

White = Middle Class?! – The Intersections of Ethnicity and Class in the Postcolonial Fictions by Contemporary British Novelists

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Ethnicity plays a significant role in the contemporary fictions by established British novelists such as Zadie Smith and Hanif Kureishi, at times labelled 'postcolonial' fictions, at times 'fictions of migration'. The prevalent critical reading of how *ethnicity* is (de)constructed in these texts can be subsumed under the notions of 'hybridity' and 'third space'. With the protagonists – as well as, in the above-mentioned cases, their authors – repeatedly not fitting the either/or-logic of dualistic essentialisms, ethno-cultural hybridity is certainly of great interest for literary and cultural analysis here. Nonetheless, *whiteness* remains a recurrent point of reference in these novels and not an independent one at that; in fact, *whiteness* is frequently represented in its intersection with another social relation and category of the self: that of *class/capital*, i.e. socio-economic inequality.

In my presentation, I will examine how *whiteness* is negotiated as against *non-whiteness* in postcolonial British novels, with regard to the interplay between *ethnicity* and *class*. In addition to the above-mentioned canonised authors, my survey will further include authors such as Hari Kunzru and Monica Ali. I will illustrate how their texts register both a notion of *whiteness* as privilege *per se*, an equation of *whiteness* and richness or middle-class-ness, as well as an (often incredulous and troubling) awareness of *white* poverty in contemporary (Western) urban settings. At the same time, these novels also (re)construct racialisation as a nationally and globally *class*-ifying social practice, in that opportunities and processes of exclusion on the job market are frequently represented as giving priority to *whites*, and disadvantaging *non-whites*. In tracing how a range of postcolonial fictions oscillate between a representation of *whiteness* as privilege *per se* and a depiction of both real-life priority and poverty of *whites*, I will make a case for adding a class-theoretical perspective to intersectional whiteness studies.