



Cinematic London: Brexit and symbolic power

by Rahoul Masrani

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I examine the ways in which London's symbolic power and, correlatively, its cinematic image, are evolving in the post-European Union referendum era. This paper identifies the ways in which the possible changes in London's material and cinematic image as a dynamic, opening and welcoming city are beginning to manifest themselves in mainstream cinema and cinema-inspired advertising. In particular, I provide an assessment of the current state of the British film industry, highlighting the ways in which EU-funded programmes, like Creative Europe, provide filmmakers in the UK with access to funds and potentially wide distribution. I then discuss the impact the Brexit decision has had on London-based films released after the referendum. Finally, I provide a sociological-thematic analysis, influenced by discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, of two film-themed advertisements (London is the City of Film and Nothing Beats a Londoner), demonstrating the ways in which the uncertainty following the EU referendum is manifested on screen. Ultimately, this paper provides an



insight into the ways in which London's material and cinematic identities are evolving as the city and indeed the rest of the UK re-evaluate their place on the global stage.

KEY WORDS: London; Brexit; City; Symbolic Power; Global City; Cinema

INTRODUCTION: GLOBAL LONDON?

The result of the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union marked a turning point in the construction of London's global identity. Nearly 60% of eligible voters in London voted to remain in the EU; in some boroughs the figure approached 80% (BBC 2016). The referendum and the ensuing legitimization of racism and xenophobia (see Piacentini 2016: 57) in the UK were an affront to London's image as an open, welcoming and hospitable place. Whilst the global city of London is full of contradictions, both materially and on screen, the complex core of the city's identity is rooted in its image precisely as a global centre in a variety of arenas, with individuals from every corner of the earth congregating on the city. Global London is a hub for international commerce, film, culture, migration and sport. After the referendum, London's prominence as the European Union's most populous and dynamic suddenly came into question. Would nationals of other EU countries be free to visit and live in the city? Would Brexit threaten London's status as a global financial centre?

London's symbolic power as a global city is the result of a variety of factors, including the city's links to global markets and a large pool of transnational migrants. These migrants provide the city with a distinctive cosmopolitan flavour, reflected in the ways in which the city is represented on screen. Film in particular is an important medium through which the city negotiates its identity and strengthens its symbolic power on the global stage. Although at the time of writing Brexit is yet to take place, there are signs that cinematic London, and by extension the material city, are changing as a result. This paper foregrounds these signs and identifies the ways in which London negotiates its symbolic identity against the backdrop of the Brexit negotiations. I begin by providing an overview of London's more recent cinematic presence, highlighting the ways in which film has been used to propagate London's symbolic power.

Using cinema and cinematic London as a theoretical and empirical frame, I then discuss the implications for London's evolving material and cinematic identities, both during this uncertain period in which the UK government negotiates its relationship with the EU post-Brexit and beyond. Finally, I provide a sociological-thematic analysis, influenced by discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, of two film-themed advertisements, demonstrating the ways in which the uncertainty following the



referendum is manifested on screen. The use of the discourse analytical method adds to the robustness and reliability of the empirical analysis by ensuring that the texts are discussed as part of a system of representation within a particular context.

LONDON'S "GLOBALNESS" ON AND OFF SCREEN

London is undoubtedly a global city. Although Sassen (1991) defines global cities as financial centres, these locations are also centres of global culture and politics. In the case of London, Eade reminds us that "the term, global city, highlights the ways in which global processes have transformed London, not only economically but also socially and culturally" (2000: 16). Global cities' symbolic power is advanced through the current visual and market landscape, in that there is a strong link between the mediation of the image of global cities through commercial media and the cultivation of their "iconic" status. Cinema, with its key attributes of audio-visual representation and global distribution, acts as an important intersection between various forms of power. The status of global cities as world centres for capitalism, culture and political power means that they are also sites of diversity and difference. Indeed, as Georgiou notes, global cities "present powerful examples, where different groups live cheek by jowl, in close proximity and in intimate interaction – desired or unavoidable" (2008: 223). Large numbers of transnational migrants belonging to a variety of social classes and ethnic backgrounds converge on the global city, looking to exploit its global connectedness, often financially.

These groups of migrants include the "transnational elite" (Hamnett 2004: 104), often contracted to work in the high-paying financial sector in the City of London (financial district), as well as asylum seekers and poorer economic migrants. Individuals belonging to these varied groups live and work alongside those from more established migrant communities and the native-born population. When the EU expanded to include states in Central and Eastern Europe in 2004, the UK became a popular destination for migrants from these countries. Indeed as Barrel et al note, "EU enlargement brought UK immigration to new heights, particularly for work reasons...2005 may have recorded the largest ever entry of foreign workers to the UK" (2010: 375). London's ethnic makeup began to change as a result, with newly arrived European migrants living cheek by jowl (Georgiou 2008: 223) with other Londoners.

CINEMATIC LONDON AND SYMBOLIC POWER

In addition to being a global city, London has a strong presence in global cinema, with its iconic monuments featuring in a wide variety of cinematic output, for example in *Match Point* (2005) and *Closer* (2004). Scholarly works from the 2000s have looked at the connections between the city and cinema, with a few focussing on London. Brunson



(2007), for example, provides an excellent deconstruction of post-war London as depicted in films, through a thematic analysis of the interplay between space, place and the screen. The author asks us to revisit our perceptions of cinematic London, moving away from clichés and distancing ourselves from preconceived ideas about London's status as a cinematic city. Brunsdon dispels any hesitations about London's status as one of the world's most recognisable cinematic cities, quelling any doubts about its central position in the history of cinema and the city (see Brunsdon 2007: 9). Other scholars, particularly when discussing cities with a weak cinematic presence, cite London as one of the world's foremost cinematic cities, taking for granted London's rich screen history (see, for example, Hassam 2009; Hemelryk Donald & Gammack 2007. Hassam (2009: 45), for example, in his discussion of Melbourne's cinematic presence in Bollywood films, notes that certain cities in fact aspire to resemble London, given the city's high levels of symbolic power (ibid.). This is an important statement, affirming that London's symbolic power both in and beyond cinema is widespread and globally recognised – other cities attempt to emulate its cityscape and by extension its cinematic image.

London's symbolic power can therefore be seen as having both material and symbolic elements, echoing Bourdieu's claim about symbolic power more generally (see Bourdieu 1981: 16). Film provides a globally-distributed media platform that is widely consumed in a variety of spaces. From the cinema hall to the smartphone, the ways in which we consume films is both traditional and new, and the naturalisation of cinematic images becomes easier as studios become more creative in the way that they distribute films around the world (see Ulin 2014: 5). The ways in which cities are represented in films, and the ways in which the characters interact with their surroundings, both reflect and construct dominant or "naturalised" city images and conceptualisations present in society. The "truth" about an image in general, let alone with reference to a city, is a specific *version* of the truth. Representation is a construction and, returning to Bourdieu's ideas, symbolic power is created and reaffirmed in cinematic representations of the global city. There is a clear link here to the Gramscian notion of hegemony, in the sense that certain representational conventions are deployed in such a way that they appear to be common sense and as such simply go unnoticed, making this power embedded and invisible (for example, London as a glamorous, important global city in the London-set romantic comedies of the late-1990s and early-2000s like *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)). Indeed, as Gramsci himself argues with reference to how the world is portrayed by the dominant classes, "common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself" (cited in Hall, 1982: 73). Kong (1993: 15) relates this to hegemony, where symbolic power becomes "natural", "common sense" and "taken for granted". Drawing on Foucault (1981), MacDonald (2003: 18) argues that "discourses are to be explored for what [Foucault] calls their 'tactical productivity' (what they achieve in terms of power and knowledge) and for their 'strategical integration' (what circumstances and rules give rise to their use in particular circumstances) (Foucault 1981: 101-102)" (MacDonald 2003: 18).



A LOOK AT LONDON'S SCREEN IMAGE: 1997-2016

The cinematic and material cities therefore work together within the framework of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism, to construct, re-frame and reinforce symbolic power. There are many examples of the ways in which this takes place in mainstream cinema. From the *Bridget Jones* franchise to *Notting Hill*, the London-set blockbusters of the late-1990s and early 2000s paint a picture of the city as a glamorous and fast-paced imagined space. It is the home of the "transnational elite" (Hamnett 2004: 104) and a well-educated, middle class population that conforms to heteronormative stereotypes (see Warner, 1991), making the city a desirable space for global audiences. At the same time, these films, with their predominantly white, well-spoken, relatively young protagonists, portray the city as a homogenous and exclusive space, ignoring the diversity and ensuing "intense juxtapositions of difference" (Georgiou 2008: 223) present in the material city. This particular version of the city creates a "commodification of a cosmopolitanism that is accessible and consumable among global audiences" (Georgiou 2017: 18). The Greek waiters in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and the rarely seen black neighbour in *Match Point* (2008) create a "taken for granted" vision of London's diversity, where minorities are only seen in the background.

Overt, foregrounded heterogeneity forms a large part of London's appealing global image. This is in contrast to the material city, which Smith reminds is part of a complex, global system of migration in which individuals travel "across nation-states [more] than ever before. Contemporary transnational migration is highly differentiated by class, gender, generation, region, religion, and political and economic circumstance of migration within the same migrating 'nationality', even within a single transnational city" (2010: 239). The realities of London's ethnic mix, an integral aspect of its global city identity, is side-lined in mainstream cinema, in favour of a sanitised, tourist-friendly, generic city image, resulting in the portrayal of a "safe and commodified urban culture" (Georgiou 2017: 18).

The late-1990s and early-2000s were also the height of "Cool Britannia", with New Labour's re-branding of Britain as at once cutting edge and traditional. Typical of the profit-centred approach to culture and creativity, film became part of this re-branding effort. In the 2004 film *Closer*, for example, cups of tea were being drunk alongside contemporary cocktails, as vintage double decker red Routemaster buses drove through the City, passing its modern skyscrapers and sleek streets. London's "cool" image, inextricably linked to its status as the capital of Britain, began to evolve in the 2000s and early/mid-2010s. The Mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, during the 2008 campaign to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, described London as "sexy" (Kapferer 2011: 184). London's global image "has its own momentum", which operates independently of the country's performance (186), bestowing it with a symbolic significance that transcends national boundaries. Indeed, London's symbolic strength weathered the 2008 financial crash, in spite of the colossal growth of centres in Asia like Mumbai and Beijing.



London's screen identity continued to mirror this image of unstoppable appeal, with the period seeing the release of a variety of slick action thrillers and period dramas alluding to the city's symbolic power as a hub for global culture, finance and geopolitics, both current and historical. The *King's Speech*, a period drama filmed on location in London, was released in 2010. *Skyfall*, the 2012 instalment of the James Bond series, featured a car chase through Central London, showcasing the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall and Trafalgar Square, amongst other monuments and central districts. Bond and Q meet in the National Gallery and the London Underground makes a memorable appearance as the epicentre of a thrilling chase between Bond and the main antagonist, Silva.

Bond, along with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, also starred in the 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony, where a short film entitled *Happy and Glorious* showcased the city's heritage (old monuments and the royal family), its modern architecture (the Shard and Gherkin skyscrapers) and its multi-ethnic populace. Several films released in 2013, like *Welcome to the Punch*, *Star Trek Into Darkness* and *Trance*, all feature images of London's futuristic architectural monuments. These films, with their stark rawness, corroborate the conceptualisation of the symbolic power of the city as including both glamorous and unpolished elements. Referencing the above three films released in 2013, an article in the *Guardian* newspaper states that "cinema's newfound interest in London's modern architectural landmarks demonstrates the UK capital's status as a global city" (Hoad 2013). In these films, London is a "European Manhattan" of sorts, with its skyward trajectory and glittering skyline. According to these globally distributed, mostly Hollywood productions, London is a global centre for geopolitics, global culture and, especially, international finance.

BREXIT AND FILM

Given the on-screen testaments to London's symbolic power discussed in the previous section, the uncertainty caused by the Brexit vote provides an empirically interesting space for scholarly investigation. Will Brexit threaten London's on-screen symbolic power that has been explicitly foregrounded since the late-1990s? The Government's line at the time of writing, that Britain will leave the European Single Market and Customs Union, suggests London could lose its pre-eminence as a global financial centre, a major component of its claim to global city status. Indeed as Djankov (2017: 1) notes, it is likely that a "hard" Brexit (leaving the Single Market and Customs Union with an uncertain future relationship with the European Union) would result in a 12 to 18% loss of revenue for the City of London (ibid.) Although London's symbolic power is apparent in a variety of arenas beyond finance, its global financial dominance is a central component of its overall power in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Film is invariably linked to this symbolic power, in that profit and marketability are valued highly. Indeed, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron was explicit in the overall focus of the then



Government's film policy, where profit trumped creativity and technical advancement: "Our role, and that of the BFI, should be to support the sector in becoming even more dynamic and entrepreneurial, helping UK producers to make commercially successful pictures that rival the quality and impact of the best international productions" (PM Backs "Dynamic and Entrepreneurial" UK Film Industry 2012). Before the EU referendum, in January 2016, the UK Government claimed that the creative industries were worth £84.1 billion to the UK economy. "British films, music, video games, crafts and publishing are taking a lead role in driving the UK's economic recovery, according to the latest Government statistics" (Creative industries worth almost £10 million an hour to economy 2016).

The signs are pointing to potential difficulty in maintaining these high profit levels, as Britain's success as a film producing country is linked to its membership of the EU and its associated arts-funding initiatives, like Creative Europe. Furthermore, being in the EU means that films distributed in European markets where there is a limit on the release of non-European films, are considered "domestic" productions, reducing any restrictions on numbers of British films that can be released in these markets. An article in the *Independent* newspaper notes that "UK films are currently classified as European productions, which makes distribution in other European countries easier. For instance, being a European film helps bypass France's international movie quota" (Shepherd 2017). Although Brexit threatens the UK's status as a European Union film producing country, the uncertainty surrounding the negotiations between the UK and the EU at the time of writing stipulates that it is too early to speculate on the real consequences of Brexit for the UK film industry.

Because of the lag between production and release, it is equally difficult to comment on the impact the Brexit decision is having on London-based films. *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, released in 2017, is an example of the continuation of a more conventional representation of London as a symbolically significant global city in mainstream film: audiences are presented with another spy thriller, featuring yet another car chase through Central London. Family films, like *Paddington 2* (2017) are equally important in the discussion about reinforcing London's symbolic power through cinema. It can be argued that the film promotes a decidedly anti-Brexit stance, given that it "celebrates London's inclusiveness – but candy-coats its inequality" (Gilbey 2017). Although these two examples lack any explicit indication that London's post-referendum image is changing to reflect the current political and economic uncertainty, there is evidence to suggest that the spirit of ethnic and cultural diversity, key aspects of London's claim to global city status, are now being re-framed to promote the city in film-inspired advertising. I shall discuss two examples of this emerging trend: an advertisement from the #LondonIsOpen campaign entitled "London is the City of Film" and an advertisement for Nike entitled "Nothing Beats a Londoner". The former is explicit in its use of film as a promotional tool for the city, whereas the latter uses the city and cinematic elements and features a narrative, to promote a brand, Nike, not directly related to film.



LONDON IS THE CITY OF FILM

This advertisement is part of the larger #LondonIsOpen campaign, launched soon after the EU referendum in June 2016 to assure viewers that the city is open for business, in spite of the UK's decision to leave the EU. According to the campaign website,

#LondonIsOpen is a major campaign – launched by the Mayor, Sadiq Khan – to show that London is united and open for business, and to the world, following the EU referendum... London is the best city in the world. We're entrepreneurial, international and outward looking. The key ingredient of our city's success has been the flow of brilliant ideas and talent from across the globe. Our city is comfortable in its diversity, proud of its history and optimistic about its future. London is open.

Our #LondonIsOpen Campaign, 2016

The campaign website features a series of short films, touting London as the city of dance, film, culture and shopping. Newer videos declare London as the city of creativity and a tolerant society that is open to migration from the EU and beyond. The videos are mostly concerned with the creative industries, reminding us of the importance of culture and creativity in London's symbolic image. Indeed as Georgiou notes in her analysis of the advertisement, "the emphasis on cultural narratives of openness does not contradict the economics-oriented ones" (2017: 16). This corroborates Bourdieu's (1981: 16) conceptualisation of symbolic power, which he believes has strong representational *and* market elements (ibid.). This hybrid business-creative perspective supports the notion that London's symbolic power draws from a combination of its global financial dominance and cinematic presence.

One of the short films, "London is Film", only 57 seconds long, begins with a brief reminder of some of London's most recognisable attributes: a double decker bus, a black taxi and Big Ben, whose chimes frame the audio for the first two seconds of the video. The rest of the short film features a variety of actors and directors, including Gurinder Chadha, Richard Curtis and Noel Clarke, plus the Mayor himself, reciting poetry and sharing lyrical musings about London, constructing a narrative of openness and tolerance in a black and white nod to the city's strong cinematic identity. The individuals chosen to speak come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including Black British, South Asian British and White British. Georgiou notes of the film that "There is no doubt that the collage of represented ethnic and gender diversity is very carefully collated, even orchestrated, to project, not just a message of unity, but a message of unity in difference" (2017: 18). Georgiou (2017: 18) also notes that this representation of diversity, restricted to the established migrant communities unrelated to Britain's EU membership, is selective, ignoring the more recent waves of migration from other EU countries. As the film is intended as a direct response to the growing concerns about London's openness



in the post-referendum era, the absence of any representatives from non-British European heritage is striking.

Equally striking is the way in which diversity is framed. Instead of celebrating London's ethnic and cultural mix as portrayed on screen, the celebrities' words evoke images of London that are homogenous and steeped in nostalgia: a "safe" and marketable form of cosmopolitanism (Georgiou 2017: 18). With quotes from *Mary Poppins* (1964) and words like "cup of tea, fish and chips, good food, bad weather", the short film feeds into the stereotypical, nostalgic image of London, evoking an urban identity that is rooted in the past, whilst the core message of diversity, re-frames this identity to fit the up-to-date narrative of openness and multiculturalism: London is the city of history, yet dynamic and forward-looking. These deliberate choices frame the city in a particular way. Would a parallel narrative, for example of 'strong espresso, pierogis, good food, bad weather', be more inclusive? Would replacing the bus, taxi and shot of Big Ben with footage of Brixton Market and a packed Underground train during rush hour, re-frame the discussion of openness? Curiously, one of the advertisement's celebrity stars, Richard Curtis, the director responsible for the narrow vision white, middle class London in *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Love Actually* (2003), states in the advertisement that "In London everyone is different and that means anyone can fit in". The short film presents a particular, marketable version of openness and tolerance, which is restricted to certain types of Londoners. The city is presented as symbolically powerful through a reliance on a specific version of its film history and indeed a showcasing of the ways in which ethnic and cultural diversity can be used as a marketing tool.

NOTHING BEATS A LONDONER

Although not explicitly linked to film, the Nike advertisement entitled "Nothing Beats a Londoner" contains cinematic elements. Whilst the 3-minute 9-second extended advertisement is expectedly about sport and promoting the Nike brand, it spends time constructing the notion of what it means to be a Londoner, through its title and a series of linked vignettes showing "ordinary" young people alongside established stars from the sport and music industries moving through the city in their Nike apparel, relaying their respective sport-related struggles and tribulations. Each story is linked to the next, either through the characters' lines or through a visual device. Shot mostly in the evening and at night, using both realism and magic realism to loosely construct a plot, the film focusses not on the West End or on London's monuments. Instead, the film uses mostly unremarkable, non-central street scenes, with only one reference to a particular neighbourhood (Peckham), plus a few indoor shots (residential interiors, an ice rink and a fast food restaurant) and scenes on the river Thames. The advertisement is presented almost as a film trailer, with the final few seconds of the piece featuring text ("nothing beats a Londoner") flashing word by word on the screen through an uninterrupted non-



diegetic soundtrack. One would almost expect to see the words “in cinemas this summer” or similar, to appear on the screen towards the end of the advertisement.

Whilst the advertisement is clearly commercially motivated, its theme and release in early-2018 are poignant, given the current uncertainties surrounding London’s demographics and, as a result, its global image in the post-referendum era. Like “London is Film”, the Nike advertisement is (re)defining what it means to be a Londoner and who fits into this narrow definition. Wieden + Kennedy, the advertising agency responsible for the advertisement state on their website that the piece is

Shot on the streets of the capital – in the very neighbourhoods that will produce the next Skepta, Dina Asher-Smith or Harry Kane – areas such as Dalston, Peckham and Brixton provide a vivid backdrop for the bravado, passion for sport and unique London spirit that unites each of the 258 real-life young Londoners who appear in the film.

Unlike “London is Film”, the Nike advertisement defines Londoners as young adults and children, mostly black and white, united in their struggle to survive in the big city, alongside their music and sport idols. London is at once exciting, vibrant, challenging and inclusive. Although at one point we hear Big Ben’s chimes, this is not the London of *Mary Poppins* or *Notting Hill*. It is ethnically mixed and rooted in the present, with very few nods to the city’s past glory or global recognisability. The celebrities featured are musicians and sporting heroes, who like the struggling young people, use the city in a raw, un-glamorised fashion, visiting fast food restaurants and corner shops, riding bicycles and running through the streets. In an interview on the *Fast Company* (2018) website by Jeff Beer, an agency representative states that:

Nike is such a quintessentially American brand with such a rich commercial history, and we felt that we needed to have a uniquely London voice if we were to truly represent the city and its inhabitants...Hence decisions like shooting on 16mm film instead of digital to really capture the texture of the city. In terms of the classic quick-cut, multi-sport film style, it’s a dynamic way to show sport looking incredible on screen.

Instead of a tourist-friendly, sanitised picture of the city, the London constructed in this film is realistic and raw, represented both visually (through the challenging weather conditions, the fast food restaurant and the shoddy interiors, and shooting on 16mm film) and through the dialogue, which highlights the ordinary characters’ struggles and challenges.

Any visual indications of London’s global recognisability or claims to symbolic significance are decidedly brief and subtle. In line with the spirit of the advertisement, the pace of the narrative is rapid and each scene is seconds long, perhaps mirroring the pace of city life (explicit when in the first few seconds of the film one individual is shown running “two miles” through the streets at an accelerated pace). At one point, viewers



are shown the interior of a London taxi, followed quickly by a scene in a London Overground train. The latter is particularly noteworthy, as the London Overground network lies in the city's periphery, rarely penetrating London's central zones. This is not a conventional representation of tourist-friendly London (although the arrival of the Overground network in areas like Dalston and Hackney in East London has arguably had an impact in making these neighbourhoods more popular and recognisable), but the London where Londoners actually reside. Halfway through the advertisement a group of young black men are in a *Polski Sklep'* (Polish shop), the only nod to London's identity as a hub for migrants from other EU countries, Poland in particular. London in this advertisement is home to a group of people united in diversity, through their sporting identities. The advertisement ends with grime artist MC Skepta riding a Santander bicycle, part of the city's cycle hire scheme. The use of this bicycle demonstrates both London's diverse and extensive transport network (much like the use of the taxi and Overground train mentioned above) and indeed the role of the City of London as an EU and international financial centre (Santander is a Spanish bank), in London's global identity.

Unlike the "London is Film" advertisement, the Nike piece gives a voice and agency to "ordinary" Londoners living outside the city's more recognisable central districts. The choice of almost exclusively young men and women alongside celebrities from the music industry and professional sport, suggests that the city's population is youthful, dynamic and future-orientated. Instead of film stars, producers and directors telling viewers that everyone is welcome in the city of Big Ben and red buses, the Nike advertisement shows young people navigating the city mostly on foot, giving us their take on what it is like to live in London. Rather than celebrating a British identity, the film is decidedly London-focussed, reminding us of Robins's (2001: 86) take on identity which is city-, rather than country- or ethnicity-focussed. The individuals featured in the Nike advertisement travel by London Overground, run through the streets and sometimes cycle, not past Big Ben or the London Eye, but through the grimy, rainy streets of Brixton and Peckham, where the magic realism technique allows zombies on motorcycles to harass a young woman as she runs along the pavement. Far from a tourist-friendly, sanitised glimpse into London life, the advertisement portrays the city as unappealing and challenging, yet unifying and pride inducing for its diverse populace.

At the same time, the Nike advertisement is similar to "London is Film", in that it gives viewers a highly selective take on the city's diversity, almost completely ignoring migrant communities from other EU countries. Although London embraces ethnic and cultural diversity, the film tells us that Londoners need to fit a certain mould to be included. Furthermore, far from pluralistic, the diversity that is featured shows different racial and ethnic groups as isolated from one another, with groups of black youths rarely interacting with those who are visibly white. In spite of this, the film is a celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, a key component of London's claim to global city status. Although visually bleak at times, the film suggests that London is a hopeful space, in which the struggling youth of today could be the next sporting heroes or musical



sensations. This corroborates Kymlicka's conceptualisation of multiculturalism, which he believes is "characterised as a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music and cuisine that exist in a multi-ethnic society" (2010: 33). Although the "feel good" factor is largely absent from the Nike piece, as London negotiates its identity post-referendum, the film encourages viewers to embrace diversity and to take pride in the city and its flaws.

DISCUSSION: WHAT NOW FOR LONDON?

In this paper, I have made a case for London's on- and off-screen symbolic power, linking its cinematic identity to its material dominance, within the framework of neoliberal capitalism. British history professor Peter Mandler believes that "London, a young, thriving, creative, cosmopolitan city, seems the model multicultural community, a great European capital" (2016). The two cinema-themed advertisements corroborate this articulation of the city's identity, using London's attributes of diversity and resulting symbolic power to sell the city and promote a sportswear brand. This is capitalism par excellence: the city is part of a larger exercise in investment (London is Film) and sales (Nike), strengthening the argument that economic and cultural power are linked and that cinema is at the centre of this articulation of symbolic power. Although mainstream film is yet to catch up with London's new post-referendum identity of uncertainty, we are seeing a continuation of the reimagining of London's symbolic power as separate from that of Britain.

London is precisely a *global* city, rather than simply the British capital. The two filmic advertisements attest to the centrality of the city's urban, rather than national, identity and how this relates to symbolic power. Although the city's diverse population lives in relative harmony and the urban context allows for the expression of personal identity based on factors other than national or ethnic origin (see Robins 2001), we need to understand how national origin and ethnicity relate to the discussion of urban change and globalisation. Equally, we need to ask how cinematic representations of these demographic attributes might fit into this discussion. The ways in which the city is represented in cinema and other popular forms of media output includes certain groups and excludes others. Yet, there is a contradiction here and always, as the city itself is primarily a lived space and remains more than simply a tool in the generation of profit. As London re-negotiates its identity after the EU referendum, we need to ask ourselves who is included and who is excluded. Is diversity simply a marketing tool or can anyone genuinely fit in, as Richard Curtis declares in "London is Film"? The outcome of the Brexit negotiations will provide clarity on these questions. If the UK restricts migration from EU countries and if the Pound continues to weaken against the Euro, making working in Britain less attractive to European workers, the face of London is likely to change. Net migration to the UK has already declined since the EU referendum (see Pitasi and Holton



2017). The dynamism and intensity of life in the city as a result of the interactions between various migrant groups, both transient and established, is likely to be curtailed if new immigration restrictions are implemented. Whether film will reflect this potential reality, remains to be seen.

WORKS CITED

"Creative industries worth almost £10 million an hour to economy", 26 January 2016, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/creative-industries-worth-almost-10-million-an-hour-to-economy>> (21 January 2018).

"PM backs 'dynamic and entrepreneurial' UK film industry", 11 January 2012, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-backs-%20dynamic-and-entrepreneurial-uk-film-industry>> (14 January 2018).

<<https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/nike-nothing-beats-londoner-wieden-kennedy-london/1456851/>> (13 February 2018).

BBC, 2016, "EU Referendum: Most London boroughs vote to remain", <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36612916>> (18 December 2017)

Beer J., "How Nike's "Nothing Beats A Londoner" Taps The City's Real Culture", in *Fast Company*, 12 February 2018, <<https://www.fastcompany.com/40529666/how-nikes-nothing-beats-a-londoner-taps-the-citys-real-culture>> (13 February 2018).

Bourdieu P., 1981, "The market of symbolic goods", *Poetics* 14, pp. 13-44.

Bourdieu P., 1991, *Language and symbolic power*, Polity Press, Oxford

Brunsdon C., 2007, *London in Cinema: The cinematic city since 1945*, British Film Institute Publishing, London.

Djankov S., "The City of London after Brexit", *Pearson Institute for International Economics*, February 2017, <<https://piie.com/publications/policy-briefs/city-london-after-brexit>> (28 December 2017)

Eade J., 2000, *Placing London: From imperial to global city*, Berhahn Books, Oxford.

Georgiou M., 2008, "Urban encounters: Juxtapositions of difference and the communicative interface of global cities", *International Communication Gazette* 70 (3-4), pp. 223-235.

Georgiou M., 2017, "Is London open? Mediating and ordering cosmopolitanism in crisis", *International Communication Gazette* 79 (6-7), pp. 636-655.

Gilbey R., 2017, "Paddington 2 is an anti-Brexit film where the villains have the narrowest minds" 10 November 2017, <<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/film/2017/11/paddington-2-anti-brexit-film-where-villains-have-narrowest-minds>> (13 June 2018).



Hamnett C., 2004. *Unequal city: London in the global arena*. Routledge, London.

Hassam A., 2009, "Melbourne, Indian Popular Cinema and the Marketing of 'An Enviably Cosmopolitan Lifestyle'", *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* 1:1, pp. 45-64.

Hemelryk Donald S. and Gammack J., 2007, *Tourism and the Branded City: Film and identity on the Pacific Rim*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey.

Hoad P., "It's looking up for London as its skyscrapers crack Hollywood", *The Guardian*, 19 March 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/mar/19/london-skyscrapers-hollywood-films>> (25 January 2018).

Howson R., 2017, *The Sociology of Postmarxism*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon.

Kapferer J. (2011), "Paris as a Brand", in K. Dinnie (ed.), *City Branding: Theory and Cases* Palgrave MacMillan, New York, pp. 184-188.

Kong L., 1993, "Ideological hegemony and the political symbolism of religious buildings in Singapore", *Environment and Planning D* 11, pp. 23-23.

Kymlicka W., 2010, "The rise and fall of multiculturalism? New debates on inclusion and accommodation in diverse societies", in S. Vertovic and S. Wessendorf (eds.), *The multiculturalism backlash: European discourses, policies and practices*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, pp. 32-49.

MacDonald M., 2003, *Exploring Media Discourse*, Hodder Education, London.

Mandler P., "Britain's EU problem is London's problem", in *Dissent*, 24 June 2016, <<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/britains-eu-problem-london-problem>> (11 February 2018).

Mayor of London, 2016, "Our #LondonIsOpen campaign", <<https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/mayor-london/londonisopen>> (13 November 2017).

Piacenti T., 2005, "After Brexit: Refugee solidarity in the everyday", *Surroundings* 64, pp. 57-61.

Pitas C. and Holton K., "EU citizens leaving UK pushes down net migration after Brexit vote", *Reuters*, 24 August 2017, <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-immigration/eu-citizens-leaving-uk-pushes-down-net-migration-after-brexit-vote-idUKKCN1B40TO>> (14 December 2017).

Riley R., Fitzgerald J., and Barrell R., 2010, "EU Enlargement and Migration: Assessing the macroeconomic impacts", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48 (2), pp. 373-395.

Robins K., 2001, "Becoming anybody: Thinking against the nation and through the city", *City* 5(1), pp. 77-90.

Sassen S., 1991, *The Global City*, Princeton University Press, New York.

Shepherd J., "How Brexit is already hitting the British film industry", *The Independent*, 21 May 2017, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/brexit-british-film-industry-affects-a7747616.html>> (23 January 2018).

Smith P., 2010, "Transnational Urbanism Revisited", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (2), pp. 235-244.

Ulin J., 2014, *The Business of Media Distribution: Monetizing film, TV and video content in an online world*, Focal Press, New York.



Warner M., 1991, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet", *Social Text* 9 (4 [29]), pp. 3–17.

Dr Rahoul Masrani is a visiting fellow in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In his research, he explores the ways in which the media construct identities and contribute to a narrative on power and society. In particular, he is interested in cinematic representations and how they re-construct and maintain the symbolic power of the global city.

r.b.Masrani@lse.ac.uk
