who's half alive and half dead. (47)

Nenna does seem to belong in this community because she feels an acute sense of unbelonging anywhere else. "Nenna was thirty-two [. . .] and felt by this time that she was neither Canadian nor English" (33). Canadian by birth and English by marriage, Nenna feels that she cannot claim either of these nationalities. She is in limbo, just like everyone else around her. Her inability to clearly define her identity compounds her problems and makes belonging on shore particularly difficult for her.

Those family members who wish to live on land or who already do attempt to force a different, more acceptable lifestyle from those who live on the barges. Nenna feels as if she must defend her choices at all times, particularly when she compares herself to other people living more respectable lives. Shortly after a discussion with the girls over the problems that the *Dreadnought* is having, Nenna thinks about making contact with her sister. The narrator reveals that "Nenna was struck by the fact that she ought to write to Louise, who was married to a successful business man" (26). Initially, it seems that Nenna may need to ask Louise for assistance, but what Nenna writes in the letter reveals that she feels that she has been set in opposition to the successes of her sister and brother-in-law. "She began, Dear Sis, Tell Joel that it's quite an education in itself for the girls to be brought up in the heart of the capital, and on the very shores of London's historic river" (26). Nenna frequently finds herself in situations in which she must defend herself and the life that she must now lead.

Richard, whose life seems much less complicated than Nenna's and the others' lives, nevertheless finds that he must defend his decisions as well. He, too, falls victim to the expectations that wife's family has for what qualifies as acceptable behavior. Richard wants to

rescue Laura from the influence of her family for Laura's well-being, but also for their future as husband and wife. He admits to Nenna, "I wanted to get her right away from her family, they're a disrupting factor, I don't mind telling you" (99). The family is a pernicious force, particularly Laura's. They remind her on a regular basis that living on the river is neither normal nor respectable, and they suggest that Laura and Richard get a home in the country, the quintessentially English place of residence.

Respectability, to Laura, demands that she live in a normal house rather than with this motley group of river rats.

> Loyalty to him, Richard knew, meant that she had never complained so far to anyone but himself about this business of living, instead of in a nice house, in a boat in the middle of London. She went home once a month to combat any such suggestion, and told her family that there were very amusing people living on the Thames. Between the two of them, there was no pretense. (11)

Laura's family expects something very different of her, and the pressure that her family puts on her, though not explicitly expressed in the novel, has a profoundly negative affect on Laura's relationship with Richard. The arguments are frequent, and they underscore the estrangement in the marriage. Richard and Laura cannot meet on a middle ground. He does not want to give up his life on the water, and she desperately wants to live in the country. The two ways of life are more than geographically contrary to one another. Laura wants to be like everyone else, and she wants to please her family by living in a location that her family finds acceptable. She also views the other members of the barge community as socially inferior, and she wants to have no part in their lives.

What is most surprising about Laura's resentment toward her life with Richard on the barge is her sense of alienation. She is the only person living in the community who feels this. Certainly, their unique living arrangements make them subject to much ridicule. Most people view them as gypsies. This negative treatment undoubtedly separates them from other people who live in the city. They are, in many respects, isolated, and Laura seems to experience this isolation more acutely than the others do. Those who want to live on the barges, such as Nenna and Richard, however, do not view themselves as isolated because they actually have a very

strong connection to each other. If one person is in need, someone else will certainly come to her aid. Some of them confide in one another, and they all offer each other a sense of safety in the midst of an environment in constant flux.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The community of people living on the banks of the Thames provides a distinct alternative to the society on land because it functions as a constant source of support. The novel opens on the residents meeting to assess the needs of everyone in the community. This inquiry is limited to obtaining information on the condition of everyone's barges, rather than serving as a therapy session, but Fitzgerald clearly illustrates from the opening moments of *Offshore*'s narrative that each member of this community is dedicated to ensuring the well-being of the others. The primary focus of this meeting is to determine what the community members can do to assist Willis in selling his barge. He has limited connections to the world outside his community, making him nearly incapable of putting his barge on the market, but Richard, with his business connections, is willing to ask an old Navy friend to list Willis's barge, the *Dreadnought*. Richard is not required to help Willis, but he feels a natural responsibility to his neighbors. "Richard saw, with reservations, *where his duty lay*, and put *Dreadnought* on the market through the agency of an old RNVR[1] friend of his, who had gone into partnership, on coming out of the forces, as an estate agent in Halkin Street" (52, emphasis added). These gestures stand in direct contrast to the behavior of the families in *Offshore*. Family members feel no obligation or desire to assist one another, yet Richard—someone who has no biological connection to Willis—believes that he is duty-bound to help Willis. Richard's concern for Willis is genuine and constant. In fact, he worries about Willis and wants to protect him. As he sees it, "the weakest element in the situation—the one most in need of protection, towards which Richard would always return—the weakest element was certainly Willis" (54). Every member of the community senses that Willis needs protection, and they are all willing to provide him that in any way that they can.

The community reveals the depths of its support after *Dreadnought* sinks. Everyone is willing to step up and provide some sort of assistance to Willis, who does not have anything left after the incident. Nenna takes all of Willis's clothes that have been salvaged and plans to clean

and mend everything. Woodie and his wife invite Willis to live with them on their barge, and they want no payment of rent to make up for it, even though Richard suggests that this is a reasonable thing to ask from Willis. They are aware, however, that Willis is in financial trouble, and they do not want to add to his concerns. Ironically, Willis wants to sell his barge and move in with his sister because he is nearing retirement and life on the barge is too demanding for him as he gets older. In order to move in with his sister in her home, however, he must sell his barge for the highest price possible in order to buy his way into his sister's good graces. He can only earn his sister's support through a monetary transaction. She will not give him space in her home without payment, yet Woodie and Janet welcome into theirs with open arms.

One of the greatest sacrifices that the community makes for Willis is, in fact, a financial one. Once the *Dreadnought* sinks, Willis bears an even greater financial burden. The barge comes to rest in the shipping channels, and in order to ensure the safety of other vessels, Willis must pay to have the barge salvaged and towed. Richard is convinced that Willis cannot pay these expenses, and his suggestion is for everyone to assist in meeting these financial obligations. He tells everyone, "I can't see any way out but a subscriptions list, to be organised as soon as possible" (80-1). No one makes any argument to the contrary. While some members of the community have more money than others—Maurice and Nenna are in similar financial situations as Willis—they are all willing to give what they can.

The community members' generosity toward one another seems limitless. After Willis moves onto *Rochester* with Woodie and Janet, they lose some of their freedom, yet they never complain or refuse to help. Woodie and Janet have always had their entire year mapped out. They know where they will be and when, but after Woodie moves in with them, their schedule is no longer their own. They are ready to make their seasonal move to their home in Purley, but since Woodie will have no place to live unless he accepts their offer to live with them in Purley, they feel it necessary to stay in order to provide him with lodging. Without question, they rearrange their lives to accommodate his needs:

> Nothing was said about his next move, except that he could hardly expect his
> sister to take him in now, and that he was unwilling, under any circumstances, to
> move to Purley. Therefore the daily life of the Woodies, which had depended

almost entirely on knowing what they would be doing on any given day six
months hence, fell into disrepair. They had to resort to unpacking many of the
things which they had so carefully stowed away. They repeated, however, that
Willis was no trouble. (85)

In fact, the overriding—yet unspoken—code of the community is to assist one another without
hesitation. In the same regard, Nenna finds constant assistance from the other Battersea Reach
residents. "When Nenna told them that she had urgent business on the other side of London and
that she would have to ask whether Martha and Tilda could stay the night, *Rochester* accepted
without protest [. . .]" (85). Nenna's relationship with her husband and her sister underscores the
vast differences between family relations and the relations that she has with the other members
of her barge community.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

The community that develops on the banks of the Thames acts as a replacement for the
families that have failed their own. One of the most surprising characteristics of this community,
however, is that they relationships are not intimate. Few of them really know one another, most
of what they feel they know about one another is based on assumptions. As a result, Richard has
no idea that Maurice is dealing in stolen goods, and neither Nenna nor Richard know the exact
condition of one another's marriage. Nenna and Maurice's friendship is the one exception.
Nenna tells Richard that she and Maurice talk "All day and half the night, sometimes" discussing
"Sex, jealousy, friendship and music, and about the boats sometimes, the right way to prime the
pump, and things like that" (103). In fact, we discover early in the narrative that Nenna
"confided in him above all others" (45). Although the remaining neighbors do not share this level
of intimacy, they perform an important function in one another's lives. What everyone does
understand is how to meet each other's basic needs. One of the benefits to this somewhat
impersonal arrangement is that no one ever passes judgment on another. The individuals in the
group place no restrictions or rules on membership, and as a result, the group is comprised of a
strange mix of people from widely varying backgrounds. In reference to Maurice, the narrator
simply states, "His occupation, which was that of picking up men in a neighbouring public
house, with which he had a working arrangement, during the evening hours, and bringing them

back to the boat, was not particularly profitable" (12). Maurice's occupation as a male prostitute and dealer in stolen goods does not change his standing in the community. He receives as much support and concern as everyone else.

Although the relationships among the barge residents are not particularly close-knit, Nenna feels more comfortable discussing her problems with her neighbors—including Laura— than with her sister. In one scene, Laura makes her displeasure with Richard and the barge relatively clear by asking Nenna, "How does it feel like to live without your husband? [. . .] I've often wondered" (17). Although Laura's question is intended as a veiled threat for Richard, Nenna reads it as sincere concern, and her response reveals how desperate Nenna is for anyone's empathy: "Nenna looked from one to the other. It was a relief, really, to talk about it" (17). She finds no relief from talking to Louise because she never has a chance to be vulnerable. Nenna talks to Richard and Laura about her situation to reassure herself that Edward is coming back, and she talks about what she believes are her failings as a single woman and mother. This moment stands in stark contrast to her discussions with her sister. Nenna can admit no weakness when she speaks to Louise on the telephone, even though Nenna is not strong enough to handle all of her challenges on her own. She has very few opportunities for this sort of therapy session, but every time she does, it is with a neighbor.

The community members fill the void left by absent or unresponsive family members. Nenna's children benefit from living on the barge around people who are interested in them. Their neighbors provide Martha and Tilda the education and affection that they should be getting from their own father. Willis, in particular, takes Tilda under his wing and makes her feel important: "Willis sometimes took Tilda, in her character as an apprentice painter, to the Tate Gallery, about two and a half miles along the Embankment" (50). No one else outside of the community shows any concern for Martha or Tilda. Nenna needs others to help her care for her daughters, as she seems preoccupied with her problems and no longer capable of being a complete mother to them. Martha is mature beyond her years, and she often must care for Nenna. In Nenna's mind, "it was quite wrong to come to depend too much upon one's children," but she has (24). Bruce Bawer claims in "A Still, Small Voice: The Novels of Penelope Fitzgerald" that Fitzgerald

celebrates those who defy mean self-interest in the name of some higher cause—

art, truth, love, or even a vague longing for something better—even as she is

acutely aware of the hurtful ways that people can treat their nearest and dearest in

the name of such causes, and of their often less praiseworthy underlying motives:

a fear of losing independence, a need to control, a craving for power. (33)

Nenna longs for a better life, and her connections to her fellow barge dwellers makes her life more tolerable, but in her determination to make things better for herself, she creates a difficult life for her daughters. She is not driven by self-interest to this life. Her choice is a matter of survival for her daughters and herself. Nenna is, nevertheless, another person who fails to care for her family as she should.

Tilda and Martha have learned that they cannot rely on their father, aunt, or grandparents for help, but the members of the barge community combat the negative lessons the girls have learned about the world around them by showing them kindness. Tilda has a very clear understanding of the world in which she lives. Her comments at times reveal that she has learned the basic tenets of the rugged individualism that people preach onshore. She questions Woodie's motives for taking care of Nenna, Martha, and her because she has been taught by everyone else that people must only look to themselves for aid:

"Tilda, you don't understand. He'd have to say yes, because he's sorry for us, I

heard him tell Richard we were no better than waifs of the storm, and we

should ruin the upholstery, and be taking advantage of his kindness."

"It's his own fault if he's kind. It's not the kind who inherit the earth, it's the

poor, the humble, and the meek."

"What do you think happens to the kind, then?"

"They get kicked in the teeth." (67)

Tilda has learned from her family that kindness is weakness, but the genuine affection that she receives from Willis, Woodie and the others reveals to her that the lessons she has learned are false. She finds comfort on the river with the people who take care of her. "Her whole idea of the world's work was derived from what she observed there and had little in common with the circulation of the great city which toiled on only a hundred yards away" (29). The love and

attention that the members of the community give Tilda repair the damage that her own family has done to her.

The community also has the ability to repair relationships as a result of everyone's desire to take care of one another. Woodie's wife, Janet, does not live with him on his barge at the beginning of the narrative, and Martha and Tilda do not believe that Woodie even has a wife. His explanation for why they have never seen her is that "She doesn't much care for the river. She spends the summer elsewhere" (68). Woodie clearly feels the need to explain himself and his awkward marital arrangements to a number of people. Janet lives in a mobile home in Wales for the summer, and they spend the winters together in a house in Purley. Tilda, now worldly wise, asks Willis if his wife has left him:

> "Certainly not. She's got a caravan in Wales, a very nice part, near Tenby."
>
> Although Woodie had given this explanation pretty often, he was surprised to have to make it to a child of six.
>
> "Then in the winter we go back to our house in Purley, It's an amicable arrangement." (68)

Janet never gives life on the river much of a chance, but when she finally visits Woodie at his home on the Thames, she begins to see the real benefits of living in such a caring community. "To Woodie's surprise his wife laughed as though she couldn't stop. 'You never told me it was so social on the boats,' she said" (75). The nurturing and welcoming quality of the community is very appealing to Janet, so appealing that she reconciles with her husband in order to remain in the community.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Penelope Fitzgerald is not one to glorify one way of life over another. Although the barge community is a promising alternative to life onshore, Fitzgerald's work underscores a number of drawbacks to community. In *The Bookshop*, the detrimental effects of community are apparent. Florence Green, the novel's main character, moves to a small town in Suffolk and opens a bookshop. She believes in the kindness and goodness of others, but she does not realize that the long-standing members of the community may reject her as an outsider. Bruce Bawer reveals her naivete: "Like Waring Smith,[2] she is something of an innocent—a well-meaning, quietly plucky,

but rather naïve adult with commendable moral and instincts but an insufficient awareness of the degree to which other people are driven by selfishness, jealousy, and power-hunger" (35). The community never welcomes Florence. In fact, they attempt to make Florence feel completely unwelcome. Mrs. Gamart, the town's self-proclaimed expert in arts and letters, believes that Florence is encroaching on her territory, and she works tirelessly to get the government to evict Florence from Old House, where she has opened her bookshop. They ultimately drive her out of business. As the outsider, Florence is isolated and weak. She cannot stand up to the powers of the larger community.

The community in *Offshore* is considerably less threatening than the one presented in *The Bookshop*; everyone is always prepared to welcome someone new. Their lives are made difficult, however, because they have been marginalized. In fact, the people who live on the Thames have been effectively erased from the map of London. Because they are on the outside, they can be ignored. The barge residents are treated as undesirable in numerous ways. The milkman refuses to continue delivering to Nenna's houseboat, making life on the barge ever more difficult, but one of the most effective attempts to erase the residents of Battersea Reach from the map is to cut off their mail service:

> "The postman used to say that there weren't many letters for *Grace*."
>
> Laura said "used" because letters were no longer brought by the postman; after he had fallen twice from *Maurice*'s ill-secured gangplank, the whole morning's mail soaked away in the great river's load of rubbish, the GPO, with every reason on its side, had notified the Reach that they could no longer undertake deliveries. [. . .] The letters, since this, had had to be collected from the boatyard office, and Laura felt that this made it not much better than living abroad. (14)

Through this simple decision, the GPO[3] makes the residents of Battersea Reach outsiders in their own land. They have withdrawn from the life onshore of their own free will, but they become more isolated when communication with the rest of the world becomes more difficult. They are not recognized as individuals by the GPO. Instead, they simply become part of a faceless crowd. When their individual identities are erased, they become insignificant.

Fitzgerald subtly reveals that the people who live on the Thames have, in many respects, refused to become active members of the growing enterprise culture, and they are marginalized for this very reason. They might like to have "adequate amounts of money" and live on the Chelsea shore, but they are unwilling to sacrifice their identities and freedom for such things. Pinkie, Richard's friend from the RNVR, represents the enterprise culture, trying to find any means of turning a profit. Richard tells Pinkie, "You wouldn't make a profit on *Lord Jim* anyway. [. . .] I don't regard her as an investment" (55). Pinkie responds incredulously, "Then what in the name of Christ did you buy her for?" (55). By living offshore, Richard and the others resist the movement toward monetarism. Mary Louise Pratt employs a term that is useful when considering the position of the barge community in *Offshore*:

> Early on, the metropolitan discourse of globalization established its preferred metaphor, a metaphor of mobility and innocence that is very much with us. The metaphor is *flow*. The image is of a planet traversed by continuous, multidirectional, commensurate flows of people, goods, money, information, languages, ideas, arts, images. (258)

Although they are closer to the flow of the river than anyone else, the residents of Battersea Reach are not part of the ebb and flow. They are moored to the banks of the Thames, and they must resist the flow in order to survive. Ironically, at the end of *Offshore*, the flow becomes the prevailing image. Maurice and Edward are swept away by the tide, and along with them float "Record-players, electric guitars, transistors, electric hair-curlers, electric toasters, Harry's hoard, the strange currency of the 1960's, piled on the floor, on the bunks, all in their new containers, all wrapped in plastic" (139). The consumerist culture that develops in the late 1960s and gains momentum in the 1980s and 1990s begins to flow and takes those who have resisted along with it.

The community members find themselves under frequent attacks to abandon their marginal, unacceptable lives from the most surprising sources. Various groups attempt to undermine the strength of the barge community, attacking each member in turn. Father Watson, a representative from Tilda and Martha's school, makes a number of attempts to bring the girls—and perhaps Nenna as well—into the Catholic fold. In order for them to be accepted into the

Catholic community, however, the girls and Nenna must change. He is not pleased with Martha's name, arguing that it is not appropriate since it is not the name of a saint. "She'll be taking another name at confirmation, I assume. That should not long be delayed. I suggest Stella Maris, Star of the Sea, since you've decided to make your dwelling place upon the face of the waters" (21). Father Watson wants to assume control of the girls because he believes that Nenna is a negligent mother. He has plans for Tilda as well: "In fact I had it in mind that she might be trained up to one of the women's auxiliary services which justified themselves so splendidly in the last war—the WRENS, I mean, of course. It's a service that's not incompatible with the Christian life" (22). He has no consideration for Nenna's opinion in the matter because she has damaged the girls' souls by bringing them to live in such a disreputable place and by practically allowing them to drop out of school. Life on the river with this strange community is incompatible with the Christian life.

Father Watson's purpose is clear from the beginning: "He couldn't have walked all the way down to the reach from his comfortless presbytery simply to talk about Martha's name" (21). He is on a mission to save Martha and Tilda from a life of sin, from the poor examples set by their parents, and from the dangerous influence that the community has on them. When he returns to the school and gives a full report of his harrowing experience, he "confirmed the opinion of the Sisters of Misericord that the two children, so clever and musical, were at risk on the boat, spiritually and perhaps physically, and that someone ought to speak much more seriously to Mrs. James" (32). The religious groups, too, find it necessary to force others to fit into the world around them. The priest and the sisters impose on Nenna this idea of what is good for the girls, or at least they try to convince her that she is damaging her children. But they, like Edward and Louise, and everyone else who should be ensuring the girls' safety, care, and unconditional love, insist on their way or nothing. There are no alternatives, and those who refuse to surrender are treated as unworthy of attention.

*   *   *

Peter Wolfe insists that every member of the barge community—except for Richard— would, if given the opportunity, live onshore:

> Richard Blake is the only tideliner we meet who lives on the Reach by choice. [. .
> .] The others, except for Richard—all of them prey to the "great tideway" (10) on
> which their boats pitch and buck when they are not hunkered in mud—prefer life
> on shore. But they are all either running away, hiding, or being punished for
> having made a bad choice. (115)

Although the novel begins with the Reach residents meeting to discuss the sale of the
Dreadnought, Willis, at sixty-five years of age, seems incapable of continuing the difficult life
on the river, even with the help of his neighbors. Willis never gives any indication that he would
prefer living onshore, however. In addition, Nenna consciously makes the decision to purchase
Grace, and Fitzgerald never reveals that Nenna does so because she has no other choice. Instead,
the people who live on the barges seem to retreat to the Thames because they are not required to
be like everyone else there and because they are drawn to a caring, supportive way of life that is
disappearing. In the last moments of the novel, Fitzgerald reveals that a careless society will
eliminate individuals who cannot provide for themselves:

> Whether they were poor because they were lame, or lame because they were poor,
> was perhaps a matter for the sociologists, and a few years later, when their
> dwellings were swept away and replaced by council flats with rents much higher
> than they could afford, it must be assumed that they disappeared from the face of
> the earth. (114)

The barge community seems to be the last holdout against a world dedicated to promoting
isolated individuals. The neighbors on the Thames bear a responsibility to stay together in order
to combat such a world. "But to sell your craft, to leave the Reach, was felt to be a desperate
step, like those of the amphibians when, in earlier stages of the world's history, they took
ground" (10). The community on the banks of the Thames is an enabling community, one that
reinforces the idea that its members are not capable of surviving onshore. Once one member
gives into the pressures from their families and leaves, the community begins to disintegrate.

 Ian Samson asserts, "The characters in Fitzgerald's novels are strange, shrunken,
disappointed people, living in unhope, thwarted at every turn" (51). The characters in *Offshore*
are far from being "shrunken, disappointed people." In light of their trials and tribulations, they

are remarkably resilient, but their ability to survive is linked to their connections with the other members of the barge community. They, like the barges, are tenuously anchored, buffeted and battered by an uncaring society, but without the constant and unsolicited support of the people around them, they most certainly would give up hope. The community appears to be the only reason, for many of the characters, to continue living.

Tess Lewis concludes that "*Offshore* offers no explanation, consolation, or even conclusion to the perennial struggle between the mind and the heart" (32). This is not, however, what is truly at stake in the novel. The ultimate comment that the novel makes is that community fails if members desert it for what is being forced on them. The families are winning out here, and their victory is not a positive one. The members of the community who have any family seem to give up what they desire the most to behave the way their families expect them to behave. The future for most of the characters is bleak. The community dissolves as one member after another gives in to the pressures of family, and Maurice and Edward drift off on the *Maurice* to their watery deaths. Maurice ultimately gives up on life when the community begins to fall apart. Without his connections to everyone else, he has no reason to live:

> It threatened him now, for what Maruice had not been able to endure was the sight of the emptying Reach. *Dreadnought*, *Lord Jim*, now *Grace*. Maurice, in the way of business, knew too many, rather than too few, people, but when he imagined living without friends, he sat down with the whisky in the dark. (135)

The novel ultimately reveals that the ties that bind a supportive community are tenuous, but without the community individuals who need assistance from others and connections to people, such as Maurice and Nenna, cannot survive.

CHAPTER THREE

"Two Aren't Enough": Developing a Support Structure Through Community
in Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

—John Donne, *Meditation 17*

In my opinion, all men are islands. And what's more, now's the time to be one. This is an island age. A hundred years ago, for instance, you had to depend on other people. [. . .] Whereas now, you can make yourself a little island paradise. [. . .] And I like to think that, perhaps, I'm that kind of island.

—Will Freeman, *About a Boy*

The reintroduction of a strong measure of caring and sharing, of concern for community, is vastly overdue.

—Amitai Etzioni, "Individualism—Within History"

Initially, Nick Hornby might seem an unlikely critic of individualism, particularly since many of his characters have turned it into an art form. His critical reception makes him an even less appealing candidate as a social critic. Hornby's novels have won him considerable praise, but rarely has that praise come from critics. Bringing a novel to film is often a mark of an author's commercial success, and Hornby can boast that he has met and exceeded that standard. Three of his novels, *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, and *Fever Pitch* have been turned into films.

Fever Pitch has been adapted for the screen twice—the first in 1997 for British soccer fans and the second in 2005 for American baseball fans.

The enthusiasm for Hornby, however, is tempered by the critics' general disregard for his work and claims that his writing is little more than pulp fiction. Göran Nieragden laments: "Hornby's close connection with pop culture is incontestable [. . .]. Much of the criticism in Great Britain is a result of Hornby's use of pop culture, and many reproach him for a lack of seriousness and treat him as a trivial author as a result" (226). Hornby's humor, however, often conceals much more serious social issues. Although Hornby relies on pop culture for much of his novels' humor, he also develops a commentary on the triviality of that culture and preaches against its lack of meaning and substance. In fact, the critics' assertion that Hornby's novels lack seriousness is the same accusation Hornby levels against individualism. His characters are hip and self-confident, but they are emotionally stunted individuals as well, a series of Peter Pan figures who resist maturation at every turn. They seem incapable of developing intimate relationships with anyone, preferring, instead, to develop relationships with their possessions or themselves alone. His 1998 novel, *About a Boy*, is one such work that criticizes the selfish individual. Throughout his body of work, Hornby illustrates the need for community in the face of rising individualism and presents an example of a new kind of community that denies the importance of locale, politics, and social rank. The novel ultimately reveals that this revised community is necessary for survival in the individualist culture; it also becomes an avenue for creating meaning and purpose in life.

Hornby admittedly writes popular culture novels, and *About a Boy* is no exception. The novel's landscape is clearly contemporary. Characters make references to music artists such as Snoop Doggy Dogg and Nirvana and to popular television programs like *EastEnders*, but their domestic situations also firmly establish them in the late twentieth century. Broken families are the norm, rather than an exception. Nearly every mother in the novel is single, abandoned in some manner by her spouse or partner; father's are absent, ineffectual, or otherwise useless, and caring, supportive families do not exist within the narrative. Hornby expertly reflects the Thatcherite cultural landscape in *About a Boy*. Although it is set in contemporary London, the

main character of the novel, Will Freeman, appears nostalgic for the laissez-faire values of Victorian England.

Will Freeman, though intimately linked with contemporary popular culture, is reminiscent of the Victorian hero, perhaps a contemporary Ernest Worthing, as he is financially independent and does little or nothing from one day to the next. His financial position situates him nearer to the Victorian "man of leisure" rather than the twentieth century man married to his job. In fact, Will Freeman will never make his occupation his life because he does not have one, does not need one, and has little desire to develop one. He only occupies himself with his creative attempts to expend the hours of any given day:

> No, the evenings were OK; it was the days that tested his patience and ingenuity, because all of these people were at work—unless they were on paternity leave, like John, father of Barney and Imogen, and Will didn't want to see them anyway. His way of coping with the days was to think of activities as units of time, each unit consisting of about thirty minutes. Whole hours, he found, were more intimidating, and most things one could do in a day took half an hour. Reading the paper, having a bath, tidying the flat, watching *Home and* Away and *Countdown*, doing a quick crossword on the toilet, eating breakfast and lunch, going to the local shops… (80-1)

The deliberate and measured pace of Will's life stands in direct contrast to the rest of 1990s Britain. His focus is not on what he must accomplish each day, but simply on how he can best spend the hours of the day. His various acquaintances have the opposite experience. They can only help him wile away the evenings after they have met their responsibilities at work during the day. Underlying Will's envious position of being able to do whatever he pleases, however, is a subtle suggestion that Will is desperately alone and merely attempting to divert his mind from this unfortunate reality. He can only "cope" with the days by filling them with activities and keeping his mind off of his isolation.

Although much of Will's life echoes that of the Victorian "man of leisure," his source of income is a decidedly twentieth century phenomenon, as he draws on the royalties from his songwriter father's one hit, "Santa's Super Sleigh." Will aggressively protects his laissez-faire

"right to property" and therefore the use of the song; he sarcastically remarks at one point that the problem with Christmas carolers singing his father's song is that they should pay royalties for doing it, but "you can't always catch them" to impose the fee (53). His comments echo the sentiments of another popular Victorian character, Ebenezer Scrooge, and the conflation of Victorian ideals and contemporary popular culture underscores the connection between the two periods. The Christmas traditions are lost on Will, just as they are on Scrooge, and his response to the Christmas carolers reveals his desire simply to accumulate wealth rather than enjoy the season or extend any consideration to others who do enjoy it. No one deserves a holiday from paying for the use of his property. Will suggests that he would not be averse to enforcing the royalty laws on carolers if he could catch them, but he must walk a fine line between detesting the holidays and the song and conceding that they are both necessities if he wishes to continue his leisurely life.

Will Freeman is a perfect model for the possessive individual, Stuart Hall's designation for the self-reliant person whose primary goal is to acquire wealth and property. An independently wealthy man, Will needs no assistance from anyone, and this independence allows him to disengage from the world around him. His concerns rest only with himself, his earnings, and his spending. Royalties from his father's song amount to a comfortable and jobless life. They provide him the means to purchase nearly anything he desires and to avoid regular contact with people. In fact, Will's consumerism is ultimately his only purpose in life. The quiz he takes in a popular men's magazine confirms his significance—at least to the British economy:

> How cool was Will Freeman? This cool: he had slept with a woman he didn't
> know very well in the last three months (five points). He had spent more than
> three hundred pounds on a jacket (five points). He had spent more than twenty
> pounds on a haircut (five points) (How was it possible to spend less than twenty
> pounds on a haircut in 1993?) He owned more than five hip-hop albums (five
> points). . . . He earned more than forty thousand pounds a year (five points), and
> he didn't have to work very hard for it (five points, and he awarded himself an
> extra five points for not having to work *at all* for it). (6)

Will not only bases his importance on what he has acquired, but he focuses on the price of his purchases as well. When a woman asks him why he doesn't put his head in the oven, his answer is that "There's always a new Nirvana album to look forward to" (250). His desire for the next rock album may suggest that Will is interested in art, but his life is driven by his need and ability to acquire the next new thing. He mentions throughout the novel that possessions will cure any negative condition. As a result, the message here is not subtle. Will believes very strongly that purchasing power is the cure for every problem and a measure of a person's value. If he feels insignificant, the carefully chosen purchase will restore his self-worth. If his world begins to look a little bleak, he can always buy something to make his problems disappear. The trials of life are reduced to matters of exchange. Will's reliance on wealth and what it buys him fosters an aggressive selfishness, a result desired by Thatcher's administration. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques call "the ideology of selfishness [. . .] one of the main underpinnings of Thatcherism" (251). If each person only worries about himself, then the need for the social system will seemingly disappear.

Will embodies the "meanness of spirit" that Salman Rushdie attributes to Thatcherite Britain ("Outside the Whale" 92).[1] His selfish individualism translates into a cruel indifference for others. He often reveals the Thatcherite stance that every person must fend for himself. Other people are not his concern. If other people do not have what he has, then they have gone wrong somewhere in their lives, and he should not be expected to supplement their finances. Will's ideology is clear; he does not want people to insinuate themselves into his posh, uncomplicated life. In fact, Will's sentiments amount to little more than an echo of the conservative manifesto. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques explain that in Thatcher's Britain "The road to salvation lay through people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. The only acceptable motive for action was self-interest" (Hall 251). Will ensures his own well-being, and he wants Fiona and others to do the same:

> You had to live in your own bubble. You couldn't force your way into someone
> else's, because then it wouldn't be a bubble any more. Will bought his clothes and
> his CDs and his cars and his Heal's furniture and his drugs for himself, and

himself alone; if Fiona couldn't afford these things, and didn't have an equivalent

bubble of her own, then that was her lookout. (69-70)

Fiona must make her life better on her own, and if she cannot, she should not expect anyone's

sympathy. Will is little more than a social Darwinist. Fiona's bubble is not the government's

concern, and it certainly is not Will's, either. Margaret Thatcher once told a group of

entrepreneurs, "The only thing I'm going to do for you is to make you freer to do things for

yourself. If you can't do it, I'm sorry. I'll have nothing to offer you" (Gardner 236). Will is a

product of this ideology. He believes that his indifference toward others is both natural and

healthy. As Will remarks in the film version of *About a Boy*, John Donne had gotten it all wrong.

Every man *is* an island and is happier as a result. This vision of the world, however, is one that is

rarely welcomed by the other characters in the novel. Rather, it is something forced on them, and

they are expected to adapt. Imposing this isolationist way of life causes considerable damage to

those who need assistance; however, Will never needs such assistance.

Unlike other characters in the novel, Will is completely alone and seems to thrive in his

solitude. He is proud of his ability to live his life without making any sustained or deep

connections with others, a point underscored by Will's name. He is a completely free man, and

he continuously operates on his own free will; nothing and no one can claim any part of him. The

independent male figure is a recurrent theme in Hornby's work. *High Fidelity*'s protagonist, Rob

Fleming, is equally free from committed relationships. When describing the nature of his

friendships, he says, "my friends don't seem to be friends at all but people whose phone numbers

I haven't lost" (66). Rob's "friends" are apparently incapable of providing him support simply

because the relationships are completely casual and inconsequential. In *Fever Pitch*, Hornby's

memoir of his love affair with Arsenal soccer, he confesses that he wanted no responsibilities or

connections to other people outside of the stadium because they might distract him from the

more important work of being a fan. The relationships that Will has in *About a Boy* are very

similar. His friends are casual and impersonal. He admits, "They wouldn't be much use in the

unlikely event of some kind of suicidal depression, or the even more unlikely event of a broken

heart, but they were pretty good for a game of pool, or a drink and a curry" (80). Will reveals

these things with a great deal of indifference, but the unfortunate reality of his situation is that he, much like Rob Fleming, will receive no help if he finds himself in need.

Will suggests, however, that he is in an enviable position. Everyone must dream of having countless hours of free time and having no responsibilities to other people. "In fact, he had reached a stage where he wondered how his friends could juggle life *and* a job" (81). Another, less appealing view of Will's situation appears beneath the surface of his boasts. His need to divide his days into units of time reveals that his life is truly empty, and he is simply trying to get through the days of his life. When he laments the end of a relationship with a women, he attempts to reassure himself with the thought that he does not miss the specific person, but what she affords him. Thinking of Jessica, one of his many ex-girlfriends, Will thinks that he "had missed her, temporarily, but he would have missed the clubbing more" (10). Without any meaningful connections to other people, his life has no purpose, and Will simply cuts the people who try to remind him of this fact out of his life. This is a source of constant tension in the novel. Will insists that his life is perfect and that others can only dream of what he lives on a regular basis, but while he protests, he also seems as if he is trying to convince himself that everything is as it should be.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

About a Boy also makes a very clear statement about the senselessness of possessive individualism. Will has no one in his life but himself, and although that gives him a great deal of freedom, it does not give him much else. Will is without a purpose or a place to belong. Although he often claims to enjoy his solitude, he also reveals a hidden desire to connect with someone, but he is limited by his fear of being rejected. For eighteen years he has thought about changing his circumstances; "as the day wore on, however, his burning desire to seek a place for himself in the outside world somehow got extinguished" (54). The world outside involves relationships and requires Will to be responsible to others, and such a proposition is intolerable to Will. When he gets caught up in the drama of Fiona's attempted suicide, he never has any intention of continuing his involvement in the saga: "Will didn't know if he was a part of the 'we' or not, but it didn't matter one way or the other. However absorbing he was finding the

evening's entertainment, he certainly didn't intend repeating it" (68). He participates in other people's lives in order to entertain himself, but he cannot be expected to actually care for them.

Hornby ultimately treats Will and his boasts of a perfect, uncomplicated life as childish rather than presenting him as a model figure of a healthy individual. Göran Nieragden argues that Hornby's male protagonists have not negotiated the difficulties of adulthood well. He claims, "On the way to adulthood, their generation has become lost in a 'hostile and unpredictable world' where everything is indefinable (*High Fidelity* 41)" (27). As a result, Hornby's generation of anti-heroes has never matured. When two of Will's friends ask him to be their daughter's godfather, they admit, "We've always though you have hidden depths," and he replies, rather proudly, "Ah, but you see I haven't. I am this shallow" (11). This is Will's mantra. He is shallow; he is alone, and he has no responsibility to anyone else because of this. "Will prided himself on his cool," but Hornby gives every indication that Will is anything but that (54). The fact that a twelve-year-old boy eventually forces Will to view his situation differently underscores Will's immaturity.

Whether Will Freeman's life is a comfortable one or he is simply too stunted to recognize its flaws, Will is, nevertheless, the only character in *About a Boy* who claims that a solitary life is a good life. Everyone else is in a position similar to Will's—they are essentially alone—but no one is thriving. Unlike Will, Fiona and Marcus, her twelve-year-old son, are suffering at the hands of this selfish society. In Hornby's screenplay adaptation of the novel, Marcus notices that his life is very different from the lives that people like Will lead. He says, "There were people out there who had a good time in life. I was beginning to realize I wasn't one of them. I just didn't fit." Because he is different, he is alone, isolated, and he is miserable as a result.

Marcus's life is extremely difficult, however, not only because he does not fit in at school, but because his daily existence involves more serious matters of life and death. His mother, Fiona, is clinically depressed and suicidal, and Marcus quickly discovers that he frequently cannot rely on her for support. Although Fiona and Marcus have one another, they are, nevertheless, as isolated as Will is. As a twelve-year-old, Marcus is not equipped with the skills necessary to help Fiona. He desperately wants to help her, but he is simply incapable of doing so, and he recognizes his limitations and the need for outside assistance: "Someone was

going to have to do something about it, because he couldn't do anything about it himself, and he couldn't see who else there was, apart from the woman under the coat" (45). The woman under the coat is Fiona, and she is in no condition to help herself, either.

Initially, Fiona's support structure is comprised primarily of her friend, Suzie, and Marcus, but they have their obvious limitations. A certain amount of tension regarding Suzie's level of responsibility is evident between Marcus and Suzie. Marcus claims that she does not understand Fiona's problem "because you don't see her often," revealing that Marcus and Fiona are essentially on their own (56). Suzie's explanation to Will that she has her own life to lead underscores the fact that nearly everyone in the novel must fend for herself, and every person who attempts to survive alone finds doing so successfully nearly impossible. Suzie is a single working mother, just as Fiona is, and, as a result, she has little time or energy left to take care of someone else, particularly someone suffering from severe depression.

Fiona, unlike Will, views individualism as a sickness. In her suicide note to Marcus, she reveals that this illness is something that will end her life:

> A big part of me knows that I'm doing a wrong, stupid, selfish, unkind thing.
> Most of me, in fact. The trouble is that it's not the part that controls me anymore.
> That's what's so horrible about the sort of illness I've had for the last few
> months—it just doesn't listen to anything or anybody else. It just wants to do its
> own thing. I hope you never get to find out what that's like. (72)

Fiona believes that her life is only worthwhile when she feels a strong connection to other people. If she begins to think only of herself, she loses those connections, and once she becomes selfish, she feels she can no longer live. Georges Bataille argues that individuals need community because "'There exists a principle of insufficiency at the root of each being. . .' (the principle of incompleteness)" (qtd. in Blanchot 5). Individualists attempt to disregard this principle, but the need for community is apparent in Fiona's life. She has been forced to fend for herself, and she is simply not up to the challenge on her own. Her illness, this very selfish individualism, is wrong because it runs counter to her nature. Fiona's "illness" is unfair and unkind because her withdrawal into this selfish individualism not only affects her life, but it also negatively impacts Marcus's life. If she commits suicide, Marcus will have no one left who

shows any concern for him. Restoring her connection to others appears to be the only way to save Fiona, but neither Marcus nor Fiona seems capable of developing a supportive relationship.

Hornby seems to have an affinity for individuals such as Fiona. What drives people to attempt suicide and what saves them from it is the focus of his 2005 novel, *A Long Way Down*. Martin, Jess, JJ, and Maureen have very different reasons for going to the roof of Topper's House—so named because a number of people have jumped from its roof—in London on New Year's Eve, but they all share feelings of disaffection. They believe that no one cares for them or understands them, and the only way they can find to end their isolation is to end their lives. Luckily, the roof becomes crowded with these people who can understand one another's desire to commit suicide. Although they really do not have anything else in common and they do not particularly like one another, their suicidal connection to each other saves them. They take turns telling their stories, and by doing so, they share their disappointments and fears, and they are able to provide each other with the courage to leave the roof in the best way, by going down the steps.

In *About a Boy*, Marcus has no such support community. He finds no safe haven from his problems with Fiona when he attends school; rather, his classmates merely exacerbate his alienation and helplessness. At school, the other students regularly harass him. Marcus naturally wants Fiona to help him resolve his problem, but he recognizes the futility of such an idea, not only because she can barely take care of herself, but Marcus also believes that he inadvertently encourages their attacks because he is different from his classmates. "Marcus knew he was weird, and he knew that part of the reason he was weird was because his mum was weird" (15). He unfortunately decides that "there wasn't anything she could do this time. She wasn't going to move him to another school, and even if she did it wouldn't make a whole lot of difference. He'd still be who he was, and that, it seemed to him, was the basic problem" (12). Marcus judges himself exactly as his classmates do; he is unworthy of consideration simply because of who he is. Although the hostile school environment depicted in *About a Boy* reflects the reality for many adolescents, it also exhibits the failings of traditional communities.

The various social groups in Marcus's school function much like other communities in their refusal to accept differences. As Iris Marion Young explains, "The ideal of community [. .

.] privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view" (300). While this ideal is appealing in its simplicity, community, in its traditional sense, has much greater potential to exclude and divide people rather than unite them. In the school, each student must be like everyone else, and any deviation from this basic requirement eliminates a child from membership in the community. The students refuse to accept Marcus because he is different, and his alienation is acute: "And because he was different he felt uncomfortable, and because he felt uncomfortable he could feel himself floating away from everyone and everything, kids and teachers and lessons" (16). Marcus is as much a victim of his unyielding school community as he is a victim of individualism. If each being is insufficient on his own, as Bataille argues, then individualism and community, in its ideal sense, are equally incapable of satisfying a person's need for wholeness.

Marcus must conceal his differences from his fellow classmates if he wants to be accepted by them, as conformity is a condition of membership. Marcus is either incapable of conforming to the standards set by the children at school or unwilling to surrender his individuality in order to belong. The leaders of these groups, however, function as a kind of police state, attempting to stifle differences by breaking those who resist, such as Marcus: "They patrolled up and down school corridors like sharks, except that what they were on the lookout for wasn't flesh but the wrong trousers, or the wrong haircut, or the wrong sneakers, any or all of which sent them wild with excitement" (14). Marcus's classmates refuse to accept individuality in any form, and they are prepared to attack those people who attempt to express their individuality or who simply cannot afford to blend into the landscape.

Conforming is not Marcus's only option for surviving in school. Marcus feels very different from his fellow classmates, and those differences make him stand out in the crowd. He can take the equally difficult path of trying not to attract any attention. His two friends do just that, but Marcus's inability or unwillingness to do the same negatively impacts their quality of life at school: "That's what had happened with Nicky and Mark: he had made them visible, he had turned them into targets, and if he was any kind of a friend at all he'd take himself well away from them" (34). Although his presence makes life at school difficult for Nicky and Mark, they

are in a much better position than Marcus. "The important thing was that they had each other" (31). Marcus's alienation is complete when he realizes that he must withdraw from his only friends.

Making himself invisible, however, would not resolve his problem. The fundamental flaw in the school community allows no resolution to this problem, as it must privilege unity over difference, and, as a result, Marcus will still be excluded from membership in the community and he will still be denied his individuality. No matter how he attempts to negotiate his problems at school, Marcus is required to forfeit his individuality or accept exclusion and ridicule. Young argues: "a desire for unity or wholeness [. . .] generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions" (301).

Marcus's former school in Cambridge does not function in the same fashion. The community he describes reveals that a less myopic community is possible: "It was different there. Not every kid was the same. There were clever ones and thick ones and trendy ones and weird ones. I didn't feel different there. Here I feel different" (123). Diversity is normal at this school, and, as a result, borders do not exist. Marcus fits in even though he is unlike anyone else. He views himself as normal because a set standard for normal does not exist. Each child seems to be unique, and everyone's individuality is respected. In "Of Being-in-Common," Jean-Luc Nancy proposes a new consideration of community similar to the one Marcus describes; the basis for the new community is existence. Nancy asserts, "Nothing is more common than being: it is the self-evidence of existence" (8). No exclusions remain once the requirement for community inclusion is reduced to this most basic element, yet such a community currently does not exist in Marcus's life.

Marcus receives mixed messages about how to negotiate the demands of his environment successfully. At home with his mother, he and Fiona are expected to demonstrate their independence and prove that they can take care of themselves. At school, Marcus must deny his independence and his individuality simply to get through the day without being harassed. He and Fiona attempt to "look to themselves first," as Thatcher charged Britons to do, but this approach is ineffective. They cannot take care of themselves, and they cannot rely on family members to assist them, either.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Many members of Thatcher's administration complained that the social system in Britain had encouraged individuals to place the responsibility for their well-being on the government. Stuart Hall notes that Rhodes Boyson, a minister of education in Thatcher's cabinet was one of many officials who claimed that Britain's decline was a direct result of the welfare system. "The whole welfare state, he says, is destroying 'personal liberty, individual responsibility and moral growth' and 'sapping the collective moral fibre of our people as a nation'" (Hall 27). Families, according to Thatcherites, were disintegrating because the state had taken over their duties. In the midst of the roll back of the social system, however, families did not return to their previous duties. The state of the family in the novel reflects the rising divorce rates in the 1980s and 1990s in Britain. Women are left to raise children on their own while their husbands and partners find new families to start. The fathers in the novel appear to walk away from their families without a thought for them. Family is in a state of severe decline in the novel. Will, like Marcus, is essentially without a family. He makes no mention of his parents other than making cursory remarks about his father's songwriting career, but he seems to view his father as a failure—both as a songwriter and a father. His distaste for families, not merely his own, is abundantly clear. He says that he has a "hatred of children and family," and when his friends ask him to be godfather to their daughter, he says, "I'm touched that you asked. But I can't think of anything worse. Seriously. It's just not my sort of thing" (11). Will believes that families are nothing but a source of unhappiness, and he will have nothing to do with them.

The lack of support from family is one of the problems that necessitate the formation of communities in *About a Boy* such as SPAT (Single Parents—Alone Together). The name of the group underscores the fact that people cannot function well without understanding and support. This community functions as a place where people who need support can come when they need that assistance. Perhaps the only requirements for inclusion are being a single parent and being frustrated. Suzie explains what she finds so refreshing about the group: "One of the reasons I like coming here is that you can be angry and no one thinks any the less of you. [. . .] Just about everyone's got something they're angry about" (40). Although they are alone, without family to help them, SPAT becomes a replacement for family uniting people who can offer one another

<center>73</center>

emotional support. Knowing that they are not alone seems to help many of them carry on with their lives.

The group is comprised almost entirely of women, and they meet to discuss their frustrations and vent their anger. The reasons for these women's being on their own are a laundry list of men walking away from their families: "There were endless ingenious variations on the same theme. Men who took one look at their new child and went, men who took one look at their new colleague and went, men who went for the hell of it" (40). Nearly every member of the group has a similar story to tell of family members walking out on them. Even Will is disgusted by the behavior of the countless men who have abandoned their families. When he hears the women's stories, he begins to understand their anger toward men: "Suddenly, Will understood Moira's sanctification of Lorena Bobbitt completely" (40). Hornby accuses men of not living up to their responsibilities to their families. They seem capable of walking away from the people who need them without any thought for the damage it will do. They have looked to themselves first, and they are more concerned with their own happiness than considering the needs of their families.

Marcus's father, Clive, resembles the rest of the men in the novel. He provides little support for Marcus or Fiona, and the relationship between Clive and Marcus is distant at best. Never having married, Fiona and Clive have separated, and Marcus sees his father on weekend visits in Cambridge. Ellie, Marcus's friend, describes the relationship very clearly: "[Marcus] asked me to come with him to Cambridge, because he wasn't looking forward to a heart-to-heart with a father he feels doesn't understand him and who has abandoned him at a time when he needed him most" (280). Marcus builds a strong case against his father and makes his feelings of abandonment clear: "And why did he only want to see his son when he'd broken his collarbone? Marcus couldn't remember ever having come home before and his mum telling him to get on the train to Cambridge because his dad was desperate. All those hundreds and hundreds of days when his collarbone was all right, Marcus had heard nothing" (255-6). Clive has no idea that Marcus is suffering and needs his father to make an emotional investment in his well-being.

Marcus finds himself desperate, and he has few options for resolving his problems. His schoolmates have very specific expectations of him that he apparently cannot meet. If he cannot

meet those expectations, they will not accept him. The government, too, has specific expectations of him and Fiona, and if they cannot meet those expectations, they are unworthy of assistance. Acceptability, according to certain government officials, involves having a traditional family:

> It wasn't that he needed someone to replace his dad. He'd talked about that with his mum ages ago. They'd been watching a programme on TV about the family, and some silly fat Tory woman said that everyone should have a mother and a father, and his mum got angry and later depressed. Then, before the hospital thing, he'd thought the Tory woman was stupid, and he'd told his mum as much, but at the time he hadn't worked out that two was a dangerous number. Now he had worked that out, he wasn't sure it made much difference to what he thought about the fat Tory woman's idea; he didn't care whether the family he wanted were all men, or all women, or all children. He simply wanted people. (94-5)

Marcus desperately needs to reach out and develop a support structure for himself and his mother in order to save her life and protect himself from losing the only person who shows any concern for him. Once Fiona attempts suicide, Marcus's stark reality is that he may very well find himself on his own. While Will seems to manage well on his own, others, like Fiona and Marcus, do not, yet the social landscape is such that they must either manage or suffer. Although Fiona mentions in her suicide note that Suzie has agreed to take care of him or he can stay with his father, neither situation would be a positive one for Marcus, as neither Suzie nor his father takes any interest in him. No one else is actively involved in their lives to act as a safety net if anything happens to either Marcus or Fiona.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Marcus understands the source of his problem better than anyone else. Wearing different clothes will not change his situation at school. Managing Fiona's depression without any assistance will not improve her situation, either. As he works out the possible solutions, he realizes that one choice is "to be his own mother," but he is already painfully aware that taking care of himself without any support is nearly impossible. Ultimately, Marcus realizes that his

problems can be resolved by surrounding himself with people who might care. According to Marcus, survival is a numbers game:

> Two wasn't enough, that was the trouble. He'd always thought that two was a good number, and that he'd hate to live in a family of three or four or five. But he could see the point of that now: if someone dropped off the edge, you weren't left on your own. How could you make a family grow if there was no one around to, you know, help it along? He was going to have to find a way. (75)

Marcus recognizes that developing a support community is necessary if he wants to ensure his and his mother's survival. Without a traditional family that includes a father, Marcus's family cannot grow, and he and his mother will remain on their own. Building a family is not an appealing option, however, as the statistics in the novel suggest that the traditional family, the one defined by the "Tory woman," has become an anachronism. Support must come from another source, and the characteristics of the people who comprise the support community are not important. The most significant consideration is only gathering people, for this is the heart of Marcus's problem: "Every time [Marcus] thought about this, it came back to the same problem: there were only two of them, and at least—*at least*—one of them was nuts" (133-4). Surrounding himself with people, no matter who they are, is Marcus's mission. Marcus does not particularly care who becomes a part of his community-building project, which makes welcoming his father's girlfriend, of whom Marcus is not particularly fond, into his home on Christmas. As Marcus sees it, "she helped to fill the room up," and a life full of people is all that matters(183). Marcus's tolerance of nearly everyone, Will included, is the only reason Will becomes a candidate for membership. Will meets Marcus at the moment Marcus develops his plan. He is too concerned with himself and his purposeless life to recognize Marcus's need for a little concern from someone else.

With Will, Hornby develops a comic variation on the *bildungsroman*. A twelve-year-old boy educates a thirty-eight-year old man to become human. Will's awakening to a new life of compassion and relationships is an awkward process. His involvement in Marcus's life is forced initially. Will responds to his developing relationship with Marcus with indifference because he cannot understand why he should be expected to assist Marcus. Years of focusing only on

himself have made Will blind to the needs of others. He experiences moments of compassion, but he is incapable of understanding the source of that compassion or what his response to such an emotion should be. "What and why he owed him he didn't know, but he could see he was serving some purpose in the kid's life at the moment, and as he served no purpose in anybody else's he was hardly going to die of compassion fatigue" (116-7).

Will is deeply ambivalent about assisting others in need. He wants to worry only about himself and maintain his uncomplicated life, but he feels a natural compassion that he stifles on a regular basis. Becoming a successfully selfish individual has required discipline. In the past, Will has thought it might be good for him to volunteer at a soup kitchen, but he never actually reports for duty: "He had, after a fit of remorse following a weekend of extreme self-indulgence, volunteered to work in a soup kitchen, and even though he never actually reported for duty, the phone call had allowed him to pretend, for a couple of days, that he was the kind of guy who might" (36). Marcus takes the work out of actually going to a volunteer job by showing up each day on Will's doorstep, and the pretence of being a selfless person becomes much easier for Will. Even when he unwittingly participates in Marcus's project, Will's motivation is selfish: "He still had this sense that Fiona and Marcus could replace soup kitchens and media *Guardian* jobs, possibly forever. [. . .] Good works! Helping people! That was the way forward for him now" (99). Will's focus remains on himself and what helping Marcus and Fiona will do for him.

Altruism is a foreign motivation for Will. If he is required to make an effort to help someone, he must benefit from it as well. He makes no emotional investment in Marcus, and Will's detachment affords him the ability to abandon Marcus without guilt. When he runs into difficulties in their relationship, he finds it easy to walk away. In fact, because Will is alone, he believes that he bears no responsibility for Marcus or anyone else. He repeats this mantra each time someone accuses him of being selfish:

> "God, you're a selfish bastard."
>
> "But I'm on my own. There's just me. I'm not putting myself first, because there isn't anybody else" (149).

Will uses his solitary existence as his excuse for not feeling any emotion and as a means of proving that he is not selfish. Amitai Etzioni notes in "Individualism—within History,"

Individualists argue that their ideology does not promote selfishness, that the focus on self-interest is fully compatible with benefit for all others, as any textbook in neoclassical economics is all too happy to elaborate and extol. [. . .]. But even if it explained to perfection the workings of the free market (another illusion), it would provide a very damaging theory of society. Society requires a measure of social commitment to shared values and bonds, a concern for one's fellow human beings. (55)

According to Will, he cannot harm anyone if he is not involved in anyone's life outside of his own. He focuses so intently on his own circumstances that he rarely sees that people around him—Marcus in particular—are desperately reaching out to him for help. If he does recognize that others are suffering, he views their problems as potential complications to his life. Each time he faces adversity in his developing relationship, he reminds himself that his previous life plan will make him happier:

He wasn't much bothered either way about anything, and that, he knew, would guarantee him a long and depression-free life. He'd made a big mistake thinking that good works were a way forward for him. They weren't. They drove you mad. Fiona did good works and they had driven her mad: she was vulnerable, messed-up, inadequate. Will had a system going here that was going to whizz him effortlessly to the grave. (102)

When relationships become difficult or demanding, Will retreats to his isolated world, a place where he can easily resolve his own problems and never focus on anyone else's.

At times, Will seems agreeable at least to attempt becoming a part of a community, but he often questions how he can help his fellow members if he cannot resolve all of their problems: "He'd had his whole life set up so that nobody's problem was his problem, and now everybody's problem was his problem, and he had no solutions for any of them. So how, precisely, was he, or anybody else he was involved with, better off?" (268). Marcus and Rachel, his eventual love interest, teach him that he performs a very important function simply through his empathy and his connection to others.

Rachel has a very different perspective on relationships than Will does. He initially believes that his isolation is natural and desirable, that it is, in fact, the easiest way to live his life. Rachel, on the other hand, believes that he has chosen a very difficult path by remaining completely on his own. She believes that he has become a very "tough" individual. "Because [. . .] most of us think that the point is something to do with work, or kids, or family, or whatever. But you don't have any of that. There's nothing between you and despair, and you don't seem a very desperate person" (249). Rachel's assessment is that relationships create purpose and support, and they constitute a barrier to despair. Rachel's and Marcus's intercessions finally bring Will to the realization that he does need the people who have been investing their time and emotion in him, even though he has only begrudgingly given them his time.

Göran Nieragden argues that the anti-heroes of Hornby's novels constitute the novels' significance and contradict the critics' claims that Hornby is not a serious author. Will, like his Hornby predecessors, eventually realizes his inability to help himself and accepts his need for committed relationships (Nieragden 228). Developing connections to other people eventually becomes a matter of survival for Will. "Keeping your head above water was what it was all about, Will reckoned. That was what it was all about for everyone, but those who had reasons for living, jobs and relationships and pets, their heads were a long way from the surface anyway. They were wading in the shallow end, and only a bizarre accident, a freak wave from the wave machine, was going to sink them" (244-5). Will clearly admits that he has had difficulty keeping his own head above water precisely because he does not have any of these reasons for living. In fact, his revelation links him directly with Fiona and her struggle with depression. Will has been depressed and desperate as well; he is merely more successful at convincing himself that he is in the shallow end.

Although being a supportive person in Marcus' life requires a bit more work from Will than living on his own does, the rewards of becoming a member of the community that Marcus develops are significant: "Will couldn't recall ever having been caught up in this sort of messy, sprawling, chaotic web before; it was almost as if he had been given a glimpse of what it was like to be human. It wasn't too bad, really; he wouldn't even mind being human on a full-time basis" (292). Will even begins to view these people as his family, and he no longer sees such a

relationship as a burden. Rather than continuing his Christmas tradition of renting videos and smoking marijuana as a way of getting through the holiday, Will looks forward to sharing the day with his new family. "So he would spend Christmas in the bosom of a family—not his family, because he didn't have one, but *a* family" (174). The community that Will reluctantly joins is chaotic because each member of the group maintains his agency. Each character is very different from the other, but no one in the community attempts to change anyone else. Individuality is respected in this group, and no matter how messy the relationships within the community become as a result of these differences, it becomes apparent that the alternative is for Will to stop functioning as a human being. Community becomes the only answer for Will to continue his maturation.

Marcus's new community has a profound affect on the quality of his life as well. Through Will's support, Marcus learns to maneuver the difficult, confusing, and often unfair politics of middle school and develops friends who welcome his individuality. The most significant shift, however, is in his home. When Fiona sinks into a deep depression once again, Marcus responds to her suicidal symptoms in a more calm yet determined way. "Then, finally, there was the breakfast crying again, and he knew for sure that things were serious, and they were in trouble. But one thing had changed. Back in the first breakfast crying time, hundreds of years ago, he was on his own; now there were loads of people"(235). Marcus knows that he can turn to the community that he has built for himself and Fiona for assistance.

Will is amazed by the courage Marcus displays when Fiona becomes desperate again. He does not believe that he could cope in a similar situation, but this again reveals Will's tendency to think of himself as being alone. Marcus responds, "but I feel safer than before, because I know more people. I was really scared because I didn't think two was enough, and now there aren't two anymore. There are loads. And you're better off that way" (298). Marcus finds comfort and safety in numbers, but he also knows that he has more than just bodies around him. He has developed a community of people who will worry about him and keep his best interests in mind, something he did not have earlier.

Marcus's conception of community is innovative. He has no concern for the social status of community members, and he does not require permanent membership in the community.

Fiona and Will do not come from similar backgrounds. They do not share similar experiences, and neither do Marcus and Will, but they respect one another's differences, and the community thrives as a result. Jessie Bernard describes a new community conception that sounds much like the one Marcus has developed:

> The conception of this post-city, in fact, postcommunity, society that comes through, then, is of a great locale-independent sea of contacts with little vestigial locale-anchored pockets of communities here and there; a great impersonal world where groups, classes, coalitions, and alliances form and reform, but remain always in flux, unanchored to any locale. It is a conception of society in which it makes little difference to people where they live. (185)

This "postcommunity" is a confounding issue for Bernard, but it is far from impersonal, as she argues such a community must be. Marcus, Will, Fiona, Rachel, and others share a deep concern for one another.

Marcus's unique community embodies the positive characteristics of the ideal city that Iris Marion Young describes: "The unoppressive city is thus defined as openness to unassimilated otherness" (319). Marcus does not expect Will to behave differently, and Will does not have those expectations of Marcus and Fiona. The members of this community are as diverse as the cultural composition of the city. They come from very different economic backgrounds, and their politics are vastly different. The only ground that they share is that they have no family on which to rely, and they are essentially alone. By recognizing one another's needs and attempting to redress them, the differences between Will, Fiona, Rachel, Marcus, and Ellie, Marcus's friend, fade into the background, and what remains is a desire to assist anyone with similar needs.

Perhaps one of the more intriguing characteristics of this community is its fluidity, again reflecting Young's image of the ideal city. Marcus recognizes that people will frequently enter and leave his life, or "mingle and overlap" as Young explains, but this is not what is important to Marcus. What is important is that they give each other support for the time that they are together. Marcus reveals the flexibility of their community to Will when he compares his new support group to an acrobatic group: "Those ones when you stand on top of loads of people in a pyramid.

It doesn't really matter who they are, does it, as long as they're there and you don't let them go away without finding someone else" (299). *About a Boy* reveals that only through compassion for and connections to others can people find meaning for their lives and hope for survival.

CHAPTER FOUR

Redefining Englishness:
Shattering the Monolithic Community in British Asian Fiction

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories.

—Hanif Kureishi *The Buddha of Suburbia*

"You are my fellow countryman."
"Well. . . not quite."

—Hanif Kureishi *The Black Album*

From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self . . . it was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else.

—Hanif Kureishi, "The Rainbow Sign"

      Hanif Kureishi's characters are never quite sure who they are. Caught between the often conflicting cultures of Britain and Asia, they seem to suffer from the problem that many second-generation British Asians face—they lack a definite identity. Kureishi's work, like Salman Rushdie's, explores the themes of identity and belonging in multi-cultural Britain. Frederick M. Holmes argues, "Like Rushdie, Kureishi is concerned with the plight of the migrant denied a unitary identity because he is shunted back and forth between two cultures (each of which is itself internally divided and subdivided) and invited to adopt a variety of sometimes

contradictory subject positions" (296). Kureishi's and Rushdie's characters often seek this clearly defined identity, believing that it will admit them to a community that has been closed to them. Developing such a singular identity cannot be achieved, however, and they realize that rather than attempting to revise their identities in order to fit into the system, they should work to revise the system to allow for their hybridity.

Salman Rushdie's characters often describe their inability to feel as if they belong in Britain or in the home of their ancestors. In Rushdie's short story "The Harmony of the Spheres," Khan, the main character, echoes the sentiments of Kureishi's Karim Amir and Shahid Hasan. He looks for a way to feel comfortable in his own skin and finds it in black magic. He claims, "I'd found another way of making a bridge between here-and-there, between my two othernesses, my double unbelonging" (141). Developing a means of bridging the divide between these two identities is Rushdie's answer to the problem, rather than searching for a way to claim only one identity. The desire to belong creates identity problems with few solutions. Khan cannot definitively proclaim himself British or Indian, and he finds himself between the two identities, belonging to neither. Khan claims that he is "suffering from a disharmony of my personal spheres" and struggles with "a number of difficult questions about home and identity that I had no idea how to answer" (139). These questions are primarily a result of white Britons' refusal to accept him as a fellow countryman. His girlfriend, Laura, ends their relationship because her mother wants her to "find someone of, you know, your own kind" (128). Although most people seem to accept Khan on the surface, his story reveals the racial tension that simmers beneath the surface.

The relationship between Khan and Eliot Crane illustrates that Khan is vulnerable to racist attacks from everyone. The two men seem incompatible as friends because their cultural backgrounds differ significantly. Khan explains, "I liked hot weather, he preferred it grey and damp. I had a Zapata moustache and shoulder-length hair, he wore tweeds and corduroy. I was involved in the fringe theatre, race relations and anti-war protests. He weekended on the country-house circuit, killing animals and birds" (136). Eliot is the quintessential Englishman, dressing and playing the part perfectly. He is committed to the venerable traditions of England. Khan,

however, represents a change to those traditions, and Eliot clearly feels threatened by Khan. He develops a theory about who Khan really is and what he is doing in Britain:

> Eliot had elaborated a conspiracy theory in which most of his friends were revealed to be agents of hostile powers, both Earthly and extra-terrestrial. I was an invader from Mars, one of many such dangerous beings who had sneaked into Britain when certain essential forms of vigilance had been relaxed. Martians had great gifts of mimicry, so they could fool yuman beans into believing they were beans of the same stripe, and of course they bred like fruit-flies on a pile of rotten bananas. (127)

Although the accusation is a product of a paranoid schizophrenic attack, Eliot's words reveal his deep-seated racist attitude toward Khan and other immigrants. In Eliot's mind, Khan is not simply alien, but he is dangerous, part of a race that will multiply like animals and take over Britain. In order to contain the threat that Khan represents, Eliot announces that Khan is no longer welcome in his house, revealing that Eliot does not want Khan in his country, either.

Khan's questions regarding his identity cannot be answered because the elements that constitute his identity constantly conflict. His skin color is incompatible with Eliot's vision of Englishness, and his cultural and political interests—"fringe theatre, race relations and anti-war protests"—clearly conflict with Eliot's English concerns (136). As a result, Khan feels incapable of considering himself English, but his life in Britain also problematizes his Indian identity, as he has no real connection to India, either. Khan's "double unbelonging" is not a unique problem, however. Jeffrey Weeks argues:

> Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different, and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities but within individuals themselves. (89)

This is the heart of the issue for Khan as well as a number of Kureishi's characters. Many of his young male protagonists are the offspring of English mothers and Pakistani fathers, but their mixed heritage does not translate into acceptance by both cultures. Karim Amir, the main

character of *The Buddha of Suburbia,*[1] may claim that he is an Englishman "born and bred," but the moment he does this, he separates himself from the other signifiers of his identity, his Pakistani heritage in particular, and in doing so, he breaks from other Asians. In addition, his fellow Englishmen may refuse to recognize him as one of their own, as many of them do. During one scene of Kureishi's screenplay of *TBS*, Karim rides his bike to his white Aunt and Uncle's house, and everyone on the street glares at him. They clearly do not want him in their neighborhood. They see his skin color and immediately consider him an outsider. Deedee Osgood, the professor in *The Black Album,*[2] describes the typical response to someone who looks like Karim: "In England white people looked at him as if he were going to steal their car or their handbag" (117). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues that this is an unfortunately common belief: "Black Britons can only really be muggers, under-achievers, rapists, part of some sordid underclass, anti-racist 'thugs and militants', drug dealers, sexual incontinents, good sports people and great singers" (139). Ultimately, the color of Karim's skin, rather than his place of birth, determines his nationality, a point underscored by Rushdie in "The New Empire within Britain." He asserts, "Britain is now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin" (134).

Shahid Hasan, *TBA*'s protagonist, faces a similar predicament. He is British, but he is also a Muslim of Pakistani descent, and by claiming all of these, he underscores his internal identity conflict. If he claims one aspect of his identity, he almost assuredly will cut himself off from the other aspects. When Riaz asserts that Shahid is a fellow countryman, the country to which he refers is Pakistan, not England. Shahid does not want to agree with Riaz completely because such an alliance would recognize his Pakistani identity and force him to deny his English identity. In Riaz's mind, Shahid's identity is an either/or proposition. Either he embraces his Asian self and rejects all things English, or he rejects his Asian brothers and becomes corrupted through assimilation.

Initially, Shahid is more interested in his fellow Britons accepting him. His desire to belong leads him to reject his Pakistani heritage violently. He admits that he wants to join the British National Party[3], which reveals his underlying feelings of self-loathing. He thinks about "going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum" (19). Shahid does not

recognize the irony of such thoughts. He cannot escape being classified a "Paki" himself, and his family would become targets for his attacks. Shahid's skin color, however, eliminates him as a potential member of the National Front, and denies him the ability to belong. Shahid desperately wants to be accepted, but he suffers, like Khan, from his "double unbelonging."

Shahid literally does not feel welcome anywhere, and his home is no exception. Like Nenna James's family in Penelope Fitzgerald's *Offshore*, Shahid's family is only a source of frustration for him rather than a source of support. They set numerous expectations for Shahid, and their acceptance of him is contingent upon his meeting those expectations, making them no different than the people on the street. Shahid must live up to the standards that they set or face their ridicule and disdain, a fate that Shahid seems doomed to realize.

The Hasan family is entrepreneurial, and they expect Shahid to follow in their footsteps. Shahid's mother and father started their careers in the travel industry as a secretary and a clerk respectively. They worked their way through the ranks eventually to open two travel agencies of their own, making them a Thatcher success story. Patricia Waugh argues that "Margaret Thatcher's term of office was able openly to replace the goals of a consensus with those of possessive individualism or enterprise" (20). Thatcher announced that her project was to make "every man and woman a capitalist," and the Hasans make economic progress their goal. Their home is a testament to their success:

> Their family house was an immaculate 1960s mansion, just outside the town, a caravanserai, as filled with people as a busy hotel. Papa had constantly redecorated it, the furniture was replaced every five years and new rooms were necessarily added. The kitchen always seemed to be in the front drive, awaiting disposal, though it appeared to Shahid no less "innovative" than the new one. Papa hated anything "old-fashioned," unless it charmed tourists. He wanted to tear down the old; he liked "progress." "I only want the best," he'd say, meaning the newest, the latest, and somehow, the most ostentatious. (48)

Papa wants to display his wealth to the world. His ability to redecorate every five years is solid proof of his progress and his worth. Shahid does not share his father's desire to accumulate

property and wealth, but his brother, Chili, has developed a similar bent for acquiring material wealth.

Chili, like Will Freeman in Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*, believes that his possessions make his life worth living. They define who he is, and based on the brands he buys, he is a man worthy of respect. He, like his father, wants only the best. Shahid's description of Chili clearly defines where his loyalties are:

> In Chili's hand were his car keys, Ray-Bans, and Marlboros, without which he wouldn't leave his bathroom. Chili drank only black coffee and neat Jack Daniel's; his suits were Boss, his underwear Calvin Klein, his actor Pacino. His barber shook his hand, his accountant took him to dinner, his drug dealer would come to him at all hours, and accept his checks. (47)

Each high-priced item is another mark of his significance, both as a person and as a contributor to the British economy. In "The Self in a Consumer Society," Zygmunt Bauman asserts, "The role that our present-day society holds up to its members is the role of the consumer, and the members of our society are likewise judged by their ability and willingness to play that role" (36). Chili is both willing and able to perform his duty to the economy. Everything about Chili is Western, and he wraps himself in these brand-name goods to help solidify his identity as a westerner. In Riaz's mind, however, Chili has lost himself. For Riaz, the only acceptable identity is a Pakistani identity, which is the reason Riaz calls Chili a dissipater. He has no connection to Karachi and its culture, and he indulges in extravagant, self-indulgent pleasures. Chili's reliance on such pleasures, however, also supersedes his family's needs, and he frequently abandons his wife and child to pursue them.

Although Chili is extremely selfish, Shahid still respects him for his ability to choose a path and never deviate from it, regardless of what people think of him. Shahid does not posses such strength of identity. "It took defiant courage, much arrogance and some nobility to be so reckless with oneself, to risk others' anger and retribution. Even Chili's greed, and the idea that the accumulation of everything he wanted would make him feel better, now seemed more touching than bad" (157). Chili is, nevertheless, a product of his consumer-driven environment,

and Shahid ultimately views him as an unknowing victim of it. His commitment to the consumer culture does not change the white Britons' opinion of him.

Shahid's father, mother, and brother enjoy the material benefits of their hard work, but his sister-in-law, Zulma believes that their economic standing earns them the greater reward of being accepted by white Britons. Zulma, like Chili, is "an arch-Thatcherite" (97). She believes in the individual's ability to make something of herself through hard work and aggressive business practices. "What was needed was the opposite—enterprising people (like her and Chili, presumably)—who weren't afraid to crush others to get what they wanted" (97). In many respects, Thatcher's call for individuals to look to themselves first worked too well with many immigrants, as Kureishi's screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette*[4] illustrates. Omar's uncle, Nasser, appears to be the head of an organized crime family. His hired thugs physically throw unpaying tenants out of his apartment buildings. Omar and Johnny learn valuable business lessons from Saleem and develop their own shady business practices, as they resort to selling drugs in order to build the capital necessary to make improvements to the laundromat. They strive to accumulate wealth by any means necessary.

In *MBL*, Saleem believes that he is an asset to the government because he is a businessman who creates jobs for people. When he offers Omar a position as a car washer, he says, "Your uncle can't pay you very much. But at least you'll be able to afford a decent shirt. And you'll be with your own people, not on the dole queue. And Mrs. Thatcher will be happy with me." Omar, who has been a victim of racist violence, pins his hopes for a better future on his entrepreneurial efforts, but his father reminds him, rather bitterly, "They hate us in England. All you can do is to kiss their asses and think of yourself as a little britisher." Ultimately, Omar's success will not buy him acceptance or equality.

Shahid attempts to shatter Zulma's misconceptions regarding her position in British society. He has been a victim of racism, and he knows that he can do little to change other people's hatred of him. "He argued she was a dupe, explaining what racists the Thatcherites were. She might imagine she was an intelligent, upper-class woman, but to them she'd always be a Paki and liable to be patronized. She appreciated the truth of this, but it was a colonial residue—the new money knew no color" (97). Zulma believes that if she and her family make a

positive contribution to the British economy, then they will be accepted. She is a product of the enterprise culture just as Chili and Papa are. In her mind, money will get her everywhere.

Shahid's family relations are strained, as they are for Omar in *MBL*. Omar's father, Hussein, wants Omar to attend college rather than become heavily involved in his brother's disreputable businesses. He tells Omar, "Don't get too involved with that crook. You've got to go to college." Shahid's family expects the opposite of him. They would prefer that he give up his studies and contribute to the family business. Shahid never seems to meet his father's and brother's expectations, as they focus primarily on acquiring wealth. "Chili's relentless passion had always been for clothes, girls, cars, girls, and the money that bought them," and Chili's commitment to these passions ensures that he will keep working to earn the money necessary to maintain his lifestyle (50). Shahid's passion, however, is for knowledge. Papa makes his feelings about Shahid very clear. In his eyes, his son is little more than a burden and embarrassment: "When the brothers were young [Chili] made it clear that he found Shahid's bookishness effeminate. He was influenced in this by the practical and aggressive Papa, who originated the idea that Shahid's studiousness was not only unproductive but an affliction for the family" (50). Shahid's interest in books and school is a significant part of who he is, and his father contributes to his identity crisis by openly rejecting Shahid for who he is. Book knowledge will be of no consequence for the family's aspirations. Shahid's father wants him to contribute to the business rather than effectively living "on the dole" provided by the family.

Shahid's politics also set him apart from the rest of his family. He argues with Zulma about social issues, and their arguments reveal the division that exists between them. "Zulma could reduce him to near-tears of frustration if he talked about fairness or equality or opportunity, or the need to reduce unemployment. She'd laugh; the world couldn't be like that" (97). Shahid calls himself a socialist, and his views reflect his desire to look after others rather than himself. Zulma and Chili, instead, subscribe to an economic neo-Darwinism, revealing their deep commitment to Thatcherite principles. As Patricia Waugh explains:

> Poverty was conceived not as a correctable social evil but as a fact of life. Indeed, the pursuit of social justice was actually claimed by some theorists of the New Right to be destructive of morality, for, in eroding individual incentive, socialist

policies were seen to remove freedom of choice and allow one social group to impose its own criteria of redistribution on others. (13)

They should not be expected to assist anyone but themselves. Zulma extends this rule to Shahid as well. Her comments reveal the dichotomy between the supportive community that Shahid seeks and the individualism of Thatcherism. "[Zulma] would patronize and incense him, personalizing everything, saying, 'It's typical, you're living off a business family, this isn't a commune, is it?'" (97). Zulma simply reiterates Papa's sentiments. She firmly believes that the family should not be expected or required to support Shahid. Instead, he should take care of himself, or as Margaret Thatcher insisted, he should "look to [himself] first." Although Shahid receives financial support from his family, they cut him off emotionally, regularly reminding him that he is a disappointment. Family members provide Shahid no relief from the judgments of others. In the world outside his home, white Britons attack him because of his skin color, and within the walls of his home, his family attacks him for not being the person they want him to be.

Shahid is a victim of the individualism forced on him. He can rely on no one but himself, and this spells a very lonely and frightening existence. The resulting isolation effectively lowers his self-esteem. He says of his life in Kent:

> I began to feel—[. . .] in that part of the country, more of a freak than I did normally. I had been kicked around and chased a lot, you know. It made me terrifyingly sensitive. I kept thinking there was something I lacked. [. . .]. Everywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred. And if they were pleasant, I imagined they were hypocrites. I became paranoid. I couldn't go out. I knew I was confused and . . . fucked-up. But I didn't know what to do. (18)

His fear paralyzes and isolates him, but he hopes that London will be a more welcoming place for him. Shahid indicates, however, that he has been equally isolated after he moves to the college. Rushdie reveals in his essay "In Good Faith" that London has a way of hybridizing its citizens: "I was already a mongrel self, history's bastard, before London aggravated the

condition" (404). Shahid is in the midst of an identity crisis, and his arrival in London has only exacerbated his problems. He suffers from his sense of unbelonging. He no longer feels a connection to his family or to the people around him.

Riaz al-Hussain appears as a messianic figure in the opening pages of *TBA* and provides Shahid with a sense of hope. Initially, he is a shadowy, enigmatic man, mysteriously appearing from a room that Shahid has believed to be vacant, but he literally speaks Shahid's language, breaking the silence with an Urdu word. Shahid has listened to a cacophony of languages around him, and this increases his isolation. Riaz's use of the Urdu word creates an immediate connection, and his treatment of Shahid is a distinct departure from what Shahid has experienced either in Kent or in London, as well as in his own home. Riaz makes him feel significant and special: "Riaz spoke to him as if it had been some time since he liked someone so much or understood anyone so well" (10). The connection is immediate, and Shahid is drawn to Riaz because he is the first person who seems interested in Shahid and who understands him. Riaz "observed Shahid intently, as if he'd look right into him, which made Shahid feel both pleased that someone was taking an interest and also a little exposed and tense" (10). Shahid has not felt that anyone has liked him for some time, not even his own father, and he views Riaz's attention as an endorsement. Riaz effectively draws Shahid out of himself. "Shahid, who had barely received or been able to give an amicable smile in the weeks since he'd started at college, was warming" (10-11). Riaz resolves Shahid's problems within moments of their meeting by inviting Shahid into his circle of fundamentalist Muslim students.

Riaz and one of his associates, Chad, accept Shahid without question. They, too, have been victimized by the racially divided nation; religious unity becomes the solution to their own identity issues. Marina Kurtén asserts, "One feature of the former homeland that is used to reinforce identity is religion" (48). The members of the fundamentalist group want to win Shahid to their cause. They are fighting a spiritual and ethnic war to save their people from the perils of the west, and they recognize that strength is directly related to numbers. In his attempts to convince Shahid that he should turn his back on his secular ways, Chad provides Shahid with testimonials. One of these stories is used as a warning, revealing how dangerous succumbing to the secular culture—and to the teaching of Shahid's professor and lover, Deedee Osgood, in

particular—really is. Chad tells a story of a young Muslim woman who turns her back on her family and her religion:

> One of our girls was twisted against the truth by the postmodernists. They made her flee her loving parents, who contacted brother Riaz and myself. She had been taken into hiding. These poor people were distraught. The young girl was forced to say the religion treats women as second-class citizens. Riaz personally took up their case. The girl went into a hostel and agreed to meet her parents for discussions. (240)

From Chad's description of events, the young woman was brainwashed by Deedee Osgood to reject an enviable life with kind parents who deeply care for her. Chad initially claims that the girl was murdered, but when pressed further by Shahid, he admits that she committed suicide. Remaining true to one's religion and heritage becomes a matter of life and death. Chad threatens, "That is what happens when somebody doesn't know who they are" (240). Chad implicates Shahid in this statement, as Shahid's loyalties are always in question.

The young woman's tragic story relates directly to Shahid's identity issues. He does not know exactly who he is, and it has had a profound impact on his self-esteem and his well-being. Chad and Riaz attempted saving the woman by reminding her of her connections to her faith, and Chad believes that this would have saved her. The Muslim community gives its members an identity, and this can save their lives. Frederick M. Holmes asserts, "In contrast [to Marxism and Thatcherism], Islam as a monistic faith has for its adherents the power to supply order, stability, and a sense of community" (299-300). Shahid needs the definitive identity that Islam can provide. His inability to label himself will only isolate him further, or like the case of the young woman, his diversity might produce dire consequences for him. He feels an urgent need to define himself because everyone seems to be claiming an absolute identity, and if he does not, he will be left completely on his own. In *MBL*, Cherry responds to Omar's indefinite identity with disgust, saying, "I'm so sick of these in-betweens. People should make up their minds who they are." Shahid recognizes the demand for an unqualified identity in a fragmented society, whether realizing such an identity is, in the end, possible or not. "Now, though, Shahid was afraid his ignorance would place him in no man's land. These days everyone was insisting on their

identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew—brandishing whichever features they could claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human" (102). The labels give people a place to belong. Without a classification, individuals are essentially erased from the social landscape. Everyone is desperate to escape a solitary existence and be accepted by a specific group, and Shahid is no exception. The fundamentalist Muslim community provides the only incontestable identity that Shahid can claim. Like Karim Amir, he is an Englishman, almost, and he cannot assert that he is a Pakistani because he has very little connection to that culture. If he insists on his identity as a Muslim, then he can become a member of an empowering community. A number of benefits come with belonging to a group of people with whom he has something in common.

Shahid is particularly vulnerable when he meets Riaz and his followers. His isolation is acute, having made no acquaintances since his move to London. The student group affords Shahid immediate friends and fellowship. At the moment he meets them he ceases to be alone. The fundamentalist community is appealing because the members understand one another, provide support and protection for one another, and care about each other. These characteristics reflect the community ideal described by Iris Marion Young:

> All these formulations seek to understand community as a unification of particular persons through the sharing of subjectivities: Persons will cease to be opaque, other, not understood, and instead become fused, mutually sympathetic, understanding one another as they understand themselves. Such an ideal of shared subjectivity, or the transparency of subjects to one another, denies difference in the sense of the basic asymmetry of subjects. (309)

Shahid has not felt any understanding from anyone before Riaz, and the other Muslim students invite him to join them. Kureishi identifies with British Asians who turn to Muslim fundamentalism. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Kureishi confesses, "I felt sympathetic; they seemed lost, and fundamentalism gave them a sense of place, of belonging" (Jaggi "Buddy"). As Shahid explains, he is not the only one who feels lost. He is part of a society of lost people, and they grasp at any label in order to establish a sense of belonging.

The community provides its members with other benefits as well. It becomes an alternative to the self-indulgent, self-serving culture of Thatcherism that Chili and Zulma represent. Chad was once very much like Shahid's brother, and he gives his own testimony to show how the community rescued him from his selfish and dangerous ways. Before Chad met Riaz, he was a confused and angry young man, whose life was headed in the wrong direction. He was an entrepreneur of sorts, but his products were drugs and prostitutes. Riaz changes Chad's life forever, teaching him that concern for others rather than for himself is the way to a more fulfilling life. Once Chad joins Riaz, he completely turns his back on individualism. His conversion is complete. He says, "We have journeyed beyond sensation, to a spiritual and controlled conception of life. We regard others on the basis of respect, not thinking what we can use them for. We work for others, which is what we doing right here now" (139). Strapper, who was once Chad's business associate, views Chad as lucky because he has been saved from his life of crime by his Muslim friends. Strapper asks Shahid, "How many can do that? Chances are low, man. Low, low, low. His people saved his life. They're pure" (154). Strapper endorses the group because everyone in it has shown genuine concern for Chad, and Strapper's own "people" have never shown any interest in his life. Instead, he is left to fend for himself.

Chad's turbulent search for belonging links him with Shahid. Confused about his identity, he becomes frustrated and angry. Although he has been raised in Britain by white Britons, everyone views him as an outsider. Salman Rushdie reveals that such denial is common: "even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real 'home' is elsewhere" ("New Empire" 132). Chad is no exception. Deedee explains to Shahid that "He was adopted by a white couple. The mother was racist, talked about Pakis all the time and how they had to fit in" (116). Chad's adoptive family welcomes him into their home but rejects him in the same instant. Although Shahid does not have to suffer racist parents, they nevertheless insist on assimilation. According to Shahid, however, assimilation does not change white Britons' opinions of him and other Black Asians. As he has told Zulma, the white Britons hate them regardless of what they do.

Chad is haunted at every turn by his unbelonging. He "would hear church bells. He'd see the English country cottages and ordinary English people who were secure, who effortlessly

belonged. You know, the whole Orwellian idea of England"[5] (116-17). The "ordinary English people" do not question their Englishness or their right to belong like Chad does because, in the Orwellian sense, they define themselves in opposition to people who are unlike them. Chad is the "other" that reaffirms their Englishness, thus perpetuating his rejection. Chad's search for acceptance leads him to join various groups, but the same rules of exclusion apply. Deedee reveals that "Trevor Buss's soul got lost in translation, as it were. Someone said he even tried the Labour Party, to try to find a place. But it was too racist and his anger was too much" (117-18). Chad develops a desire similar to Shahid's wish to join the National Front. He wants to channel his anger into action: "Anyway, the sense of exclusion practically drove him mad. He wanted to bomb them" (117). Islam saves Chad from his uncertainty and constant rejection, as it uses the white Briton as its "other." He is literally transformed by Riaz's acceptance, even changing his name from Trevor Buss to Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Shah (which eventually gets shortened to Chad). Chad makes a commitment to his Muslim brothers by rejecting the name his adoptive parents give him and by attempting to erase the last connection to his failed English self. The community is a safe harbor for Chad and replaces the family that has discarded him. Chad's is initially a compelling success story.

The Muslim community is attractive to Shahid not only because he feels some connection to its members. It also performs the functions of a traditional nuclear family. In fact, the Muslim community in *TBA* becomes a replacement for Shahid's own family. According to Shahid, "Riaz and Hat and Chad were the first people he'd met who were like him, he didn't have to explain anything. Chad trusted him. Hat had called him brother. He was closer to this gang than he was to his own family" (67). Shahid's father, mother, brother, and sister-in-law all have very different views from Shahid's. He attempts to explain himself to them at every turn, but they simply dismiss him and his ideas. Shahid believes that his Muslim brothers give him the respect and understanding that he expects from his own family but never finds. The Muslim community's appeal for Shahid is that he finally feels as if he has something in common with the people around him, but his inclusion in the community is built on a mutual misunderstanding.

The Muslim group's message is an appealing one, and it directly contrasts Zulma's aggressive Thatcherite principles. Rather than advocating a selfish individualism as Zulma does,

Riaz preaches a more humanistic approach. Their duty is to one another rather than to themselves. Riaz's lesson is simple:

> "We cannot just forsake our people and live for ourselves."
>
> "No."
>
> "If we did, wouldn't that mean we had totally absorbed the Western morals, which are totally individualistic?" (183).

Shahid and Zulma have fought over this issue on numerous occasions, and she has always frustrated him with her refusal to accept that helping others is more appropriate than thinking only of herself. Shahid thinks of himself as a progressive socialist, and Riaz's message reflects Shahid's own beliefs. The fundamentalist group provides practical assistance and protection for its members, particularly those in the greatest need. Shahid has witnessed Riaz dispensing legal advice to people who stand in a long line outside his apartment. Riaz must work tirelessly to assist them because no one else has offered any assistance. Teams of men guard people's homes to prevent attacks. The cooperative effort is necessary to restore security and order to people's lives.

The fundamentalist community develops to respond to the needs of British Asian Muslims and to combat the racism that runs rampant throughout *TBA*. The British Asians are better able to respond to the racism by presenting a unified front. Individually, they cannot withstand the pressure. Chad believes that being separated from the group is dangerous. He warns Shahid that walking London's streets alone will encourage attacks, and in so doing, he reaffirms the need for the community. He cautions, "Just watch out [. . .]. They might want to pick us off individually" (140). His anxiety, however, is quite reasonable. They have all experienced various forms of racism, and they know that being on the streets alone only makes them easy targets. In *MBL* Kureishi illustrates what can happen to small groups of British Asians when Omar drives the inebriated Salim and his wife, Cherry, home in their car. When Omar stops the car at a traffic light, a group of skinheads begins beating at the car, yelling obscenities, and exposing themselves to Salim and Cherry. Chad understands that he has more strength to stand up to similar attacks if he has other people with him.

Kureishi's inspiration for *TBA* was the furor that *The Satanic Verses* raised, and the cultural landscape of that time bears directly on understanding the need for a unified Muslim voice. One of the most interesting arguments that arose out of the debate over *The Satanic Verses* dealt with Britain's anti-blasphemy law. The legislation prohibits anyone from making blasphemous statements in art, writing, and television against any part of Christianity or Catholicism, including religious figures or teachings. Islam was never included in this law, and Islamic leaders began to demand that parliament take up the issue and amend the law to include them. The intention of this move was to give Muslims the authority legally to condemn and to ban the novel rather than simply resorting to death threats. Muslim leaders also made a proposal to include a disclaimer on the book's cover stating that the events within the novel were fictional, but this proposal was rejected as well. The situation revealed, however, how liminal the Muslim community was in Britain, as their demands for equal protection were rejected. The fundamentalist community, in turn, raised its collective voice in the streets of London.

Although Shahid benefits a great deal from his membership in the fundamentalist group, he also finds that the community has a number of drawbacks as well. The most significant disadvantage is the community's insistence on every member's subscribing to the same thought patterns, adhering to very strict rules of behavior, and privileging "unity over difference" (Young 300). Shahid discovers that the Muslim group wants to force him into limited and specific identity.

White Britons limit Shahid's identity based on his skin color; but his Muslim brothers take steps to further reduce his identity. Chad makes a generous gesture when he presents Shahid a traditional Islamic suit, but the garment only makes Shahid feel "more conspicuous" (141). It is intended to set him apart from everyone but his religious community. Marina Kurtén explains, "In *The Black Album* the Islamic group takes up an emphatic stand against the British society in which its members are living in order to give them a sense of strength and identity as Pakistanis rather than as members of their new homeland" (48). Chad uses the salwar kamiz as a definitive statement regarding Shahid's Pakistani identity:

> Shahid extracted a white cotton salwar kamiz, shook it out, and held it up. "It's
> beautiful."

"Yeah!"

Shahid put it to his cheek. "Is it for me?"

"Course. I got my own. Will you put it on?"

"Now?"

"Go right ahead."

He watched as Shahid changed, for the first time, into "national dress." Chad looked him over before taking, from behind his back, a white cap. He fitted it on Shahid's head, stood off a moment, and embraced him. (141)

Kureishi's choice of the salwar kamiz, however, underscores the fact that identity is constantly in conflict, continually shifting. The garment is from the Punjab, a place with its own identity conflict, where India and Pakistan argue over custody. When Shahid dons the salwar kamiz, his identity is contested as well. Chad treats this moment as an initiation ceremony, and as Shahid changes into the suit, Chad considers Shahid's transformation complete. Chad embraces him as he embraces the group's cause. The salwar kamiz makes a definitive statement regarding loyalties. As Marina Kurtén explains, it is an undeniable symbol of Shahid's association with the fundamentalists. Kurtén argues that Shahid makes a conscious and definitive commitment to his fundamentalist Muslim community when he wears the garment:

> The salwar kamiz is a sign that he has abandoned all the trappings of a Western lifestyle and wholeheartedly enters into the strategy of segregation. This dress is only used by men in South Asia if they are fundamentalist Muslims. It is used here as a symbol of Shahid's readiness to enter into the religion whole-heartedly, though this phase only lasts a short while for him, as he evolves towards the strategy of integration. (50)

The salwar kamiz is intended to dissolve Shahid's individual identity further into the group's collective identity. The suit's specific signification makes every male in the group appear exactly the same, just as the women's hijab scarves identify them as Muslims and conceal their individual appearances.

Shahid's reaction to the salwar kamiz, however, does not support Kurtén's narrow reading. In fact, Shahid admits to Chad that he feels "A little strange" wearing it. He only revises

his statement to "But good, good" when he sees Chad's mounting anger (141). Kurtén's assessment provides only two options for Shahid. He can wear the "national dress," which symbolizes that he embraces segregation and his Muslim identity and rejects his Englishness, or, as Kurtén suggests, he can refuse the garment and lose a different part of himself by integrating. Either way, Shahid must surrender some part of himself, and he is ultimately unwilling to deny part of who he is in order to belong. While Chili, Zulma, and Shahid's father have all integrated, Shahid attempts to find an alternative. His gender-bending game of dress up with Deedee reveals that he is willing to play with his identity, treating it as fluid rather than static:

> Deedee fetched her bag and lay everything out on a white towel. He sat beside
> her. She hummed and fussed over him, reddening his lips, darkening his
> eyelashes, applying blusher, pushing a pencil under his eye. She back-combed his
> hair. It troubled him; he felt as if he were losing himself. [. . .] For now she
> refused him a mirror, but he liked the feel of his new female face. (127)

Shahid finds the experience a little unnerving, primarily because he sheds the most basic part of his identity, his gender, as Deedee feminizes him. This new "garment" does not require the same commitment to a particular identity as the salwar kamiz does. Through Deedee's tutelage, Shahid discovers that identity is a mutable construct. The exercise is a troubling one initially, but Shahid eventually appreciates the freedom he has to make such a change, even if temporarily. Shahid becomes a *bricoleur* through these exercises, playing with his identity and revealing that no costume can define him, just as no religious or national affiliation can. The fundamentalist group cannot allow for such a lack of uniformity.

Jeffrey Weeks asserts, "Groups and communities become potentially undemocratic, as fundamentalists of whatever flavour do, when they begin to proclaim the universal truth of their particular experiences. The freedom to live your own life in the way you choose must imply an acceptance of other ways of life" (98). Riaz, Chad, and the other group members fundamentally cannot accept other ways of life. Chad reveals his inflexibility when Shahid does not respond favorably to the salwar kamiz, but Riaz is even less permissive with his expectations of others. This is particularly evident in the way that Riaz treats his own family. Deedee attempts to make the depths of Riaz's fundamentalism clear to Shahid, disclosing that "Riaz was kicked out of his

parents' house for denouncing his own father for drinking alcohol. He also reprimanded him for praying in his armchair and not on his knees. He told his friends that if one's parents did wrong they should be thrown into the raging fire of hell" (119). Shahid and his family do not agree on many issues, but he still allows them their opinions. He believes in difference and the individual's right to choose his own path.

Frederick M. Holmes argues that the fundamentalist community is actually presented as a group of distinct individuals rather than singular thought and action. He asserts, "The young Muslim fundamentalists in Riaz's orbit, for example, are all distinct individuals, and it is important to note that they are all shown to be struggling, with all of the difficult problems of late adolescence, to maintain their faith. None is simply an allegorical vehicle used to express a monolithic, Muslim viewpoint" (311). Holmes is correct in one respect; the fundamentalist Muslims are all different from one another in some ways. Chad is a very angry, violent young man; Riaz is a poet, thinker, and orator, but they are all bound by the same rules, and those rules do not allow for deviation. *TBA* certainly does not suggest that only one Muslim viewpoint exists; it simply underscores both the allure and the inherent danger of any community that abolishes individual agency and demands censorship.

Riaz and Chad believe that a singular voice is more powerful than the many voices within the group, and they alienate Shahid with their desire to suppress opposing viewpoints. Shahid, regardless of how much he desires the supportive community offered by his Muslim brothers, still contends that individual thoughts and identities are much more valuable because they enrich the lives of others. This is the basic problem with the traditional community. As it begins to draw the boundaries, it must eliminate those who do not fit the mold. Iris Marion Young argues, "The dream [of community] is understandable, but politically problematic, I argue, because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify" (300). Strapper envies the way that Chad's community saves him, but Strapper will never receive the same treatment from the fundamentalists because he is white. He is willing to give them helpful information, but they reject him nevertheless. His exclusion is not based on his occupation as a drug dealer, as Chad was once in the same industry. Chad ignores Strapper because he has drawn the racial boundaries

around himself, just as white Britons have done to Chad throughout his life. Shahid is in danger of being excluded by the group for a very different reason. He insists that individuality must be respected, if not celebrated. He cannot surrender his beliefs, which categorically conflict with their collective ideas.

Shahid believes that respecting individual identities is necessary, as diversity is a means to understanding others. It enhances experience, rather than hinders it. Riaz, however, believes that individual identities and ideas breed a lawless and corrupt society. Their heated discussion reveals that Riaz intends to contain and eliminate dissention:

> "A free imagination," Shahid said, "ranges over many natures. A free
> imagination, looking into itself, illuminates others."
> "We are discussing here the free and unbridled imagination of men who live apart
> from the people," Riaz said. "And these corrupt, disrespectful natures, wallowing
> in their own juices, must be caged as if they were dangerous carnivores." (194-5)

Shahid ultimately rejects the fundamentalist community because it insists on homogeneity. Riaz values the broader concerns of the entire group rather than the individuals who comprise it. Riaz claims, "To me these truths about the importance of faith and concern for others are deeper than the ravings of one individual imagination" (195). In privileging the group, Riaz maintains the monolithic nature of the community. Although he insists that he is a champion of his people, Riaz ultimately disrespects the individuals within his community with his unbending policies. The fundamentalist's cause supersedes the individual's need.

Kureishi explains, "[Shahid] makes an effort to join their community, but he can't fit in" (Jaggi "Buddy"). His inability to belong is directly linked to his commitment to individualism. Shahid believes in the diversity of London and the diversity of thought, and his opinions are the source of a dispute with his Muslim brothers: "But the individual voice is important, too, isn't it?" Shahid persisted, aware that the fervent note in his voice was separating him from his companions" (195). Shahid nevertheless respects Riaz for maintaining his own individuality. In Shahid's eyes, Riaz's decision to assert his fundamentalist beliefs makes him a strong man, particularly because it does not improve his position with white Britons. "Riaz, however, in an era of self-serving ambition and careers, had taken on a cause and maintained his unpopular

individuality. In the end he was more of a nonconformist—and one without affectation—than anyone Shahid had met. Where everyone else had zigged, Riaz had zagged" (119). Riaz's failure lay in his refusal to give others a similar consideration. He does not allow them to maintain their individuality.

Shahid learns an important lesson about himself and the trade-off required in order to belong. About Riaz: "The meaning of his life was his creed and the idea that he knew the truth about how people should live. It was this single-mindedness that made him powerful and, to Shahid now, rather pitiful" (184). Once his agency is threatened, Shahid sees Riaz for who he really is and finds him an almost pathetic figure. Riaz has never had any control over his world until he usurps the individual agency of his followers. The community ideal disintegrates because Riaz demands that everyone be of one mind.

In Rushdie's "In Good Faith," his defense of *The Satanic Verses* and himself, he argues: "*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure" (394). Riaz, in contrast, rejoices in purity, saying that "Only those who purify themselves can escape" (20). By preaching purification, Riaz endorses the National Front's platform and unknowingly colludes in further enforcing a fractured Britain. Riaz plays into the hands of the racists by insisting on segregation. Iris Marion Young argues that this is a common product of the desire for community:

> Racism, ethnic chauvinism, and class devaluation, I suggest, grow partly from a desire for community, that is, from the desire to understand others as they understand themselves and from the desire to be understood as I understand myself. Practically speaking, such mutual understanding can be approximated only within a homogeneous group that defines itself by common attributes. Such common identification, however, entails reference also to those excluded. [. . .] I do not claim that appeal to the ideal of community is itself racist. Rather, my claim is that such appeals, within the context of a racist and chauvinistic society, can validate the impulses that reproduce racist and ethnically chauvinistic identification. (311-12)

The Muslim students develop a community of people who fully appreciate the damaging impact that racism has on them. Their desire for this understanding is a natural response. Without the community, they are lost, alone, completely misunderstood. Their homogeneity, however, develops only when the group members define themselves in opposition to others, and the students use "Westerners" as their foil. By consciously separating themselves, they unconsciously perpetuate the racial division that has been the source of their difficulties.

  The divided Britain presented in Kureishi's work reflects the social landscape of Britain during Thatcher's tenure. Cairns Craig argues that the society developed by Thatcherism was a pragmatic one "full of isolated units, afraid of one another" (97). Tony Harrison's long poem, *V.*, illustrates Cairns Craig's view of the British social landscape. The poem lists the numerous factions within Britain fighting against one another, and the poem's title underscores the fact that the nation is divided:

> Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind,
>
> East/West, male/female, and the ground
>
> These fixtures are fought out on's Man, resigned
>
> To hope from his future what his past never found. (73-6)

Malcolm Bradbury, in his discussion of *The Satanic Verses*, echoes this sentiment. He argues that "a main theme of the book was the fragmentation, violence, and disorder of a multi-cultural but incoherent Britain, ruled by a 'Mrs. Torture'" (401). Opposition was the order of the day, and that opposition was used both for practical and sinister ends. When a minority group speaks with one voice, making generalizations about the people who comprise it becomes much easier. The government's goal seems to be the strengthening of the ethnic community in order to separate it as "other." James F. English asserts, "it is by controlling and policing this line of racial difference that the nation sustains the myth of its own (horizontal) community" (219).

  This division is also apparent in Kureishi's work. The London metropolis is teeming with tension. The social relations in *TBA* are extremely contentious between whites and Muslims. Only a tragic event can repair the divide, and even then only temporarily. Two hours after a bomb explodes in the main terminal of Victoria Station, Shahid is able to board a northbound train. What he finds on the train starkly contrasts his daily experiences, as the division has

dissolved and people interact with one another: "The proximity of others comforted him: they all sat guarded, scared, wet. Such a tragedy was the closest a city like London could come to communal emotion. [. . .] Passengers were so alarmed they spoke to one another" (113-14). The explosion has jarred them out of their isolation, even if only for a moment. Whatever may be the source of their division has been overtaken by what they have in common—their fragile existence.

The train scene recalls Deedee's reference to "the whole Orwellian idea of England" (117). The citizens of London are divided by many things, but when faced with terrorism, those divisions disappear, and they become unified as Britons. Anthony Ilona explains:

> As an essentially determined phenomenon, national identity, in Orwell's view[6], relies on a mass conception of unilateral sameness within a group or community of individuals. [. . .] As a relational phenomenon, the identity of a community is perceived as whole only through interaction with another perceived community or group. Though Britain's national identity is, as Orwell sees it, a mutable construct [. . .], it is only so in a negatively reinforced way. That is, Britain's national wholeness appears to be at its most cohesive when positioned in relation to some externalized and excluded Other. (88)

The terrorists, in the moment of the attacks, become the Other. It is in this way that 'Englishness' can be defined in opposition to the other groups, and the nation needs these communities of "others" to maintain a sense of a national community. Paul Gilroy argues in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* that "There are good grounds on which to argue that the language of community has displaced both the language of class and the language of 'race' in the political activity of Britain" (230). The language of community is a seductive one, as it seems only to have positive connotations. But the reason for 'community' replacing 'race' is to put a positive spin on something quite negative. Governments or majority groups can create perceptions of minority communities in order to contain and exclude them and to develop stereotypes about them. In Britain, emigrants from former British colonies and their British-born children became the negative reinforcement for national identity. As Ilona explains, "The heterogeneous African,

South Asian and African Caribbean groups in Britain now became a single, empirical Other; enunciated in a single discursive sign, 'black'" (92).

Shattering the perception of a monolithic community is a difficult task. Jeffrey Weeks argues, "the Muslim communities at the centre of the crisis[7] are themselves not monolithic, bisected as they inevitably are by antagonisms of class and gender, and by political conflicts" (93). The dissention within these communities, however, is either stifled by the community itself or by those who wish to exclude British blacks and British Asians from the majority culture. Weeks' assertion is a valid one, but ethnic communities are, nevertheless, reduced to monolithic groups in order to contain them. Although the community may dissolve difference from within, those outside the community refuse to acknowledge differences as well.

Individuals who are automatically included in undifferentiated groups of British blacks and British Asians must work to dismantle stereotypical perceptions of the ethnic community in order to have their individual concerns addressed. The Southall Black Sisters[8] wrote a letter to the *Guardian* in 1989 saying, "the Labour Party is prepared to abandon the principle of equality where black women are concerned. Instead they deliver us into the hands of male, conservative and religious forces within our communities, who deny us our right to live as we please" (qtd. in Weeks 94). The Southall Black Sisters and the women whom they represent have been reduced to a singular discursive sign, and such forced inclusion in a group essentially silences them. The women become victims of their communities as well as the government. Jeffrey Weeks asserts, "This underlines the danger of seeing communities as unified wholes, rather than as the locus of debate and divisions" (94).

In *TBA*, Shahid attempts to develop an identity and a place where that identity will be respected. He can choose to side with his family and become a Thatcherite, or he can become a member of the radical Muslim group in Kilburn, but neither choice accommodates his individuality. Becoming a completely self-reliant individual would allow him to maintain his freedom, but it denies him any support. Frederick M. Holmes asserts that Shahid "comes to accept the fluid, mongrelized condition of both the self and the society at large and [rejects] the purity of a dogmatic, totalizing religious faith" (297). Although Kureishi claims that community

is a dream that cannot be realized, he nevertheless presents two alternative communities that welcome difference, and one of them is the Muslim faith.

The mosque provides a place to belong, but it differs greatly from the community of fundamentalist Muslims because purity is not preached within its walls. Shahid's description of the mosque's atmosphere is a welcoming one:

> Men of so many types and nationalities—Tunisians, Indians, Algerians, Scots, French—gathered there, chatting in the entrance, where they removed their shoes and then retired to wash, that it would have been difficult, without prior knowledge, to tell which country the mosque was in. [. . .] Here race and class barriers had been suspended. [. . .] There were dozens of languages. Strangers spoke to one another. The atmosphere was uncompetitive, peaceful, meditative. (142)

The mosque is one place in London that eschews the virtues of community. It is the one location where Shahid does not stand out in the crowd, and it stands as a refuge for Shahid. The division that is apparent on the London's streets does not exist here. The differences between people remain, but they accept their diversity. The mosque does not insist on purity. Rather, the members appear to celebrate their own mongrelization. Kureishi effectively illustrates in this brief description of the mosque that the Muslim religion is not monolithic, and he does not completely reject religion as a source of community.

Ultimately, Shahid chooses the academic community, represented by Deedee Osgood, as his support group. It affords him a kind of freedom that he has not experienced elsewhere, and his professors challenge him to consider a more hybridized society. Shahid is interested in Prince's music, but Deedee encourages him to investigate Prince's identity as an example of hybridity: "He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho, too" (34). Prince is much like Shahid, yet he is widely accepted in spite of his mongrelized self.

The professors at the college attempt to build unity through diversity by allowing students to investigate their own interests rather than teaching from a standardized curriculum. Shahid must learn to assert his individuality in the academic community because he has never been allowed such freedom, but his reprogramming process is often difficult. "Yet he was

discomfited by the freedom of instruction Deedee offered. She and other postmodern types encouraged their students to study anything that took their interest, from Madonna's hair to a history of the leather jacket" (34). Shahid has been told how he should think by his parents and the members of the fundamentalist group, and he finds some safety in the clearly defined rules. In their tirade against Deedee Osgood, the Muslim group claims that Osgood will only allow for equality if everyone believes what she believes. "'She believes in equality, all right, but only if we forget that we are different,' said Tahira. 'If we assert our individuality, we are inferior, because we believe foolishness'" (241). Tahira reads Deedee's teaching philosophy as insisting that the Muslim students integrate, but Deedee simply challenges what they have been taught by the fundamentalists. Tahira believes that she has asserted her individuality by joining Riaz's group, but she has only traded one form of integration for another. The freedom the professors give their students to think for themselves allows them to express their individuality.

   TBA ends in a similar fashion as *About a Boy*. Shahid, like Will Freeman, finally decides that he will try to rely on another person, although "He had never relied on anyone before" (286). This marks a significant shift for Shahid. Initially, he is forced into individualism because he cannot claim a definitive identity that would secure him a place in any group. His interest in the Muslim community illustrates his rejection of the degenerate individualism that Zulma and Chili represent, but the members of the group reject his individuality. He finds his place in the academic community with Deedee Osgood. Shahid and Deedee's relationship is a tenuous one; however, the arrangement is agreeable to both. "He'd take what she offered; he'd give her what he could" (286). They will support each other during the time that they are together, echoing the fluidity of *About a Boy*'s community. Deedee and Shahid have no specific expectations of each other, and they both have the option to leave at any point. This arrangement contrasts the rigid rules of the radical Muslim organization. The novel ends on a positive note once Shahid has escaped the darkness that the Muslim students have engendered.

   Kureishi's work effectively undermines racial stereotypes by presenting a wide range of characters whose lives reflect those of white Britons and British Asians alike. Although Asians comprise a large portion of the British population, they are underrepresented in literature and film. The representations that do exist are often stereotypical. According to Farrah Anwar, "If an

Asian gets a look in on the [television], it will invariably be as a doctor. . .or a shopkeeper" (29). Many contemporary British black authors describe this as their motivation for writing. Maya Jaggi asserts, "Many express a hunger for images of themselves. A sense of being invisible, erased from Briatin's idea of itself and of its past, is an avowed spur for several of these authors to writing themselves back into the picture" ("New Brits"). British writers of Asian and Caribbean descent are expected to fill the gap with new representations, but those representations are often met with resistance from the white majority and the writer's own ethnic communities. Creating a space for British blacks and British Asians in fiction presents the same challenge to revise monolithic conceptions of race.

After Kureishi released *MBL*, he lamented that the British Asians "think that I'm perpetually throwing shit at them," since he chose drug dealers, alcoholics, and homosexuals as his main British Asian characters (qtd. in Anwar). Gurindher Chadha, a British-Asian writer and film director,[9] criticizes Kureishi for what she believes is a misrepresentation of his ethnic group. She essentially censors Kureishi by arguing that he does not fulfill his responsibility to portray the Asian community positively, charging, "I feel he's quite isolated from the Asian side of himself. If there's one criticism of him, it's that he's used that side of him without real cultural integrity. He's used it to fulfill the briefs of the Max Stafford Clarkes,[10] so that when other Asian writers come along, they're immediately compared to him" (Anwar). Nahem Yousaf asserts that Kureishi distances himself from his "Asian side" in order to illustrate that "Asianness" is a construct, just as "Englishness" is:

> It may seem significant here that Kureishi appears to remove himself from 'the
> Asian community' in this statement but I feel that, rather than simplistically
> denying his own place within that community, he is questioning the idea of
> community itself. Kureishi refuses to see community in monolithic terms, so that
> when critics maintain that his work is fragmentary and unstructured, arguably,
> they are perceiving Kureishi's artistic response to the 'structure' of the Asian
> community as *bricolage*; as incredibly diverse, heterogeneous peoples yoked
> together under the political aegis of 'Asian' or 'Black' as a result of the
> 'Othering' of their communities by white British institutions. (16)

The emerging writers continue to dismantle the monolithic ethnic community. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* does not overlook the racial tensions in Britain, but it does present a diverse community of varying ethnicities. The novel ends with Irie, the daughter of a white Briton and a British Caribbean, giving birth to twins. They are the product of her relationship with the Iqbal brothers, and the children represent the cultural mélange that Britain has become.

Many publishers, however, prefer representations what they consider the typical Asian experience. Andrea Levy[11] recalls publishers' requests that she write like other authors whose parents emigrated to another country. She was once told: "Love your writing—but could you write a book like (Amy Tan's) *The Joy Luck Club*?" She responds, "They wanted the 'immigrant experience' to be formulaic. There's pressure to stay within the realms of identity, of the black experience in Britain" (qtd. in Jaggi "The New Brits").

Hanif Kureishi resists that pressure in telling his stories. Instead, he focuses on one character who discovers that identity is always changing and cannot fit into a specified category. Kureishi views the Asian community as "so diverse, so broad in terms of class, age, and outlook, that it doesn't make any sense to talk about the so-called Asian community" (Anwar). He prefers to talk about the new British community, one that is inclusive, rather than perpetuating division. Many critics believe that perceptions are now changing. Laura Moss argues:

> Hybridity is no longer an exception to a concept of identity based on some kind of unity, or even unity in diversity. Instead, the myth of 'an' English national, or even post-national, identity has been replaced by an acceptance, or at least acknowledgement, of a multiplicity of identities. Cultural and racial hybridities are becoming increasingly ordinary. The significance of this ordinariness lies in the pivotal notion of a tolerance or acceptance of diversity in opposition to the potential fear or prejudice that comes out of a desire for purity. (12)

Kureishi's work does not advocate the rugged individualism encouraged by Thatcher, but it seeks to celebrate the particularities of individuals rather than subsume them into generalized categories. Kureishi makes his intentions very clear: "If both racism and fundamentalism are diminishers of life—reducing others to abstractions—the effort of culture must be to keep others alive by describing and celebrating their intricacy, by seeing that this is not only of value but a

necessity" ("My Uncle"). Viewing difference as a valuable asset has the potential to change the landscape of Britain. Iris Marion Young asserts, "The unoppressive city is thus defined as openness to unassimilated otherness. Of course, we do not have such openness to difference in our current social relations" (319). British black and British Asian writers are part of a revolution to develop this unoppressive city, using their work to shatter monolithic perceptions of ethnic groups and develop a much more inclusive definition of Englishness. In this way, the city becomes the new community. Andrea Levy's mantra is a charge to the new generation of writers and to anyone who, like Shahid Hasan and Khan, struggles with a sense of double unbelonging: "If Englishness doesn't define me, redefine Englishness" (qtd. in Jaggi "New Brits").

.

CHAPTER FIVE

Nowhere to Go but Up:

The Death and Rebirth of Community in Mike Leigh's *High Hopes*

The triumph of the industrial economy is the fall of community. But the fall of community reveals how precious and how necessary community is. For when community falls, so must fall all the things that only community life can engender and protect: the care of the old, the care and education of children, family life, neighborly work, the handing down of memory, the care of the earth, respect for nature and the lives of wild creatures.

—Wendell Berry

The camera forces one to face facts, to probe, to reveal, to get close to people and things; while the British nature inclines to the opposite; to stay aloof, to cloak harsh truths with innuendoes.

—Satyajit Ray[1]

I'm not really concerned with coming up with simplistic answers. I'm concerned with formulating questions and with stimulating the audience's sense of how things should *be.*

—Mike Leigh

One of the most profound moments in Mike Leigh's 1988 film, *High Hopes*, is one devoid of spoken lines. Mrs. Bender (Edna Doré), the elderly woman who lives alone, stands on her front steps and searches through her bag. She appears confused, frustrated, and distraught. Painfully, she turns to look at her door and lowers her head. The camera cuts to Mrs. Bender at

the foot of the steps, leaning on the fence, staring at the ground. People hurriedly pass by her but never acknowledge her. The background music is dark, brooding. *High Hopes* can be summed up with this singular image of the despairing individual who must—but cannot—fend for herself.

Throughout the film, Mike Leigh frequently turns the camera's intense gaze on a weary and silent Mrs. Bender while the world moves at a furious pace without her. She is a perpetual victim of the selfish culture that thrives in *High Hopes*' Britain. *High Hopes* is a direct and sustained attack on Thatcherism, and Leigh's camera surveys the damage done to individuals and to community as a result of Thatcher's long tenure. Community in *High Hopes* is essentially dead, and a divided London, full of selfish individuals, has risen in its place. Andrew Higson asserts in "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film," "The privatizing ethics of popular capitalism shifted the emphasis from community values and notions of consensus and collective identity to the values of individual enterprise and the marketplace" (127). *High Hopes* illustrates the demoralizing impact of this shift on individuals who need assistance.

Leigh created *High Hopes* during a decade that had been hailed as the rebirth of British film. The industry's rise in status, however, was largely a result of the critical and commercial success of *Chariots of Fire* in 1981. Higson claims that the film's value was not measured in financial terms alone, although it was very successful financially. Its real value was found in its extensive cultural impact. The film displays Britain in all its glory. Although half of the scenes set in Britain are rain-soaked, the weather presents only a minor inconvenience when set against Britain's noble traditions and fertile countryside. The prevailing images of Britain presented abroad during the 1980s, in particular, were of this *Masterpiece Theatre* variety—idyllic and set in the past. Films such as *Chariots of Fire* and *A Room with a View* (1985) were part of the heritage industry that sought to capitalize on images of a Britain steeped in tradition. Andrew Higson argues that these images were deployed primarily as a means of invigorating the British tourism industry: "Images of Britain and Britishness (usually, in fact, Englishness) became commodities for consumption in the international image market," and the heritage films, especially, were "a vital part of contemporary tourism" (109, 112). The films that were

successful both within Britain and abroad, however, are curiously set in the Victorian or Edwardian era, and most are not set in Britain, but abroad.

Cultural critics assert that the purpose of the heritage films was not limited to creating a tourism boom. Salman Rushdie has remarked that Britain's decline in the world and its bleak prospects in the 1980s created a climate in which Britons were particularly inclined to forget their troubles by remembering better days. In "Outside the Whale," Rushdie argues, "The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourages many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence" (91-2).[2] Stuart Hall asserts that "Culturally, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of 'regressive modernization'—the attempt to 'educate' and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past" (2). Although Thatcher's Britain was marked by gross economic inequality and social and ethnic division, films such as *Chariots of Fire* foster a completely different image of a unified Britain. Its citizens are gifted and driven to achieve greatness for themselves, for God, and for their country, and their differences are harmoniously sutured by these common goals. Leonard Quart asserts that the film "implicitly endorses the Thatcherite ethos of a nation based on meritocracy of the ambitious, the diligent, and the gifted. [. . .] It's a fitting message for a Thatcher-ruled England where the traditional class lines give way to individual achievement, usually defined in terms of wealth and status" ("The Religion of the Market" 26-7). Although the Masters of Cambridge voice anti-Semitic sentiments at the beginning of the film, Harold Abrahams' (Ben Cross) otherness as the son of a Jewish immigrant merchant is absorbed by his commitment to his own, and more importantly, to his country's glory. Eric Liddel (Ian Charleson), the devoutly Christian Scot, is embraced as well. His greatness as a runner qualifies him as an Englishman and erases his difference.

In contrast, *A Room with a View* (1985) turns its gaze on the British upper classes on holiday and at leisure, joyously frolicking naked in the woods, rejecting repressive social rules, and finding love. The Forster films, in particular, erase the social inequalities of the past and present by fetishizing the simplicity of the upper class life. Higson remarks, "[T]hey transform the heritage of the upper classes into the national heritage: private interest becomes naturalized

114

as public interest" (114). These films allow the audience to escape into a fictional past, a classless Britain where only minor obstacles to happiness exist and are easily overcome.

These films, however, are dedicated to presenting a harmonious society, and some critics argue that this preoccupation reflects Britons' longing to escape their fragmented society. Alison Light claims that the films express "the romantic longing within liberalism for making unions despite differences of nationality, sexuality, social class" (63). Andrew Higson shares a similar analysis:

> Thus, if the films seem at first to attempt to escape from the cultural heterogeneity of contemporary Britain by celebrating a class apparently secure in its self-knowledge and self-sufficiency, it is clear that they also dramatize the effort of different social identities to connect with one another across cultural and social boundaries, so reinvoking the liberal consensus. [3] (119)

The producers and directors of these films, nevertheless, encourage the audience to view this idyllic world in a vacuum through their dedication to recreate the period exactly as it would have appeared. Ismail Merchant and James Ivory are often praised for their minute attention to detail in their representations of the past, yet Andrew Higson argues that this attention to detail creates a world that can only be observed, rather than considered in terms of the present. Higson asserts, "The strength of the pastiche in effect imprisons the qualities of the past, holding them in place as something to be gazed at from a reverential distance, and refusing the possibility of a dialogue or confrontation with the present" (119). The heritage films offer nothing more than a means of escaping present troubles.

For many viewers outside the United Kingdom accustomed to these representations of Britain, the London of *High Hopes* might seem a foreign place, indeed. Rather than setting his story in the lush English countryside, Mike Leigh focuses on the dingy concrete jungle of metropolitan London. Leigh refuses to manufacture romantic visions of a unified Britain, and he forces his audience to come acknowledge the unfortunate reality that society and its attendant forms of support are crumbling around them. Films set during Thatcher's tenure, such as *High Hopes* and Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi's *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, are decidedly political and paint a rather bleak portrait of affairs in Britain. Michael Coveney, focusing on

Mike Leigh's body of work, claims that "The images of Britain perpetrated by the movies of this decade are not flattering," but Leigh was not alone in his pessimistic representations of Britain (190). Films funded by Channel 4 became crucial sites for contesting the romantic visions of the past fostered by the heritage industry. Frears and Kureishi refer to *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* as their "declaration of war on Thatcher England" (Barber 221). Many of the Channel 4 films demand that Britons look squarely at their present troubles, rather than dream of a time long past and completely ignore the present. Higson argues, "These films are set firmly in the present, away from the centers of power, in an unstable and socially divided postimperialist and/or working-class Britain, where identities are shifting, fluid, and heterogeneous" (110). If a filmmaker wanted to accurately represent the state of affairs in 1980s Britain, he would have to show a deeply divided nation. Although critics accuse Mike Leigh of presenting a limited and largely negative vision of Britain under Thatcher's administration, Michael Coveney defends Leigh, saying, "No film-maker has an obligation to be fair, or balanced, about the society he by rights claims as his material. His only obligation is towards the truth as he perceives it, and Leigh perceived a divided and demoralized nation" (191). Leigh holds Margaret Thatcher directly responsible for the country's dismal state of affairs. Shirley (Ruth Sheen) names her cactus "Thatcher" because, as Cyril (Philip Davis) explains, "It's a pain in the arse. Prongs you every time you walk past it." *High Hopes* asserts no clear solution to the problems created by Thatcher, but it sends a clear message that cannot be ignored. People are suffering as a direct result of the aggressive individual's rise and community's coinciding demise. Howie Movshovitz argues, "Along with [Ken] Loach, Leigh has a love and a fascination with the working class, people who've suffered particularly from the social dislocations caused by Thatcherism and whom Leigh sees as struggling to maintain their identity (*Life Is Sweet*), their sense of humor (*High Hopes*) and their sanity (*Naked*)" (52). Movshovitz, however, gives *High Hopes* a rather limited reading. While Mrs. Bender certainly suffers more than any other character, Leigh's presentation suggests that the death of community and its support structure affects the entire society.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

In *High Hopes*, the scene outside Mrs. Bender's home clearly identifies her as a victim of the Thatcherite culture. She is completely alone and helpless, and without assistance from

someone, she could remain on her doorstep for a very long time. When her neighbor, Laetitia Booth-Braine (Lesley Manville), returns from a shopping trip, Mrs. Bender seizes the opportunity to ask for help, but Laetitia cannot be bothered to assist her. She is far from being Mrs. Bender's saving grace, attempting to pass responsibility to someone else instead.

> LAETITIA.   Are there any neighbors you know who could help you out?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   Not anymore.

The social landscape of Mrs. Bender's neighborhood has changed dramatically. All of the people who shared this street with Mrs. Bender and her family, along with the support that they provided, have disappeared. Mrs. Bender has no neighbors who will help her now, though, largely because selfish individuals such as Laetitia Booth-Braine have overtaken her neighborhood. Although Laetitia lives directly next door to Mrs. Bender, she feels no responsibility or concern for her neighbor.

Laetitia and her husband, Rupert (David Bamber), are the embodiment of the careless individuals that Alexis de Tocqueville once feared would develop. His description of these individuals in *Democracy in America* accurately anticipates the Booth-Braines*:* "[A]s for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone" (663). Laetitia is oblivious to other people's needs, no matter how trivial those needs may be or how easily she could meet them. Her attempts to quickly slip into her home suggest that she does notice Mrs. Bender, but she obviously intends to ignore her. Forced to acknowledge Mrs. Bender's plea for assistance, Laetitia makes it clear that Mrs. Bender is nothing more than a nuisance. Mrs. Bender is insignificant, and she deserves to be brushed aside. The only support that Laetitia can muster is to tell Mrs. Bender, "There are such things as telephones, you know." Laetitia, at first glance, appears to be a mindless fool. She is apparently incapable of comprehending that a woman who is locked out of her home and who does not have her purse would have no ability to make a phone call. Laetitia's inability to process this information, however, is not a reflection of her intelligence. Rather, it is a reflection of her limited human understanding. She is a callous individual, and she simply has no concern for Mrs. Bender's plight.

Laetitia Booth-Braine is an odious figure for good reason. Leigh presents her as the model Thatcherite, and as such, she is also one of the film's comic villains. She is a product of the selfish individualism promoted by Thatcher and her administration, and Laetitia is unwilling—and perhaps incapable—of showing kindness to others in need. In "The Religion of the Market," Leonard Quart asserts that the general disregard for others was a natural byproduct of the Thatcherite ideology: "Thatcher promoted an individualist ethos and an entrepreneurial culture where the acquisition of wealth and the consumption of goods became the prime values, while the ethic of social responsibility and mutual aid began to unravel" (20). Hugo Young confirms Quart's sentiment, claiming that Margaret Thatcher expressed in no uncertain terms that being a consumer was much more important than showing concern for others (537). Laetitia Booth-Braine has been a model student, learning and then living the lesson. Even the simplest act of kindness or concern runs counter to her ethical code. Although critics often cite Laetitia as an example of Leigh's unfair treatment of the middle class, *High Hopes* is meant as a direct attack on the Thatcherite ethos. Leigh presents Laetitia in a negative light to ensure that the audience never identifies with her. She is merely a grotesque example of Thatcherism's affect on British society.

Laetitia is completely self-sufficient, and she expects others to be as well. Her facial expressions illustrate her cold indifference toward Mrs. Bender. Her actions—or inaction, in this case—are a direct result of her refusal to concern herself with others. She sees no one else around her because her world is comprised solely of herself. She recognizes that Mrs. Bender has gotten herself, as she remarks, "in a pickle," but she does not wish to help Mrs. Bender out of it. Laetitia treats Mrs. Bender like a child, scolding her and acting as if she is senile. Laetitia attempts to rid herself of this nagging problem because she does not want to open herself or her home to others. To illustrate this point, Laetitia asks for Valerie's phone number, suggesting that she will call Valerie while Mrs. Bender waits outside. She literally does not want anyone to infiltrate her sacred space.

Mrs. Bender's unpleasant encounter with Laetitia underscores the division between individuals, but it also reveals the deep divisions between classes. Although the middle class, represented in *High Hopes* by the Booth-Braines, is living among the working class, the two

rarely have any contact with one another. In fact, the Booth-Braines attempt to avoid all contact with any member of the Bender family, and they attempt to drive Mrs. Bender out of her home in order to avoid future contact. The dividing lines between these two groups of people are literally drawn on Mrs. Bender's block of flats. Hers is the only façade that is dingy, and the lines that separate her bricks from her neighbors' are perfectly straight and clearly defined. Cyril, when looking down the street, remarks to Shirley, "This was a different street when I was a kid, before the middle classes took over." The Booth-Braines might accept his statement as a compliment, as they would read their presence as an improvement on the former tenants. For Cyril, however, it is a lamentation. No one is on the streets in this neighborhood. Certainly people live in these homes, but those lives are self-contained and conducted behind closed doors. Interaction between neighbors no longer occurs. The street was different because people were involved in each other's lives. The neighborhood has now become the sight of a hostile corporate takeover, with greedy yuppies like the Booth-Braines purchasing the council homes merely to turn a profit, and with their takeover, the community has died.

Margaret Thatcher obliquely expressed her intentions to gentrify London's inner cities in her 1983 victory speech. Her disembodied voice plays in the opening minutes of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. She says, "We've got a big job to do in some of those inner cities." The job to be done, however, is not assisting individuals in need or making their lives better. Michael Walsh explains her actual goals: "[T]he 'job to do' which the naïve auditor might take to be the solution of social problems turns out to be redevelopment; Thatcher's voice sets the gentrification agenda for a film which makes much of the polarization between the inner city and its leafy suburbs" (183-4). In his chapter titled "The British Cinema and Thatcherism," John Hill asserts that "tension between rhetoric and reality" was a defining characteristic of Margaret Thatcher's tenure (11). He argues that "despite the Thatcher regime's appeal to order, unity, and social cohesion, it was evident that Thatcherite economic policies were contributing to an increase in social divisions and conflicts" (10). Although Thatcher set policies in place that would allow council tenants to purchase their homes,[4] the middle class purchased many of those council properties instead. As most Conservatives had called for "one nation," Thatcher's policies developed, in fact, two nations. Rupert Booth-Braine underscores this reality when he tells Cyril,

"Now. What made this country great was a place for everyone and everyone in his place, and this is my place." The place that has always been the Benders' has been effectively taken from them. The Booth-Braines reinforce the dividing lines between the classes by claiming that people such as Mrs. Bender no longer belong on the street, and they certainly do not belong in the Booth-Braine's home.

Rupert and Laetitia Booth-Braine are stereotypical of the acquisitive individuals that Thatcher promoted through her policies. They have taken advantage of the opportunity to purchase a flat once owned by the Council, making them active participants in the regentrification of their street. Mrs. Bender does not meet the neighborhood's new demographics, however, and Rupert and Laetitia are determined to erase the last vestiges of the working class neighborhood by encouraging Mrs. Bender to vacate her home.

> LAETITIA.   Rather a large house for one person, don't you agree?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   I manage.
>
> LAETITIA.   Milk? Yes, but you can hardly justify having three bedrooms, though, can you?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   It's my home.
>
> LAETITIA.   Yes, it is at the moment. I grant you that. Sugar? Fine. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better appreciated by a professional couple or even a family. Biscuit?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   Thank you. I've always lived there.
>
> LAETITIA.   Yes. That may be, but times change. I think you would be the first to agree that you would be far better off buying yourself a nice little modern granny flat.
>
> MRS. BENDER.   Where would I get the money from?
>
> LAETITIA.   Well, if you were to put your house on the market, I think you'll find that you've been sitting on a gold mine. Do you have all your original features? Cornices, fireplaces?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   Got fireplaces, yeah.
>
> LAETITIA.   Yeah, *voila*. Bring in the estate agents.

MRS. BENDER.   Not my house.

LAETITIA.   Ah. It belongs to a member of your family.

MRS. BENDER.   Belongs to the Council.

LAETITIA.   Ah, well, mercifully you people do have the opportunity to
    purchase your Council property nowadays. I'd snap it up if I were you. Then,
    of course, one sells.

Rupert and Laetitia are both untouched by the realities of the world around them. Whatever economic terms describe their own existence must apply to everyone else's. As a result, Laetitia must be told directly that Mrs. Bender's home is Council property. She cannot envision any alternative to her own housing situation. Mike Coveney argues, "This iconic confrontation between the two extremities of Mrs. Thatcher's political legacy dares to control, in a few sharply-etched frames, the spirit of the age" (190). Their conversation is terse; Laetitia peppers Mrs. Bender with questions and makes her disdain for Mrs. Bender apparent. If Mrs. Bender could purchase her home, she could launch herself into the ownership class. Since she cannot, she is nothing more than a burden, a drain on the British economy, a point made clear by Laetitia calling Mrs. Bender "you people." Mrs. Bender is particularly undesirable since young professionals have almost completed the neighborhood's regentrification. Hers is the only council flat left on the block, and many professional couples would seize the opportunity to own her valuable property. Leonard Quart reports that Margaret Thatcher's policies effectively overturned the growing equality between classes in Britain. By 1988, "The best-off tenth of the population now enjoyed nearly nine times more income than the worst-off tenth" (*The Films of Mike Leigh* 5). The Booth-Braines have literally capitalized on the working class's decline.

Rupert and Laetitia Booth-Braine have traded their humanity for financial gain, but their moral decline is not unique. According to Leonard Quart, they are model citizens in Thatcher's new consumer-driven culture:

The result was a Thatcher ethos shaped out of her sense of political certitude and moral rectitude, and characterized, in the main, by a hunger for status, gross materialism, unembarrassed consumption, and contempt for the poor. The pursuit of self-interest became the dominant force in British culture. [. . .]Britain [. . .] had

become a country where acquisitive individualism and aggressive self-interest thrived. (*The Films of Mike Leigh* 5)

Rupert and Laetitia's callous disregard for their neighbor becomes more pronounced when Rupert arrives home. In fact, he and Laetitia behave, for the most part, as if Mrs. Bender is not there. Although they do not completely ignore her, she is nothing more than an afterthought to them. When they do converse with her, they are brusque. Rupert claims that Mrs. Bender's home is limiting the neighborhood's appeal, and he enumerates the changes that she should make. For Rupert, Mrs. Bender is responsible for everything, even though it is abundantly clear that she cannot manage such repairs on her own. Her age and ability, however, are no excuse for the aesthetically displeasing state into which she has allowed her home to fall.

> RUPERT.   Now, how about getting outside with a brush and giving the front
>   of your house a lick of paint?
>
> LAETITIA.   Yeah.
>
> RUPERT.   And your garden leaves a great deal to be desired. You could have
>   enormous fun out there.
>
> LAETITIA.   Do you have green fingers?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   My husband used to do all that.
>
> LAETITIA.   Ah.
>
> RUPERT.   Where is he now?
>
> MRS. BENDER.   He's dead.
>
> RUPERT.   Jolly good. Where should we eat after?

Rupert's "jolly good" is a heartless non sequitur, but it further illustrates his self-centered nature. He does not care where Mr. Bender is, so he does not listen to Mrs. Bender's response. He retreats to his own vapid life. Rupert has told Mrs. Bender what she must do to meet his standards. The reason her house is not well-maintained is irrelevant to him. He simply cares about surface appearances, not about the lives of the people beneath the exterior. Mrs. Bender, sitting with the Booth-Braines in their kitchen, is completely alone. Rupert and Laetitia's selfish individualism alienates and isolates Mrs. Bender.

*   *   *

High Hopes reveals a Britain replete with isolated individuals. Mrs. Bender is the most obvious victim of the selfish ideology, but most of the couples in the film are affected as well. Even though Rupert and Laetitia, Martin and Valerie are married, each person is essentially alone. They move in separate spheres, even at the moments in which they are closest to one another in physical proximity. They seem to have no understanding of or concern for one another. Communication between these individuals rarely occurs or operates properly. When people do speak to one another, they seem to be speaking different languages.

Rupert and Laetitia Booth-Braine demand that everyone be as self-sufficient as they are, and their aggressive individualism is the source of their inability to communicate with one another. Rupert and Laetitia exchange words, as people might when having a conversation, but their responses do not correspond to one another. Laetitia lies on the bed talking about the opera, and Rupert's non-responses are only about the two steaks he has eaten in one day. They are merely two distinct individuals in the same room. They have no relation to one another, and they do not participate in each other's lives. Rather than developing a conversation that fosters an understanding of one another, their discussions are nothing more than concurrent monologues. Ray Carney explains:

> There is no fun, no flexibility, no inventiveness, no good-natured teasing or joking, no mutually responsive and stimulating exchange of emotions and energies. Rupert and Laetitia's so-called interaction consists of mismatched, nonintersecting pronouncements. They don't really listen, let alone respond to each other. Their "conversation" is closer to being a series of alternating monologues. [. . .] Rupert and Laetitia take their own pulses, so wrapped up in their own private worlds of self-referential memories and observations that they might as well be talking to themselves (and perhaps are). There is no communication here, just the staking out and defending of independent positions. (*The Films of Mike Leigh* 183)[5]

The love affairs that Rupert and Laetitia seem to have with themselves separate them from one another and essentially from anyone else. In effect, they have little more support than Mrs.

Bender does, and their self-absorption prohibits them from developing a deep connection with one another.

Valerie (Heather Tobias) and Martin (Philip Jackson), though married, are essentially alone as well, but their emotional separation is a direct result of their attempts to claim supremacy over one another. When they speak to each other, they actually respond to each other, unlike Rupert and Laetitia, but their verbal exchanges are nothing more than childish arguments. The bedroom scene reveals that Valerie and Martin will each defend their individual positions in every situation.

VALERIE.   You start.

MARTIN.   No, you start.

VALERIE.   You start.

MARTIN.   You bloody start.

VALERIE.   Oh, come on.

MARTIN.   You get on top.

VALERIE.   No. I don't want to get on top.

MARTIN.   Start what, anyway?

VALERIE.   You're Michael Douglas. [. . .]

MARTIN.   Who's Michael Douglas? [. . .] I'm not Michael Douglas.

VALERIE.   I'm a virgin.

MARTIN.   [laughter]

The exchange is tedious, and it gets them nowhere. Neither Valerie nor Martin is completely invested in having sex at the end of their strange negotiation, but neither is willing to relinquish control to finalize the terms of intercourse or end the argument.

In their efforts to secure or maintain their individual agency, Valerie and Martin wage war against each other, each attempting to claim control over the other. They are perpetually locked in a battle for primacy. When Valerie storms into Martin's office and demands money, Martin mounts a counter attack by rejecting her demands out of hand. We see no negotiations between these two individuals, and, as a result, the battle continues when Martin arrives at home. Valerie responds to Martin's refusals by giving him bread and water for dinner. While Valerie

initially treats this as a joke, the message is serious. Either Martin learns that he must give her things when she wants them, or he will be left with nothing but bread and water. Although scenes such as these provide comedic relief, they reveal the latent hostility in the Burke marriage. That hostility occasionally manifests itself in verbal sparring, but it also escalates into physical hostility as well, such as the scene at Mrs. Bender's birthday party when Martin shoves Valerie onto the couch. Without careful, dedicated conversation, Valerie and Martin cannot understand one another. Without understanding, they cannot work together for peaceful, mutually agreeable solutions, and they cannot develop a supportive relationship.

Martin and Valerie's constant battles for control isolate them from one another, and both, like Mrs. Bender and the Booth-Braines, are disconnected from everyone else. When Valerie hosts Mrs. Bender's doomed surprise party at her home, Valerie proudly announces to Cyril and Shirley, "We're detached." She is obviously referring to her house, but she unknowingly utters a profound statement about her life. She and Martin have no connection to one another, and they have no connection to anyone else. They are emotionally detached as well—detached from any concern for others, and detached from their own emotions. The Burke's detached house is a badge of honor for them, underscoring the prosperity of Martin's businesses, but their emotional and social detachment causes Valerie, in particular, to suffer. She, like her mother, is victimized by the material culture, but she is unique because she is a victim of her own making. She is suffering from a self-inflicted isolation.

Valerie also suffers from an identity conflict, and her frenetic behavior suggests that she is uncomfortable in her own skin. Her social history began in the working class, but Martin's financial success has repositioned them in the enterprise class, an apparently purgatorial position in the social structure. They no longer identify with the working class, but based on the Booth-Braines' response to Valerie, the Burkes are unwelcome in the middle class. Ray Carney asserts, "To Rupert and Laetitia, the typecasting of identity and experience involves treating anyone below their own social class as being indistinguishable from a tradesman" (184). Mike Leigh has expressed in interviews[6] that he intends to show in his films the pressures at work on individuals to conform to larger group identities. Valerie is desperate to project a different identity; she wants to be part of the middle class and to be welcomed by its members. She believes that

dressing like Laetitia Booth-Braine will afford her admittance to this identity. As Carney suggests, "for Valerie you *are* your clothes and mannerisms" (184). If she purchases fashionable clothes and drives the flashy sports car, she should be accepted, yet she merely looks like a cheap imitation, and people such as Rupert and Laetitia openly reject her.

Valerie also attempts to solidify her social standing by comparing herself to Cyril. She clearly believes that she is more successful than Cyril, but she is careful to inventory her home's impressive features—which amount to little more than kitsch items—for Cyril as a means of underscoring her wealth and his relative poverty. Cyril and the Booth-Braines find Valerie equally repellent, but for different reasons. Cyril believes that she has sold her soul and her concern for her family in favor of wealth, and the Booth-Braines find her abhorrent merely because she acts as if she is their equal. Valerie is victimized in this respect, as well. She has accepted Thatcher's promise that those who work hard will acquire wealth and a better life, yet the doors to the life Valerie desires are closed to her. John Hill claims that Valerie, rather than being a victim of her culture, is a victim of Leigh's misogyny:

> Although Leigh's work does not associate superficiality and pretentiousness exclusively with female characters, it is generally the women who display these attributes most clearly. Indeed, such is the degree of Valerie's grotesquerie in *High Hopes* that the film extends her virtually no sympathy at all and, as in earlier working-class realism, effectively 'punishes' her by making her suffer in a way that none of the other characters have to and by reducing her to a state of hysterical collapse. (194).

In a film overpopulated by grotesque characters, Valerie's drunken end in her bubble bath may seem to be an unfair punishment because no other guilty party seems to suffer in the end. Unlike the other characters, however, Valerie is pitiful figure, and while the audience wastes no sympathy on Martin or the Booth-Braines, Valerie's frailty throughout the film allows the audience to see her as an unwitting victim of the Thatcherite ethos.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Many film critics view *High Hopes* and *Naked* (1993) as two variations on the theme of social decay. In his interview with Lee Ellickson and Richard Porton for *Cineaste*, Leigh agrees

that they both lament the loss of communal bonds and the general disintegration of mutual support:

> *Cineaste*: [*Naked*] is, then, a film about the breakdown of community and solidarity—both political and personal solidarity.
>
> Leigh: Absolutely, and about the crumbling of the edifice.
>
> *Cineaste*: If, then, things are getting worse in England, how do you see them getting worse?
>
> Leigh: If we talk about England, in reference to *Naked*, we should do so cautiously, since, as I've said, it's not just about England. However, if we do, the fabric of society is collapsing. People are insecure. There is a sense of disintegration which is, as much as anything else, a legacy of the Tories. [. . .] I find it difficult to expend too much energy discussing [*Naked*] as a metaphor for the collapse and decay of the United Kingdom. Whereas you could talk about *High Hopes* in those terms. (68)

Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that society did not exist, however, and according to Leigh, Thatcher was effectively promoting the death of society.

Naked, like *High Hopes*, is about people who are alone, even at the moment that they are with other people. Nearly every character is presented as a victim of an impersonal and ruthless London. Louise (Lesley Sharp), Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge), and the café waitress (Gina McKee) appear battered and demoralized, acutely suffering on their own. Louise attempts to fend for herself, but she feels disconnected, isolated by London's impersonal, indifferent culture. For Louise, returning to her family in Manchester and the comfort, security, and support that they provide is the only way for her to survive. Louise is the only character in *Naked* who has a family to whom she can retreat, however. The remaining characters are alone, seemingly abandoned by their families. Mike Leigh has said that *Naked* "is about displacement—people displaced from their families. I've dealt more with families than just about anybody, but in this film I felt the need to address the situation of people who have drifted away from their families. There have always been people like that" (Ellickson 67). During his breakdown in Louise's flat, Johnny (David Thewlis) reveals that his family compares him to his brother, and Johnny does not

measure up to his brother. His anger, frustration, disillusionment largely stem from this rejection. As a result, he is completely alienated from any human relationship and frightened of accepting assistance from others even though he desperately wants these things. Leonard Quart describes Johnny as a man "whose capacity for anger and cruelty are the strongest elements of his personality" (*The Films of Mike Leigh* 227). He meets people who are willing to help him, but he is incapable of accepting that help, and he deliberately attempts to injure those who offer him assistance. Many characters in the film seem desperate for a connection to someone else, yet they have lost their ability to create those connections. Everyone appears frightened of what relying on someone else might spell for them. They have been taught that they cannot rely on anyone, including family.

David B. Schwartz and other community theorists argue that a culture of aggressive individualism erodes basic forms of support, including familial relationships. *High Hopes* presents London on the brink of being devoid of community, but it also reveals a nearly post-family world as well. Starting a family is the only source of strife between Cyril and Shirley. Cyril believes that the family is dead and that having children only contributes to the growing population of people who are suffering in a selfish society. Cyril's reluctance to have children is directly related to the selfish world he sees around him. He angrily says to Suzi (Judith Scott) and Shirley, "What pisses me off is everyone goes on about the unborn fetus. No one gives a shit what sort of world the kids are being born into." Shirley desperately wants a child, but Cyril is completely against it. He makes a profound pronouncement about the state of the family: "They don't work anymore, families. They ain't got not point." Cyril sees the family's failure all around him. If a person's family cannot be his last and constant source of comfort and support, then the institution itself is dead.

The film's opening scene illustrates that the family structure is crumbling. Wayne (Jason Watkins) is lost because his mother has sent him away without giving him complete directions to his sister's flat. Wayne's trip is precipitated by his mother, who, he claims, has kicked him out of the house because he purchased the wrong kind of pies. Her rejection of him for such an insignificant mistake underscores her lack of affection for her son. Wayne tells Cyril and Shirley that he cannot possibly return home, and his frightened expression provides more evidence that

he is completely without support. He retreats to London to stay with his sister, and his difficult situation is made worse by the fact that she is not at home each time he goes to her flat. This becomes one of the film's recurring themes. Expecting assistance or concern from neighbors or other people is ridiculous, but anticipating any support from family is an equal waste of energy. Essentially, family members are never available when someone needs them. Wayne can find no support from his family, yet he finds a refuge in Cyril and Shirley's modest flat.

The connections between members of the Bender family have nearly disintegrated, as well. Cyril's relationship with his mother is strained, as are the relationships between all of the family members. When Cyril visits his mother, they have little to say to one another, and Mrs. Bender simply falls asleep. Cyril and Valerie avoid communicating with each other, and when they do come face to face, their irritation and near hatred for each other is obvious. These difficult relationships are nothing new to Mike Leigh's films, however. Sibling tension is a common theme in much of his work, including *All or* Nothing (2002), Secrets *and Lies* (1996), and *Meantime* (1983). Cyril and Valerie's distaste for one another does not negatively impact them, however. The real victim is Mrs. Bender, once again. During the heated argument between Cyril and Valerie at Mrs. Bender's birthday party, the two speak as if their mother is not in the room, just as Rupert and Laetitia had done earlier. She stares blankly as everyone around her argues about what she does or does not want, but they never give her a voice in the matter. Leigh holds the camera on Mrs. Bender's pained face while the sounds of Cyril and Valerie shouting swell with the brooding music. Mrs. Bender is victimized again by her own family, yet they are her last hope for aid.

Without the support of her family, Mrs. Bender will certainly suffer, as no one else has any reason to show concern for her. Cyril, however, believes that his mother would be better off if she had no contact with her daughter, Valerie. Once Valerie appears on screen with her mother, his reasons are not difficult to determine. Valerie is openly cruel and hostile toward Mrs. Bender. She shows no affection or concern for her mother, apparently withholding it until Mrs. Bender behaves exactly as Valerie wishes. Mrs. Bender could have gone to Valerie's for Christmas, but refused. As a result, she doesn't get her Christmas gift from Valerie until February. In Valerie's world, people, primarily her family, only earn her attention when they

obey her. In the midst of this scene, Mrs. Bender's marginalization is clear. She hardly has a moment to utter a word to Valerie, and Valerie does not give her mother a chance to open her Christmas gift on her own. Instead, Valerie tears it open and tosses the impersonal blood pressure monitor on Mrs. Bender's lap. Valerie is, at the very least, insensitive, and her constant need to command attention and control every situation merely exacerbates her insensitivity and renders her utterly useless to her mother.

Valerie is a ridiculous figure, the extremely aggressive individual, but her desire to control every person and every situation in her life reveals her ultimate failing. Once she has orchestrated the seating arrangement at her mother's birthday party, she begins to lose control of the situation again. To regain it, she offers a champagne toast: "I'd like to propose a toast for mom's birthday cause it could be her last." The more she attempts to rule everyone and everything in her world, the more frustrated she becomes, leading to her breakdown at the party. Ray Carney views Valerie's efforts as a significant metaphor in the film:

> The dramatic metaphor surfaces in *High Hopes* during Mrs. Bender's birthday gathering, where Valerie attempts to script and direct the "surprise" party to the point where the surprise, the party, and the interest disappear. Like Keith [in *Nuts in May*] earlier, Valerie functions as a dictatorial actor-writer-director who refuses to tolerate the least deviation from her script and storyboard. For her, as for some film directors, actors are clearly cattle. She has decided how they should play their roles and has blocked out their positions and movements in advance. Rather than letting the people she has brought together bring their unique expressive gifts to a scene, so that they may exhibit feelings and attitudes different from her own, she robs them of their uniqueness by forcing them to play their parts according to her conception of them.[7] (183-4)

Valerie's world, however, has room for only one individual, and that is Valerie herself. In fact, most of *High Hopes*' characters view the world in much the same way. In succumbing to the individualist ideology, they value their own experiences, needs, and opinions above everyone else's, and in so doing, they delegitimize anyone who differs from them. Their aggressive individualism, ironically, denies others their individuality. Rather than creating a welcoming

space for varying identities, these individuals view difference as a form of opposition that must be eliminated.

Ray Carney deliberately illustrates Valerie's attempts to control the party in cinematic terms. Valerie's party is a failure because she refuses to collaborate and allow room for individual identities, yet Mike Leigh practices this very kind of collaboration on all of his films. Leigh creates an inclusive community throughout the entire film production process, and his willingness to collaborate is one of the marks of his significant achievements as a director. Richard Porton discusses Mike Leigh's significance to British film, but his remarks reveal a significant aspect of Leigh's own worldview: "Perhaps one of the few figures who will eventually be remembered as equally important within the history of both British theater and cinema, Leigh (who trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) is known for creating plays and film scenarios that are the product of an intimate process of collaboration with unusually talented casts" (59). Leigh introduces play in all of his films by coming to the initial cast meeting with no script. He is no Valerie, directing everyone, choreographing their every move. Each cast member brings something to the creative process, and the film only gets made when everyone involved listens to one another and develops a story together. Leigh's films create, for the time that the cast and crew are together, a community of individuals who work together but who all maintain their individuality. Cyril and Shirley mimic this process in their interactions with others.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Cyril and Shirley present the only source of relief from the fragmented, careless society in *High Hopes* because they have not bought into the Thatcherite ethos. They exist outside the consumer culture, and they express no interest in becoming part of the enterprise class. The stark contrast between them and the other couples is made clear from the beginning when comparing their homes and possessions, and these material possessions define them. Rupert and Laetitia have purchased a council home and renovated it to measured perfection. Valerie owns a detatched home and has decorated every square inch of it. Martin becomes, in Cyril and Shirley's humorous exchange, "The jerk in the Merc, the wanker in the tanker, the weasel in the diesel." Cyril and Shirley live in a third floor walkup that is small and sparsely decorated, yet

<p style="text-align:center">131</p>

they are the most content individuals in the film despite their limited income and possessions. Unlike the Burkes and the Booth-Braines, Cyril and Shirley do not value possessions over relationships. Their connections to each other and their openness to other people set them apart because these connections are the source of contentment. Their happiness is not tied to material possessions. In fact, *High Hopes* clearly illustrates that accumulating possessions and neglecting people's needs will not create the comfortable, happy life that Thatcher promised.

The binary between individualism and community is strongly defined in *High Hopes*. Consumerism, wealth accumulation, and personal isolationism become the selfish individual's primary attributes. In the Thatcherite ideology, however, these are the marks of a successful individual. Although Martin and Rupert, in particular, are considered success stories, they lack any compassion or concern for anyone but themselves. Laura E. Nym Mayhall asserts that *High Hopes* stresses another approach: "Regardless of the political label attached, Leigh suggests, human values such as compassion, generosity, and nurturing should not be abandoned in the quest for material success" (197). Martin, Valerie, Rupert, and Laetitia behave in a way that suggests that these human values are a hindrance to achieving prosperity, and the film itself reinforces the binary between compassion and wealth. Cyril and Shirley, who have the least and have no interest in acquiring more, have these human values in abundance, while the others—the Booth-Braines, for example—have no compassion, but a have significant material wealth. While Mayhall may read Leigh's presentation as a call for both progress and community, the film seems to suggest that striving for financial success automatically requires the individual to forfeit his compassion for others.

The selfish/supportive binary is particularly obvious when Martin attempts to give Cyril pointers on how to be more successful. Martin has made his small fortune by taking his place in the enterprise culture, owning a used car lot and a hamburger joint, but he is at least generous enough to share his secret for success with Cyril. Martin is a treasure-trove of financial advice, telling Cyril that he needs to "speculate to accumulate," and Martin is preoccupied with accumulating as much money as possible at other people's expense. Martin believes that the real benefit to being a business owner is that he can get rich primarily from other people's work rather than his own.

MARTIN.	Your best bet is to form yourself a little company.
CYRIL.	What for?
MARTIN.	Well, you let all the other wallies do the dirty work, and you sit in happy valley collecting the dosh.[8]

Cyril, in contrast, does not want to start his own company precisely because Martin's business principles—or lack of any principles—run counter to his own. In *All or Nothing: The Cinema of Mike Leigh*, Edward Trostle Jones asserts, "To Cyril, capitalism produces an unjust society, in which economic values drive out human values. Greed and consumerism prevail at the expense of spiritual wholeness and human relationships. The unrelenting pursuit of profits undermines familial and communal bonds; therefore, capitalism debases human morality by corrupting the rich and brutalizing the poor" (36). Martin actually confirms Cyril's suspicions by telling Cyril that "Every man has his price." Given the proper amount of profit, every man, according to Martin, will gladly exchange his principles. Once he has done this, Martin can view people as simple commodities, available for exploitation and profit. John Hill argues that in setting Martin and Cyril in opposition to one another, Leigh does not focus on Thatcher's victims but on her victors. "By setting these lifestyles alongside each other, the film then offers less an attack on the economic hardship suffered by the losers in Thatcher's Britain [. . .] than a critique of the cultural 'barbarianism' associated with its economic beneficiaries" (Hill 193). Cyril and Shirley do not benefit from the enterprise culture, but they do not suffer from it, either. More importantly, they do not inflict suffering on anyone else. Their principles affect nearly every aspect of their lives, and their concern for others ultimately makes them the most successful people in the film. Their compassion for people allows them to develop a welcoming and supportive place for individuals who are suffering on their own.

Cyril and Shirley's conversations with one another are markedly different from the other couples' because they operate on these principles of mutual concern. Cyril and Shirley are more effective because they listen to one another and respect each other's opinions, even if they ultimately do not agree. They see that there are multiple points of view on a given subject, and they frequently show their willingness to accept differing viewpoints. In giving directions to Wayne, Cyril tells him to go "right and then right." Shirley remarks that he could just as easily

go "left and then left." Their conflicting directions may seem insignificant, but this minor difference of opinion would quickly bring Rupert and Laetitia or Valerie and Martin to an impasse. Cyril and Shirley, in the end, agree that either way will get Wayne to his destination. Not only are they willing to accept each other's directions, but they turn their conflict into a joke. In Cyril and Shirley's world, there is always more than one way to view a situation.

Even in the midst of their arguments, Cyril and Shirley display tenderness and concern for one another that is absent from the other couple's relationships. Cyril is agitated after their visit with Suzie, and he lashes out at Shirley because they have differing views on whether or not to have children. In the midst of the tension, however, the two communicate with one another respectfully. They lower their voices and choose their words carefully, earnestly attempting to understand one another. Unlike Rupert and Laetitia, Cyril and Shirley actually converse with one another. Back at their apartment, Cyril is visibly agitated, but Shirley quickly calms him when she reveals that she simply wants to know how he feels.

> CYRIL.   Don't tell me what to say.
> SHIRLEY.   I ain't telling you. I'm asking you.

Shirley wants to understand Cyril's reluctance to have a child, and she wants Cyril to understand her desire for one. She does not try to control Cyril at this moment like Valerie attempts to control Martin with the bread and water. Cyril fears that Shirley might leave him because he does not want to start a family, but she tells him that she loves him in spite of his refusals. Ray Carney asserts that Cyril and Shirley set the standard for supportive relationships in the midst of their arguments: "The ideal partnering is one that trusts the other enough to allow each to move somewhat independently of (and, if need be, at odds with) the other. The greatest drama doesn't come out of merging, compromising, or blending individual points of view, but from honoring and bringing differences into play" (190). Cyril and Shirley's exchanges lack the urgency and anger inherent in Martin and Valerie's disagreements. While Valerie and Martin continually fight for control even over the simplest situations, Cyril and Shirley's conversations reveal that there is no need to claim control. Cyril and Shirley simply do not attempt to change each other. They allow room for more than one way of seeing the world.

Some critics accuse Mike Leigh of creating stereotypical characters who border on the ridiculous in his films. The Booth-Braines and the Burkes are characters that critics often cite as example of Leigh's unfair treatment. Those Leigh promotes are allowed subdued, natural performances, while those he disdains must be over the top. John Hill explains, "For the degree of acting which is 'displayed' by actors varies and it is characteristically the least likeable characters who are associated with the most 'excessive' performances (and, hence, criticism)" (196). Although their performances are excessive, their characters remain underdeveloped. Cyril and Shirley are more rounded, and, as a result, more human. Ray Carney defends the disparity between the two characterizations:

> In *High Hopes*, there is no question that Rupert and Laetitia and Valerie and Martin are simpler and less nuanced than Cyril and Shirley, but Leigh uses the stylistic mismatch for expressive effect. The "flatness" of the first two couples communicates their flat-mindedness, while Cyril and Shirley's expressive depth communicates their imaginative depth. Cyril and Shirley seem all the more complex because the others function as stylistic foils. (181)

In addition, the differences between Cyril and Shirley and their selfish counterparts illustrate yet another negative effect of aggressive individualism. Leonard Quart argues that "Sometimes the films get so bogged down in caricature and over-the-top behavior [. . .] that [Leigh] reduces his characters to their class stereotypes. Their class and culture become the prime definitions of their identity, and they begin to lose their individuality and layering as characters" ("Introduction" 7). Some critics may argue that these representations are flawed or that Leigh's treatment of them is overtly ideological, but aggressive individualism allows no room for difference. As a result, those who pursue the individualist ethos ultimately lose their individuality.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

In order for meaningful, supportive relationships to develop, people must make allowances for individuals who are different, as well as allowing their identities to shift. Just as Shahid in Kureishi's *The Black Album* plays with his identity, Cyril and Shirley role-play in their relationship. Their play is fun and harmless, rather than the insistent play of Valerie and Martin or the childish play of Rupert and Laetitia, and it is this flexibility, this willingness to allow for

differences that makes them the most caring characters in the film. They make room for more than one identity. They also restore a comedic spirit to a largely depressing film. Ray Carney suggests that their flexibility, their openness to otherness is the heart of their successful relationship:

> In particular, what Cyril and Shirley demonstrate when they play together that the other two couples lack, is the ability to enlarge their identities through theatricality. They show that they are no one thing. They show how many different tones, moods, and feelings can be held in suspension in one individual, how many different people exist, at least potentially, in each of us. (181)

Rather than forcing a limited identity, one that requires them to give up many other aspects of themselves, Cyril and Shirley allow for some play. Their relationship is more loving than the other couples' relationships, as a result, but this also allows them to welcome others into their world.

Community, for Cyril and Shirley, is not a fixed group of people. Rather, it is an idea, a way of treating those around them with care and concern. They create a welcoming space for Wayne and take him into their home without question or hesitation. They are the pictures of hospitality. Cyril and Shirley show no signs of irritation with Wayne or with finding him on their doorstep more than once. They are genuinely willing to assist him in finding his sister's flat, but they also take time to offer him a cup of tea and a biscuit before they send him on his way again. They stand in stark contrast to Rupert and Laetitia, who are reluctant to let their own next door neighbor into their home. The Booth-Braines leave no question as to how they feel about Mrs. Bender, and they are quite adept at making her feel unwelcome. Ironically, they treat her like a simple-minded child. Mrs. Bender is far from being simple-minded, but Wayne is exactly that. Cyril and Shirley, nevertheless, treat him with care and respect. They go as far as inviting Wayne to stay the night with them, knowing that he has nowhere else to go. Their behavior toward Wayne is a simple manifestation of their humanistic ethos. They are concerned not only for their own well-being, but for others' as well. Unlike the Booth-Braines, Cyril and Shirley's field of vision expands beyond the walls of their own home. Cyril worries about everyone, and he worries that he has done nothing to change the situation. "I want everyone to have enough to

eat…Places to live, jobs," Cyril wishes. Although space is cramped in the flat, it is worth noting that they have a spare room. No matter how meager the offering, Cyril and Shirley always make room for those in need.

John Hill criticizes Cyril and Shirley for not being more socially or politically active in promoting their vision of a supportive society. Hill claims, "In this respect, for all of their intuitive humanism, Cyril and Shirley would appear to lack any clear sense of connection or involvement with a more broadly based social or political community and tradition" (197). [9] Cyril laments that he has done little to change his world for the better. He compares himself to Karl Marx and determines that he has failed everyone around him. Karl Marx "set down a program for change. Without Marx, there would have been nothing," according to Cyril. He tells Shirley, "I'm a dead loss. Don't do nothing, but sit here complaining." Cyril even mentions that he feels "cut off," and much of this stems from his inability to subvert the carelessness of Thatcherite Britain. Edward Trostle Jones recognizes Cyril and Shirley's failings as well, but he argues that their humanism distinguishes them as decidedly more productive than the other couples:

> So while we identify with Cyril and Shirley as the most compassionate characters in *High Hopes*, who transcend the limitations of materialism and pride in possessions demonstrated by the other couples, Leigh does not wholly excuse their lack of ambition and their reliance on hashish. Nevertheless, this couple act far less in a moral vacuum as parallel to and reflective of the market economy espoused by the film's other couples. (39)

Hill, nevertheless, claims that Cyril and Shirley are ultimately no better than the Burkes and the Booth-Braines. He cites Cyril and Shirley's apparent isolation from their own neighbors as evidence: "And while the film chides the lack of neighbourliness shown by the Booth-Braines towards Mrs. Bender, there is no evidence of any 'community' in the block of flats in which Cyril and Shirley live (where no neighbours are seen, or identified at all)" (197). Cyril and Shirley's neighbors are no different from anyone else in *High Hopes*. Every segment of society has been affected by the individualist agenda. Although Leigh often implicitly supports the working class in his films, in *High Hopes* he makes no argument that the working class is more

attuned to providing solutions than anyone else. In "The Religion of the Market," Leonard Quart explains, "*High Hopes* provides no political alternative to Thatcherism, but it suggests ways to live more humanly, even amid the social inequity and meanness of Thatcher's England" (32). Cyril and Shirley set the example for change. They are literally the last bastion of community in the film. Their compassion is the basis of their ability to create a community of support. Jones argues:

> What finally distinguishes Cyril and Shirley from the other couples is their human capacity to love anything and each other, an irrepressible Eros that eludes Peter and Sylvia [in *Bleak Moments*]. Cyril and Shirley have acquired an inclination, desire, and ability to consider people for the qualities they possess and to react emotionally to those qualities, whether in the aimless and lost Wayne or the equally vulnerable Mrs. Bender. (Jones 40)

The simple fact that Cyril and Shirley consider people at all distinguishes them from everyone else. The other characters live and move among other people, but they never take a moment to acknowledge their existence.

Regardless of his generosity toward his mother and Wayne, Cyril is not beyond reproach. He has the potential to fail at creating a welcoming community because his hatred for the middle and upper classes always allows him to keep them at a distance. By doing so, he is in danger of becoming exactly like Valerie—essentially alone. He relies on Shirley for his comfort and connection to the rest of the world, but he frequently rejects the community that she fosters. Developing connections to others does not come naturally to Cyril, but this kind of support requires a conscious effort. He must overcome his own prejudices to create a community with anyone. People such as Rupert, Laetitia, and Martin would never need the support of others, but Cyril and Shirley extend their offer to those who desperately need help. They rebuild community with these people. Valerie, given her perpetual failure to control her world and given her emotional collapse at the birthday party, may not be far behind in crying out for assistance.

John Hill attributes Valerie's breakdown to her inability to have a child, rather than her isolation. Hill asserts that the film's preoccupation with unrealized motherhood and Cyril's ultimate decision to have a child with Shirley reinforces the Thatcherite ideology:

> The decision of Cyril and Shirley to have a child, therefore, invests the end of the film with a degree of optimism (or 'high hopes') about the future. However, while the film may, in this way, succeed in expressing values of care and responsibility which cut across the prevailing ethos of Thatcherism, it only does so by partly reproducing conservative (and, indeed, Thatcherite) values regarding the family and women. (198)

Hill's insistence that the women in the film are unhappy merely because they do not have children, however, reinforces conservative female identities. Valerie calls her dog "Baby," as Hill carefully points out, but this minor fact does not signify that the source of Valerie's mania or impending breakdown is infertility. Laetitia gives no indication that she wants to have a child. In fact, she appears incapable of paying attention to anyone but herself. Shirley, while preoccupied with having a baby, cannot be described as unhappy. Cyril's decision to have a child with Shirley is significant because he finds hope for change. Cyril and Shirley are the two people who have proven themselves capable of being a source of support for others, and they are able to provide a child a good life.

Hill asserts, "As such, a film like *High Hopes* ends up conforming to a conservative ideology of 'familialism' that is little different from that associated with Thatcherism" (198). The film does end with a clear endorsement of family, but this is becoming a caring family, one that does not exist throughout *High Hopes*. Hill overlooks the fact that Wayne and Suzi cannot cling to family and that they turn, instead, to Cyril and Shirley for support. The film ends with Cyril and Shirley welcoming Mrs. Bender into their home, but such a gesture does not limit their community to family alone. Cyril and Shirley begin to make progress with their supportive community by beginning with Mrs. Bender. Their "movement" works from the basis of the family.

Leigh concludes *High Hopes* with an optimistic vision for the future. Throughout the film, he limits the audience's view of the landscape. The camera focuses on Mrs. Bender's home situated in the middle of two others, but the frame includes no other part of the street. The camera angles and the field of vision are always tight and restrictive. Mrs. Bender's view of the world is limited to her living room. Rupert and Laetitia never look past their own front door. At

the end of the film, however, Cyril and Shirley take Mrs. Bender to the top of their building and show her their view. Cyril and Shirley's worldview is more broad and encompassing. It is an awe-inspiring sight for Mrs. Bender because she can look over the rooftops of a diverse and expansive London. Mrs. Bender no longer appears distraught or dejected. This final scene is the first hint that she could be happy. Michael Coveney views the final scene as decidedly optimistic for Cyril, Shirley, and Mrs. Bender: "'It's the top of the world,' whispers Mum, pleased to be up there. Life could be worth living. A child would enjoy this view. People have each other. All in all, Cyril's lucky" (193). Life is worth living because Cyril and Shirley are willing to provide support to others in need. Their fledgling community effectively ends Mrs. Bender's victimization and provides a model, as Leigh puts it, for "how things *should* be."

CONCLUSION

The conception of this post-city, in fact, postcommunity, society that comes through, then is of a great locale-independent sea of contacts with little vestigial locale-anchored pockets of communities here and there; a great impersonal world where groups, classes, coalitions, and alliances form and re-form, but remain always in flux, unanchored to any locale. It is a conception of a society in which it makes little difference to people where they live.

—Jessie Bernard, *The Sociology of Community*

Communitarianism presents itself as an answer to the problems created by the failures of the old ("statist") left and the new ("marketising") right, promising the prospect of a third way between state and market.

—John Clarke,
"Public Nightmares and Communitarian Dreams"

The word community has universal appeal. People cling to the promise of a society in which everyone is equal, understood, and nurtured, and the word connotes all of these ideals. As a result, political party leaders have made "community" a significant part of their platforms. In "Community and Its 'Virtual' Promises," Mihaela Kelemen and Warren Smith note, "In the last two decades the imagery of community has been heavily drawn upon by both New Right and New Left politics, in response to problems as diverse as unemployment, crime, poverty, individual alienation and the 'collapse of the moral order' (Etzioni)" (373).[1] Developing community—or reviving it—has become the answer to the problem of a divided and uncaring society.

In the 1979 Conservative Manifesto foreword, Margaret Thatcher accused the Labour pary of dividing the nation and stripping individuals of their rights. She wrote,

> No one who has lived in this country during the last five years can fail to be aware
> of how the balance of our society has been increasingly tilted in favour of the
> State at the expense of individual freedom. [. . .] First, by practising the politics of
> envy and by actively discouraging the creation of wealth, they have set one group
> against another in an often bitter struggle to gain a larger share of a weak
> economy.

According to Thatcher, the Labour party had set Britons against one another by forcing them to share meager resources. Equality was to be found in allowing each individual to work for what he needed or wanted.

On the other side of the political battleground, James Callaghan argued in the same year that the Conservative party's platform would spell injustice and inequality for Britons. He urged Britons to continue working toward a caring society. In his foreword, Callaghan wrote,

> Now, more than ever, we need Labour's traditional values of cooperation, social
> justice, and fairness. [. . .] Our purpose is to overcome the evils of inequality,
> poverty, racial bigotry, and make Britain truly one nation. [. . .] Our purpose is to
> deepen the sense of unity and kinship and community feeling that has always
> marked out our fellow countrymen and women. No nation can succeed by
> accepting benefits without responsibilities. I ask everybody who shares our ideals
> and our faith in Britain to join with us in securing the return of a government that
> dares to turn the dream of a caring society into practical action. And then work
> with us to complete the building of a Britain offering hope, social justice, and
> fairness to all.

The Labour party made little mention of individuals throughout its 1979 manifesto, choosing, instead, to invoke community as the foundation for a prosperous future in Britain. The two parties drew a distinct dividing line between each other. The Conservatives argued that individualism and equality were intimately linked, while the Labour party claimed that equality could only be achieved through community.

In his conclusion to *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, Stuart Hall proposed a means for recovering Labour's footing in the wake of Thatcher's

unparalleled tenure. The conclusion's title formed the basis of his proposal—"Learning from Thatcherism." The title, as Hall acknowledged, would likely raise the ire of Labour party loyalists. For many of them, nothing could be learnt from Thatcherism because everything about it was wrong. Hall noted, "The very idea of Thatcherism is anathema to the left. Decent people everywhere hate and revile it. Where Thatcherism is, there the left cannot be. They inhabit two, not only different and hostile, but mutually-exclusive worlds" (Hall 272). According to Hall, the left's insistence on maintaining the binary between themselves and Thatcherism was the source of its failure to effectively counter Thatcher's administration. Attempting to understand both sides of the binary, and perhaps admitting that both have merit, is the first step in developing an effective manifesto.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Previous considerations of community have maintained the binary between community and individualism—or, where community is, there the individual cannot be. Although the desire for community is as pronounced as it has been in the past, many community theorists have begun to fear that the potential for creating the "caring society" through community is lost if the individual/community binary remains. In *The Sufficient Community: Putting People First*, Chris Wright asserts that in order to reclaim community as a useful project, we must re-examine as well as revise it. The literature and films from the Thatcher era perform this important duty. They seem to mark a shift in the field of community studies, illustrating that a supportive society can develop when the divide between maintaining community or individualism dissolves. The post-community of these novels and films develops irrespective of social position, religion, ethnicity, language, and location. These communities are formed on the basis of human need, or as Jean-Luc Nancy describes it, "being in common." By allowing group members to maintain their individual identities and agency, these communities provide a sense of support and belonging that no other group is capable of delivering, particularly the family.

In Penelope Fitzgerald's *Offshore*, the barge community retains a few significant connections to traditional considerations of community. It is locale-specific, and when individual members decide to withdraw to life on shore, the community disintegrates. Although the members of the group come from all walks of life, a hierarchical structure still exists. Richard is

<div align="center">143</div>

the most successful member, and as a result of his ability to maintain a structured life, the others recognize him as their established leader. The lower class members willingly yield to his better judgment. This community differs from traditional formations, however, because it is not formed on standard bases of commonality. The members of the community display a remarkable ability to welcome one another into the fold without reservation and without any consideration for their differences. What they share in common is their collective inability "to be like other people" (*Offshore* 10). They cannot maintain their individuality onshore, but offshore, in their community, these people give and receive assistance while being respected as unique individuals.

Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*, Mike Leigh's *High Hopes*, and the work of British Asian and British black writers take the post-community one step further. No longer concerned with the location of their members, these communities are more fluid. Unlike the Battersea Reach community, which crumbles when a member departs, these groups withstand departures of old members and the arrivals of new ones. As Marcus reveals in *About a Boy*, "It doesn't matter who they are, does it, as long as they're there and you don't let them go away without finding someone else" (299). This new post-community provides a useful roadmap for repairing a splintered diasporic world. By expanding the basis for inclusion in any community to the simple fact that everyone needs support, the divisions between individuals and various groups collapse. Such sentiments may seem naively optimistic, but the proliferation of virtual communities suggests that an open, welcoming community, one that embraces diversity is something that people are interested in cultivating.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The number of websites dedicated to providing individuals a place to connect with one another and offer information and comfort to each other increases every day. People around the world can find support groups through simple searches on the Internet, and within seconds, they can get advice and information from a caring community of individuals who understand their specific needs. Howard Rheingold asserts in "A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community," "Virtual communities might be real communities, they might be pseudocommunities, or they might be something entirely new in the realm of social contracts, but I believe they are in part a

<p style="text-align:center">144</p>

response to the hunger for community that has followed the disintegration of traditional communities around the world." These virtual communities are not entirely new. They provide the support that traditional communities once provided, but they do not resemble traditional communities in terms of their construction.

Virtual communities respond to the failures of the traditional community by being more inclusive. Like the post-community, virtual communities are not locale-specific. People around the world can join an online group; they are not isolated from one another by distance or time. In addition, ethnic and racial differences are largely irrelevant in these communities. Howard Rheingold notes, "We do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind. Millions of us have already built communities where our identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location." These communities, by virtue of their disembodied nature, allow for the interplay of differences because those differences are unseen. Mihaela Keleman and Warren Smith explain that proponents cite this as one of the virtual community's greatest virtues:

> "Optimists" portray the virtual community as removing social constraints and allowing for liberation. Here the virtual community is presented as a place where the individual is liberated from the social constraints derived from an embodied identity [. . .]. Thus, the "virtual community" is seen to be build upon "points of difference" rather than similarities between individuals. (376)

The virtual community is an inclusive community, capable of providing a place of fulfillment, concern, understanding, and belonging for individuals without demanding a single group identity. It is a perfect model of the post-community, reflecting Jean-Luc's vision of a "community formed by an articulation of 'particularities,' and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular beings into itself" (75). The dissolution of the individual/community binary is the foundation of the post community. Where community is, there individualism must be as well.

NOTES

Introduction

1   Thatcher delivered these remarks to a group of "aspiring businesspeople" (Gardner 236).

2   The response to Thatcher in the two polls, however, is not unusual for a political figure. In all fairness, Tony Blair found himself on both lists, and had the dubious distinction of being number one on the "Worst Britons" list.

3   Sir Keith Joseph is regarded as the man responsible for turning Thatcher into an "ism." Margaret Thatcher called him her closest friend in politics, and she relied on Joseph to effectively articulate the primary tenets of Milton Friedman's free-market monetarism. Friedman was an American economist who was known for his strong advocacy of laissez-faire economics. He won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1976. Although Margaret Thatcher has become the public face of these economic policies, the ultimate responsibility for developing and promoting the policies rests with Joseph.

4   Tebbit is Norman Tebbit, who served in a number of capacities in Thatcher's cabinet, one position being Secretary of State for Employment. Tebbit had once remarked that his father was unemployed, but he never participated in a strike. Instead, he got on his bike and looked for work. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown makes veiled references to this comment, and it actually became part of a slogan to encourage people to look for work: "On yer bike!"

Tebbit is also well-known for his "cricket test." He claimed that an immigrant could only be considered British if he or she cheered for Britain in cricket matches rather than for the country from which they emigrated.

5   Stuart Hall enumerates the creative accounting that Thatcher's administration used to understate unemployment figures:

> [. . .] in spite of the extensive manipulation of the figures (one of the government's undeniable successes) there is very little sign of a turn-around on unemployment. School-leavers can be shunted sideways by Lord Young into schemes with little prospect of full-time employment at their end; their entry to the dole can be delayed; a proportion of the marginal and long-term unemployed can be squeezed off the register. (81)

6   Alibhai-Brown refers to Norman Tebbit's rallying cry to the unemployed.

Chapter One

1   The campaign poster slogan is taken from Jeffrey Weeks essay, "The Value of Difference."

2   The "decade [. . .] of human selfishness" to which Weeks refers is the 1980s in Britain, but given the close political and ideological ties between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, a similar decade played out in the United States.

3   Sarason wrote his study of our psychological need for community in 1977. While Jeffrey Weeks argues that the 1980s was a particularly selfish period and the need for community was greater in the 1990s as a result, Sarason's study reveals that this need is almost always present.

4   Etzioni refers to Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), and the chapter "Health and Happiness" (Chapter 20) in particular; Francis Fukuyama's study is titled *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

5   Tönnies' theories can be found in *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1957.

6   Tönnies uses *eine Verbindung*. Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis explain its meaning: "translatable as union, association, connection, combination, alliance, etc. Elsewhere in the book Tönnies uses the word specifically to mean the kind of holistic organic bonding that he attributes to *Gemeinschaft*, but here it is used in a more general way to cover groups in both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*" (17).

7   Alibhai-Brown includes an example of the perpetual rejection that a British Indian teacher experienced:

> I talked in English, proper convent English. To my colleagues this meant that I was a fraud, not a real Indian. I wore saris to school and my head told me it was a health hazard so I had to wear trousers. This same head then went to India on tour and came back with all his souvenirs of the "real" India. He never promoted me, treated me like I was nothing and the harder I tried, the harder he became. It was just so difficult for us. What were we to do? (7)

8   Weeks refers to the Labour Party's campaign in early 1989 to define its purpose as returning to a humanistic tradition and to President Gorbachev's 1988 speech to the United Nations that called for "an ending of the arbitrary divisions between peoples" (91).

Chapter Two

1   "RNVR" is the acronym for Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

2   Waring Smith is the protagonist of Fitzgerald's novel *The Golden Child*, a mystery that she published in 1977.

3   "GPO" is the acronym for the British General Post Office. Margaret Thatcher's administration abolished it in 1981 through privatization. Its services are now provided by Royal Mail.

Chapter Three

1   In "Outside the Whale," Rushdie refers to Thatcher's attempts to rebuild the British Empire rhetorically as a means of encouraging Britons to ignore their economic problems and to neglect the needs of others. He claims, "And there can be little doubt that in Britain today the refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image is under way. The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourages many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence" (92).

Chapter Four

1   Throughout this essay, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* will be abbreviated as *TBS*.

2   Throughout this essay, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* will be abbreviated as *TBA*.

3   The British National Party is also known as the National Front, a political group that seeks to repatriate non-white immigrants back to their native lands. The Party clearly outlines its national platform on its website (http://www.natfront.com):

In the case of Britain the National Front upholds the wish of the majority of British people for Britain to remain a white country, with customs and a culture which have been developed to suit our character. Consequently the National Front would halt all non-white immigration into Britain and introduce a policy of phased and humane repatriation of all coloured people currently resident here. Such a policy would be expected to extend over 10-15 years and its completion would thus depend on the recurrent election of successive NF governments.

4   Throughout this essay, Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* will be abbreviated as *MBL*.

5   Deedee refers to Orwell's essay, "England, Your England."

6   Ilona refers to Orwell's essay "England, Your England" and quotes:

The vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while your feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos! [. . .] But talk to foreigners, read foreign books or newspapers, and you are brought back to the same thought. Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization.

Orwell later reveals,

You can see the hesitation we feel on this point by the fact that we call our islands by no less than six different names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion. Even the differences between north and south England loom large in our own eyes. But somehow these differences fade away the moment that any two Britons are confronted by a European.

7   The crisis to which Weeks refers is the conflict that arose in Britain after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

8   The Southall Black Sisters is a resource center in London for Asian, African, and African Caribbean women. Case workers provide assistance to these women regarding domestic problems, harassment, both sexual and racial, and immigration. The Southall Black Sisters also work to defend and extend the rights of black women.

9   Gurinder Chadha is perhaps best known for the very successful film *Bend It Like Beckham*, which she directed in 2002. Chadha began her career as a reporter for the BBC in Birmingham. Her other credits include two films for Channel 4, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *I'm British, But…*, and a Bollywood-inspired revision of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, titled *Bride and Prejudice*, which was released in early 2005.

10 Max Stafford Clarke is one of the most controversial and influential directors in the United Kingdom. He is currently the Artistic Director for the Out-of-Joint acting company.

11 Andrea Levy is the British-born daughter of Jamaican parents. Her fiction explores the difficulties that British blacks—and children of immigrants, in particular—face in contemporary Britain. Levy won the 2004 Orange Prize for her fourth novel, *Small Island*, a story that follows a Jamaican immigrant and a Briton during 1948, a year of drastic social change in Britain.

Chapter Five

1   Satyajit Ray is quoted in Charles Barr's introduction to *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1986. 9.

2   Rushdie refers specifically to the Raj films popular during the 1980s, including *Ghandi* and *A Passage to India*, and the television serials "The Far Pavilions" and "The Raj Quartet." These films, according to Rushdie, encouraged Britons to remember their great imperial heritage, in particular, even while Britain's significance on the world stage was in a steady state of decline.

3   The films that Higson focuses on are *Maurice*, *A Room with a View*, *Another Country*, *Chariots of Fire*, and *A Passage to India*.

4   According to Leonard Quart, this policy allowed one million families to become first-time homeowners ("Biographical and Cultural Introduction," *The Films of Mike Leigh* 4).

5   Although both Leonard Quart and Ray Carney are the authors of *The Films of Mike Leigh: Embracing the World*, the editor's note clearly defines their separate contributions to the text. The note states, "Leonard Quart contributed the 'Biographical and Cultural Introduction' and Chapter 13, 'Desperate Lives: *Naked*.' Ray Carney wrote the rest of the text, chose the photographs, and wrote the captions" (x).

6 One interview in which Leigh discusses the tension between conforming and maintaining individual agency is his conversation with Lee Ellickson and Richard Porton for *Cineaste*, "I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life: An Interview with Mike Leigh."

7 According to Carney's analysis of Mike Leigh's body of work, most of Leigh's films include a dramatic metaphor of his own working style. *High Hopes* is no exception. In it, Valerie and Martin, and Laetitia and Rupert must work according to a specific script. This script is not simply for themselves, but it is a map for the way in which everyone around them should behave. Cyril and Shirley are the individuals who can function without a script. In fact, they seem comfortable allowing everyone to behave in whatever way they see fit. They are open to different identities for each individual.

8 *Wally* and *dosh* are British slang. *Wally*, whose origin is uncertain but may be a diminutive of Walter, refers to individuals who are thought of as stupid or insignificant. The *Oxford English Dicionary* cites another connotation, however, with a reference from the *Times* on 8 August 1974: "They choose to be known as the Wallies of Wessex, Wally being a conveniently anonymous umbrella for vulnerable individuals." This connotation is particularly intriguing when considering Martin's remarks. He wants the people he views as insignificant to perform all of his work, but he is, of course, exploiting vulnerable individuals who need the job.

   Dosh, whose origin is unknown, is a slang term for money that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, first appeared in 1959.

9 In the selfish wasteland that is London, however, Cyril and Shirley's difficulties with making a broader connection or starting a humanist movement are understandable. The post-community, in addition, develops as a fluid community. It is not rigidly defined as a political or social group. It is more about a specific behavior.

Conclusion

1 Keleman and Smith quote Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

REFERENCES

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. *Imagining the New Britain*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Anwar, Farrah. "Is There a Sodomite in the House?" *Guardian* 7 August 1992: 29.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "The Self in a Consumer Society." *The Hedgehog Review* 1 (Fall 1999): 35-40.

Bawer, Bruce. "A Still, Small Voice: The Novels of Penelope Fitzgerald." *New Criterion* 10.7 (March 1992): 33-42.

Behrens, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Heath to Thatcher: Policies and Politics 1974-1979*. Westmead, Farnborough: Saxon House, 1980.

Bernard, Jessie. *The Sociology of Community*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1973.

Bidiss, Michael. "Thatcherism: Concept and Interpretations." *Thatcherism: Personality and Politics*. Eds. Michael Biddiss and Kenneth R. Minogue. New York: St. Martin's, 1987.

Blake, Robert. *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Unavowable Community*. Trans. Pierre Joris. Barryton, NY: Station Hill, 1983.

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern British Novel*. London: Penguin, 1994.

Brenkman, John. "Family, Community, Polis: The Freudian Structure of Feeling." *New Literary History* 23.4 (Autumn 1992): 923-54.

Carney, Ray, and Leonard Quart. *The Films of Mike Leigh: Embracing the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Caughie, John. *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1996.

Clements, Paul. *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh*. London: Methuen, 1983.

Cohen, A. P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock, 1985.

Coveney, Michael. *The World According to Mike Leigh*. London: Harper Collins, 1996.

Crowdus, Gary, and Dan Georgakas, ed. *The Cineaste Interviews 2: On the Art and Politics of the Cinema*. Chicago: Lake View, 2002.

Davis, Joseph E. "Healing the Fragmented Self." *The Hedgehog Review* 1.1 (Fall 1999): 47-53.

Deneen, Patrick J. "Lonesome No More!: Individualism and the Rise of Democratic Despotism." *The Hedgehog Review* 4.1 (Spring 2002): 57-73.

Dodd, Philip. *The Battle Over Britain*. London: Demos, 1995.

Ellickson, Lee, and Richard Porton. "I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life: An Interview with Mike Leigh." *Cineaste* 20.3 (1994). Rpt. in *Mike Leigh Interviews*. Ed. Howie Movshovitz. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2000. 59-78.

English, James F. *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor, and the Politics of Community in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994.

Etzioni, Amitai. "Individualism—within History." *The Hedgehog Review* 4.1 (Spring 2002): 49-56.

Featherstone, Mike. "The Citizen and Cyberspace." *The Hedgehog Review* 1.1 (Fall 1999): 63-69.

Fitzgerald, Penelope. *The Bookshop*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.

- - -. *Offshore*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

Friedman, Lester, ed. *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Gardner, Howard. "Margaret Thatcher: A Clear Sense of Identity." *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.

Gilroy, Paul. *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Gould, Carol. *Marx's Social Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978.

Hall, Stuart. *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London: Verso, 1998.

— — —, and Martin Jacques. "People Aid—A New Politics Sweeps the Land." *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London: Verso, 1998.

Harrison, Tony. *V*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1989.

Head, Dominic. "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millenium." *Contemporary British Fiction*. Eds. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. 106-19.

Higson, Andrew. "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film." *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Ed. Lester Friedman. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. 109-29.

Hill, John. *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Hoffert, Barbara. Rev. of *The Blue Flower*, by Penelope Fitzgerald. *Library Journal* 1 Mar. 1997: 101.

Holmes, Frederick M. "The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West: Kureishi's *The Black Album* as an Intertext of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 37.3 (Summer 2001): 296-313.

Hornby, Nick. *A Long Way Down*. New York: Riverhead, 2005.

— — —. *About a Boy*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

— — —. *High Fidelity*. New York: Riverhead, 1995.

— — —. *How to Be Good*. New York: Riverhead, 2001.

Ilona, Anthony. "Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*: 'A New Way of Being British'." *Contemporary British Fiction*. Eds. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. 87-105.

Jaggi, Maya. "A Buddy from Suburbia." *Guardian* 1 March 1995: T6.

— — —. "The New Brits on the Block." *Guardian* 13 July 1996: 31.

Jones, Edward Trostle. *All or Nothing: The Cinema of Mike Leigh*. New York: P. Lang, 2004.

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972.

Kelemen, Mihaela, and Warren Smith. "Community and Its 'Virtual' Promises: A Critique of Cyberlibertarian Rhetoric." *Information, Communication and Society* 4.3 (2001): 370-87.

Kirkpatrick, Frank G. *The Ethics of Community*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

Kivisto, Peter. *Multiculturalism in a Global Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

Kumar, Amitava. "A Bang and a Whimper: A Conversation with Hanif Kureishi." *Transition* 10.4 (2001): 114-131.

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Black Album*. New York: Scribner, 1995.

— — —. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

— — —. *My Beautiful Laundrette.* Dir. Stephen Frears. Perf. Gordon Warnecke, Daniel Day-Lewis, Saeed Jaffrey, and Roshan Seth. Cineplex Odeon, 1986.

— — —. "My Uncle the Muslim Atheist." *Guardian* 5 April 2002: 8.

— — — "With Your Tongue Down My Throat." *Love in a Blue Time: Short Stories*. New York: Scribner, 1997.

— — —, and Roger Michell, adapt. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Dir. Roger Michell. Perf. Naveen Andrews, Brenda Blethyn, Roshan Seth. British Broadcasting Corporation, 1993.

Kurtén, Marina. "Negotiating Identities: Expressions of 'Culture' in British Migrant Literature." *Atlantic Literary Review* 3.2 (April-June 2002): 47-55.

Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew, eds. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003.

Leigh, Mike, dir. *High Hopes*. Per. Philip Davis, Ruth Sheen, Edna Doré, Heather Tobias, Philip Jackson, Lesley Manville, David Bamber, Jason Watkins, and Judith Scott. Film Four International/British Screen/Portman, 1988.

Lewis, Tess. "Between Head and Heart: Penelope Fitzgerald's Novels." *New Criterion* 18.7 (March 2000): 29-36.

Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Societies*. London: Sage, 1996.

Mayhall, Laura E. Nym. "Teaching British Cinema History as Cultural History." *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 193-7.

Mercer, Kobena. "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Miami Theory Collective, ed. *Community at Loose Ends*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991.

Monaghan, David. "Margaret Thatcher, Alan Bleasdale, and the Struggle for Working-Class Identity." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29.1 (Spring 2001): 2-13.

Movshovitz, Howie, ed. *Mike Leigh Interviews*. Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2000.

Moss, Laura. "The Politics of Everyday Hybridity: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*." *Wasafiri: The Transnational Journal of International Writing* 39 (Summer 2003): 11-17.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Ed. And trans. Peter Connor. Trans. Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney. Theory and History of Lit. 76. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991.

Nieragden, Göran. "'Cynical Young Men'—ein neues Paradigma für den englischen Roman der 1990er Jahre (?): Christopher Brookmyre, Nick Hornby, Irvine Welsh." *Klassiker und Strömungen des englischen Romans im 20. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Ansgar Nünning. Trier, Germany: Wissenschaftlicher, 2000. 221-41.

Orwell, George. "England, Your England." *A Collection of Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1970. 252-78.

Pierson, Chris. "Social Policy under Thatcher and Major." *Contemporary British Conservatism*. Eds. Steve Ludlam and Martin J. Smith. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. 202-21.

Quart, Leonard. "Biographical and Cultural Introduction." *The Films of Mike Leigh: Embracing the World*. Ray Carney and Leonard Quart. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 1-13.

Quart, Leonard. "The Religion of the Market: Thatcherite Politics and the British Film of the 1980s." *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Ed. Lester Friedman. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. 15-34.

Ranelagh, John. *Thatcher's People: An Insider's Account of the Politics, the Power, and the Personalities*. London: Harper Collins, 1991.

Rushdie, Salman. "In Good Faith." *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991. 393-414.

— — —. "The Harmony of the Spheres." *East, West*. New York: Vintage, 1996. 123-46.

— — —. "The New Empire within Britain." *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991. 129-38.

— — —. "Outside the Whale." *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991. 87-101.

Sarason, Seymour Bernard. *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Schwartz, David B. *Who Cares?: Rediscovering Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997.

Singer, Linda. "Recalling a Community at Loose Ends." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991. 121-30.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. New York: Random House, 2000.

Sudrann, Jean. "'Magic or Miracles': The Fallen World of Penelope Fitzgerald's Novels." *Contemporary British Women Writers: Texts and Strategies*. London: Macmillan, 1993.

Thatcher, Margaret. *Conservative Manifesto, 1979*. Political Science Resources. 8 July 2005 <http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/area/uk/man/con79.htm>.

Tonkin, Boyd. "Confessions of a Tease." *The Independent* 23 October 1999: 5.

Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Civil Society*. Ed. José Harris. Trans. José Harris and Margaret Hollis. New York: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Van Den Abbeele, Georges. "Introduction." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991. ix-xxvi.

Walsh, Michael. "Reality, the Real, and the Margaret-Thatcher-Signifier in Two British Films of the 1980s." *American Imago* 52.2 (Summer 1995): 169-89.

Watson, Garry. *The Cinema of Mike Leigh: A Sense of the Real*. London: Wallflower, 2004.

Waugh, Patricia. *Harvest of the Sixties*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "The Value of Difference." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Wright, Chris. *The Sufficient Community: Putting People First*. Devon: Green Books, 1997.

Young, Hugo. *The Iron Lady: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher*. New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1989.

Young, Iris Marion. "Comments on Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self." *New German Critique* 62 (Spring-Summer 1994): 165-72.

— — —. "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship." *Ethics* 99.2 (January 1989): 250-74.

— — —. "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference." *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Linda J. Nicholson. London: Routledge, 1990. 300-23.

Yousaf, Nahem. "Hanif Kureishi and 'the Brown Man's Burden'." *Critical Survey* 8.1(1996): 14-25.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

After earning her bachelor's degree in English at Taylor University, Rebecca S. Godlasky worked as an analyst for KPMG Consulting while pursuing her master's degree in English at the University of West Florida. In 2001 she dedicated herself full-time to her doctoral studies at The Florida State University. Rebecca currently resides with her husband in Atlanta, Georgia. She is an Assistant Professor in the Language and Literature Department at Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia.