

## Towards Socialism with a Small “s”: Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* and the Reconsideration of Welfare State Nostalgia

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A new sentiment appears to be abroad in the United Kingdom: austerity nostalgia. Consider, for instance, the afterlife of “Keep Calm and Carry On,” a World War II-era government poster exhorting British citizens that has become a popular marketing gimmick. As Owen Hatherley observes, the campaign’s current popularity constitutes “the most visible form of a vague nostalgia for a benevolent, quasi-modernist English bureaucratic aesthetic” (1). The vagueness of this nostalgia is twofold: not only were most of the consumers of this memorabilia born long after V-J Day and, as such, have no actual memory of the austerity to which it refers, but the poster itself was also one of many the Churchill government commissioned but never actually mass-produced. By tracing a pattern of government actions that seek to follow in spirit on the success of this anachronistic publicity campaign, Hatherley detects an official eagerness to capitalize on this supposed public feeling. Several official initiatives evidence a wish that this public feeling indicates rather more enthusiasm for the brutality of wartime austerity than the public may have bargained for;<sup>1</sup> among the most disturbing is a 2009 poster campaign promoting the Gordon Brown government’s Community Payback initiative, which publicizes the court-sanctioned reparations of individuals who have committed minor offences.<sup>2</sup> Seemingly cribbed directly from the (now discredited) “Broken Windows” model of policing,<sup>3</sup> the scheme turns the fulfillment of criminal sentences into spectacular public performances, as is evident from Hatherley’s witnessing of “a score of downcast black youth, being led by a similarly orange-jacketed overseer, to pick up rubbish in an area where the council infrequently collect. The community, meanwhile, on this weekday morning, were conspicuous by their absence” (Hatherley 6). As Hatherley implies, the absent audience for the performative punishment of “Community Payback” indicates that austerity nostalgia is a more minor affect than the British government might have hoped; benign though it may be on a T-Shirt, “Keep Calm and Carry On” becomes less quaint than disquieting when the slogan advertises the Metropolitan Police.

Whereas Hatherley’s juxtaposition of the racist spectacle of Community Payback, on the one hand, with the anachronistic poster

campaign's reference to wartime fortitude, on the other, effectively undermines the ostensibly benign kitsch aspect of the latter by association, there remains another possible relationship between state-sponsored discrimination and the nostalgia twinned in this pairing. Buchi Emecheta's 1974 novel, *Second-Class Citizen*, shows how initiatives like Community Payback have precedents in some less lionized aspects of the history of the state's social safety net: the narrative charts numerous ways in which the welfare state variously facilitates, relies upon, and exploits the racialization and gendering (among other oppressions) of its subjects. The struggles of Adah Obi, a Nigerian migrant to Britain, and Emecheta's protagonist, to provide for herself and her children are not only hindered by her husband's intractability but also by how haphazard and unfamiliar normative distinctions between public and private goods appear, given her unfamiliarity with her new cultural surroundings. The role of social policy in reinforcing racialization and gender norms needs to be taken into account if a revanchist (and to date, notional) welfare state is to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past<sup>4</sup> in the process of reinvigorating the UK's social contract, which has been under continuous neoliberal assault since the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

Interpreting this novel as an anticipatory critique of contemporary left liberal responses to the hegemony of neoliberalism raises two critical issues: first, how state policies both past and present have disadvantaged subjects on the basis of social differences; and second, how revisionism in contemporary left liberalism espouses reviving the state's role in social governance, while also setting this tendency off against the post-imperialist nostalgia characteristic of late twentieth-century British culture. Maintaining cognizance of the iniquities embedded in supposedly socially redistributive institutions does not have to mean downplaying the social consequences of the neoliberalization of the British state; rather, such a perspective can seek to specify the ethical costs that an as-yet-hypothetical return to the welfare state would necessarily incur, by bringing into view the fact that it was also a system that routinely incurred such costs in cases where its constitutive principles of equity and redistribution encountered population groups whose disadvantages derived from (perceived) social differences.

When it is framed critically in relation to twenty-first century and post-war political contexts, *Second-Class Citizen* reads as more than an index of the profound influence the British welfare state in the 1960s and early 1970s had in the daily life of a woman of colour such as Adah, the focal point of Emecheta's novel. What emerges in this interpretation is an insistence on the historicity of calls for vigorous state management, which in turn identifies those aspects of statist socialism that, were they to be reinstituted wholesale, would repeat the exclusions over which more nostalgic calls for social welfare's return find it convenient to gloss.

## From Anthropological Model to Post-Imperial Centre: Navigating the Welfare State from Nigeria to the United Kingdom

*Second-Class Citizen* begins by describing an encounter with bureaucratic officialdom that inaugurates Adah's earliest memory: her knowledge of her age stems from remembering that she was eight years old at the time of the return of the first man from her village to receive schooling as a lawyer in the United Kingdom. This scene is an apt way to begin laying out the general coordinates for Emecheta's plot as a whole, as Adah's desire to live in the UK provides the novel with its agon, and also anticipates the specific affective qualities precipitating that desire, which are themselves equally telling about the drama to come. Adah remembers listening closely to her father talking about the UK: "[t]he title 'United Kingdom,' when pronounced by Adah's father sounded . . . so deep, so mysterious, [and was] always voiced . . . in hushed tones, . . . as if he were speaking of God's Holiest of Holies" (Emecheta, *Second* 8). Not only does this reverential attitude account for Adah's later desire to move her family to the United Kingdom, but it also indicates the extent to which her experience of and regard for state authority in Britain will involve conceiving of it as "so deep, so mysterious," a country just as imponderable as divinity itself.

State imperatives first impinge on Adah's subjectivity during her youth in Nigeria, where the rules governing such interactions are deliberately obfuscated in the context of decolonization.<sup>6</sup> Given such conditions, Adah somewhat unwittingly learns quickly how crucial semi-autonomy will be to her future agency; in order to circumvent the patriarchal social code that forces her brother Boy to attend school grudgingly while a willing student such as herself must stay at home to help with domestic chores, Adah manipulates the state's partial regulation of child-rearing. Her being reported missing when she slips away to school one day precipitates the police first charging her mother with child neglect and subsequently force-feeding her until she promises to permit Adah to go to school regularly. Although Adah wonders where the Nigerian police "got all their unwritten laws from," she ultimately benefits from her mother's extreme punishment by the police—whose mandate to enforce mandatory schooling at all, much less in this manner, remains unclear—and attends classes without parental protest (8). Continuing to exercise semi-autonomy in one realm, however, also means risking constraint in another. Upon seeking entrance to university after enjoying success in secondary school, Adah finds that "[t]o read for a degree, . . . one needed a home. . . . In Lagos, at that time, teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves, and if the teenager happened to be a girl as well, living alone would be asking for trouble. In short, Adah had to marry" (23). Evidently, when attained via state auspices, agency is highly provisional; where in one situation the Nigerian state proves malleable enough to challenge the custom prohibiting Adah's schooling, in another

she finds that the apparent flexibility of its instruments can equally well tend towards the reconsolidation of patriarchal authority.

Migrating to Britain in the 1960s would not have represented a complete departure from the frequent contradictions of the Nigerian sociopolitical context with which *Second-Class Citizen* begins. Emerging in Britain in fully-fledged form following World War II, the institutions that comprised the welfare state were created by a succession of government policies based largely on the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes. Until approximately 1970, Keynesian ideas of social redistribution influenced Labour and Conservative parliaments alike, resulting in the active reshaping of British governance structures in an unprecedentedly socially conscious mould.<sup>7</sup> As access to new services provided by the state expanded, however, British citizenship became a site of increasing political pressure, and this particular shift in social policy had a particular impact on would-be migrants like Adah. Even as the formalization of citizenship enabled non-white subjects from the (former) colonies to move to the empire's centre and demand equal rights, the new citizenship regime simultaneously made these new denizens of Britain vulnerable to both popular and state racisms (Dawson 12).<sup>8</sup> In this way, the welfare state itself and early post-imperial migration were both based on an anthropological mode of governance first applied in former British colonies like Nigeria and later transposed back to the United Kingdom itself.<sup>9</sup>

Jed Esty observes that Keynes proposed two key changes in British economic policy in response to decolonization: "(1) the reconception of the imperial state in specifically national terms . . . ; and (2) the migration of available models of social totality from the colonial periphery to an increasingly compact territory at home" (175). Imperialism had allowed Britain a prolonged reliance on a vulgar form of "classical economics [that] thought of the national income (or debt) in terms more or less dictated by the metaphor of the nation as household" (Esty 173); as Britain's imperial star waned and its economic fortunes suffered, this metaphor became increasingly inadequate. Consequently, as Esty writes, Keynesianism represented a preferable approach because it treated the economy as "a *dependent variable*, an object of policy that could be scientifically predicted and manipulated by the politically neutral technique of the state's economic engineers" (174).

Neutral though this new bureaucratic approach to governance may seem, its ramifications for the politics of race become clear when its anthropological logic is applied to areas like citizenship. For instance, while the 1948 Nationality Act granted subjects in the colonies the right(s) of British citizenship, it was also an economic carrot to dangle in front of colonies "growing increasingly restive with the forms of political and economic subordination required by the commonwealth system"; in actual fact it also allowed "representations of the nation as a patriarchal family [to be] codified" (Dawson 9-10, 13). Moreover, this legislation provided statutory cover for the state's increasing interest in leveraging discourses

of gender and race so as to compartmentalize groups of citizens, producing some of them as “problem bodies,” to use Gillian Swanson’s evocative phrase (33).<sup>10</sup> While the welfare state thus promised a social safety net far in excess of the piecemeal social policy of the preceding hegemony of classical British liberalism, its anthropological modelling meant it was influenced by colonial means of distinguishing those subjects who deserved state protections and provisions from those who were not, a project for which the legal designation of citizenship proved especially apt.<sup>11</sup>

Having sketched the British welfare state’s postcolonial exigency, it remains to delineate how its gendered and racialized contours play out in the fictional account of the Obi family’s migration. The co-implication of gender and race-based oppressions as they are lived by black women reveals the risk of reifying the bureaucratic institution as the sole scale on which these occur and ought to be confronted. While Hazel Carby stops short of uncritically idealizing black domestic situations, she points out that seeking state-based protections can work to undermine the historical role of the black (British) family as a less regimented site for identifying and challenging oppressions:

We would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression . . . but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression. We need to recognize that . . . under the present authoritarian state, the black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism. (213)

If black families remain for Carby bulwarks of anti-oppressive resistance, despite “having been seen as pathological by the state and are in the process of being constructed as pathological within white feminist theory” (215), then Emecheta indicates how that family context can become oppressive at least in part due to the state’s blunt implementation of ostensibly pro-feminist social policy. When Adah seeks state-guaranteed contraception so as to prevent a fourth pregnancy that would cause her to lose her job, her doctor provides her with a requisition form that requires her husband’s signature (Emecheta, *Second* 142). Requiring male consent for contraception indicates the heteropatriarchal privilege underwriting contraceptive policy, which both undermines Adah’s right of bodily self-determination and cannot conceive of a nuclear family such as Adah’s, where her work as a librarian supports Francis, her indolent accountancy student of a husband, as well as their three children. In Britain as in Nigeria, claiming the ostensible benefits of the state is a Faustian bargain that further subordinates Adah to male authority; when she first took the risk, it was for an education that promised a well-paying job, whereas now the gambit is all that stands between her and poverty.

By charting the managerial logic that renders the British welfare state poorly equipped for non-normative domestic arrangements, Emecheta’s account of Adah’s struggles in and with family dovetails with research that indicates how variations in the way citizens’ rights are conferred and

distributed disproportionately impact black (and) migrant British women.<sup>12</sup> One key episode in this ongoing trajectory of Britain's flexible citizenship regulations<sup>13</sup> is the controversial Nationality Act of 1981, which, as Imogen Tyler observes, was met with violent protests from Brixton's predominantly black population (63). By revoking the citizenship rights of Commonwealth citizens, the act has had particular consequences for migrant women. Quoting Martha Escobar, Tyler notes that while "[i]deal migrant labour is frequently defined as sojourner and exploitable . . . , [t]he presence of migrant women disrupts this ideal since they represent reproduction and settlement.' . . . Immigration controls often focus on the reproductive bodies of women" (68). Tyler's observation underscores how (racialized) immigrant women function as tropes of permanent settlement and are thus understood by the British state as threats against which to guard.

Like Carby before her, Tyler cautions against conceiving of black women solely as victims. Despite their ready legibility "as maternal figures who . . . carry moral and ethical *weight*" (68), Tyler's concern is that in trading on the symbolic capital of migrant mothers, anti-deportation campaigns risk repeating the essentialist accounts of black femininity that have historically complicated black British women's positioning *vis-à-vis* mainstream British feminism. As Carby points out, despite sharing struggles against the (masculinist) state regulation of women's bodies, race-based political claims often undermine relations between potential allies in the feminist cause, because

[t]oo often concepts of historical progress are invoked by the left and feminists alike, to create a sliding scale of "civilized liberties." . . . In a peculiar combination of Marxism and feminism, capitalism becomes the vehicle for reforms which allow for progress towards the emancipation of women. The "Third World," on the other hand, is viewed as retaining pre-capitalist forms expressed at the cultural level by traditions which are more oppressive to women. (Carby 215)

Whenever (and wherever) the feminist project fails to attend to the qualitatively different terms of struggle implied by variations in cultural and/or geographical location, it will be impossible to fairly accommodate the historical grievances of gender and class under its umbrella.

Wendy Brown terms this philosophical conundrum a problem of "wounded attachments," where "identity politics concerned with race, sexuality and gender . . . [risks undermining its] enriching complexification of progressive formulations of power and persons . . . as [it is] tethered to a formulation of justice which, ironically, reinscribes a bourgeois ideal as its measure" ("Wounded" 394). Such a reinscriptive tendency corresponds to the phenomenon that in Carby's account appears as an impasse; the "peculiar combination of Marxism and feminism" that results in conflict between black and white feminists is for Brown a constitutive contradiction for activisms that make identitarian appeals. Feminisms, anti-racisms, as well as other identity-based modes of resistance, all risk reinforcing that which they resist once they

institutionalize. By actually attaining the privileged community that is their notional goal and eradicating their *raison d'être*, they would be thus at odds with the imperative to institutionalize.<sup>14</sup>

Emecheta implicitly names this very conceptual problem in a discussion of her own feminist epistemology. In an essay entitled “Feminism with a Small ‘f,’” she relates several anecdotes that illustrate how uneasily she herself, as well as her writing, fit under the unqualified moniker “feminist.” One such anecdote goes as follows:

I had my photograph taken once in my office where I do my writing. The photo-journalist was a staunch feminist, and she was so angry that my office was in my kitchen and a package of cereal was in the background. I was letting the woman's movement down by allowing such a photograph to be taken, she cried. But that was where I worked. Because it was warmer and more convenient for me to see my family while I put my typewriter to one side. I tried to tell her in vain that in my kitchen I felt I was doing more for the peace of the world than the nuclear scientist. (556)

Emecheta does not regret that her maternal role circumscribed other possibilities in her life, preferring to take pride in motherhood that complicates her encounter with an emissary of mainstream feminism in the figure of the photo-journalist. Her interviewer's anger demonstrates the distance between theoretical commonplaces—in this case, a prevalent mistrust of normative domesticity by mainstream feminists—and practical situations, particularly those where race complicates the gendering of the family. One corollary of Carby's critique of the negativity ascribed to the black family, however, is that it emerges as something other than a kind of locus for resistance that trades on symbolic capital, as it appears to be in Tyler's reference to the effectiveness of using black mothers' images in campaigns against racist state immigration policies.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, Emecheta materializes the resistance of black migrant women enacted through domesticity by describing the effort it takes to care for a family in socially hostile settings, whether in their private homes or the wider public sphere.

Carby's theorization and Emecheta's own self-positioning with regard to feminism proper combine to highlight the different scales on which oppression takes place. On the scale of the individual, Adah's compulsion to marry in order to gain the address required for university entrance sets off the lengthy series of injustices that is her marriage to Francis, and which the novel dedicates itself to cataloguing. The broader social implication of Emecheta's photo, and her novel itself, is that state imperatives can homogenize subjects in tandem with gender and racial norms. If *Second-Class Citizen* challenges the conventional interpretation of the quotidian condition of black mothers' lives in Britain as inherently and thoroughly oppressed by making a case for “feminism with a small ‘f,’” then it also presents a trenchant critique of some classic premises of socially redistributive policy. In short, the novel also advocates a more critical socialism: socialism with a small “s.”

## Anti-Imperialist Nostalgia and the Reassessment of the Political Promise of the Welfare State

How has the twenty-first-century vogue for a full-scale return of the welfare state been expressed? Since his 6 August 2010 death, Tony Judt has often been deemed prescient for his staunch advocacy for the renewal of statist administration, a position that flew in the face of a chorus of left liberal support for the neoliberal project that David Harvey has called the “financialization of everything” (33). The ongoing economic ills that have arisen in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis have been cited as proof of the foresight of Judt’s analysis.<sup>16</sup> His essay, “What is Living and What is Dead in Social Democracy,” lays out the general contours of his intellectual legacy:

the institution of welfare as a matter of right and its provision as a social duty: these were no mean accomplishments. That these accomplishments were no more than partial should not trouble us. If we have learned nothing else from the twentieth century, we should at least have grasped that the more perfect the answer, the more terrifying its consequences. (Judt 15-16)

Notice how Judt qualifies his assertions regarding the “right” and “social duty” of social welfare; numerous though the benefits of the welfare state (in Britain, the period of “collectivist consensus”) were, he admits that they were “partial.” Besides the question of which parts were left out, the notion that “the more perfect the answer, the more terrifying its consequences,” implies both that former actually-existing communist countries are the only other possibilities for a left politics and that such alternatives are inherently excessive in practice; thus, Judt positions recapturing the welfare state’s partial successes as the sole viable alternative, and implies that re-implementation is worth re-introducing the flaws of its earlier iterations.<sup>17</sup> He pitches his argument for a reinvigorated welfarism against the advocates of the neoliberal status quo, who seek the continued hollowing-out of the husk of the welfare state “to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital” (Harvey 7). Judt regards this neoliberal hegemony as engendering the decline of guiding principles of left liberal nation-statehood, including “[c]itizenship, democracy, rights and duty[, which] are intimately bound up with the state.” Judt adds that “[p]hysical proximity matters [as well]: to participate in the state you need to feel part of it” (Judt, *Postwar* 798). Long prior to the post-2008 disenchantment with neoliberalism, then, Judt had sought to reclaim the welfare state on its own merits.

The shifting political climate of Britain in the 1980s exemplifies the very sort of country in the midst of decreasing citizen participation in the state that Judt envisioned. Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government is well known for downsizing and privatizing key welfare state institutions, dissolving many of its institutions and centralizing



government in London, which also effectively cut many post-industrial communities off from any robust sort of reconstitution.<sup>18</sup> While the social costs of this policy suite in Britain and elsewhere are innumerable, prompting longings for the bygone security that social institutions provided, it is nonetheless the case that welfare programs relied on a homogenizing model of equality that failed to account for all subjects' differences. The question is whether these longings veer into nostalgia, which may be defined as a "sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past" ("Nostalgia").

Salman Rushdie has argued that the nostalgia prevalent in British culture less than a decade after *Second-Class Citizen*'s publication worked to filter cultural memory of state racism and misogyny. A 1980s spate of screen versions of fiction detailing Britain's imperial apex precipitates Rushdie's argument that the populist style of these adaptations is symptomatic of a broader imperialist nostalgia: "there can be little doubt that in Britain today the refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image is under way . . . exemplified by the huge success of these fictions, [which] is the artistic counterpart of the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain" (91-2). If Rushdie is correct in his contention that such cultural productions cater to a nostalgia induced by Britain's proverbial post-imperial hangover, then the issue becomes how fiction might more responsibly represent the past. One way of countering the "Raj revivalism" that Rushdie inveighs against would be to dismiss it altogether as Owen Hatherley does in his reading of "austerity nostalgia." But rather than see it as an index of cultural forgetting, Jennifer Wenzel's concept of "anti-imperialist nostalgia" (7) presents another way to refract nostalgia away from such conservative ends.<sup>19</sup> Wenzel warns against dismissing cultural archives of colonialism *tout court*, articulating instead a nuanced ethics of reinterpreting such documentation for political purposes:

[a]nti-imperialist nostalgia is a longing for what never was, yet a longing that is fully cognizant that its object of desire is one of the 'ways it could have gone' but did not. This cognizance involves a confrontation with the forces that obstructed that lost future, a confrontation that has the potential to 'immunize' . . . one from or mobilize resistance to similar forces in the present. (16)

This formulation provides a means of critically re-reading the past in order to make it serve as a resource for present political problems, a recapitulation that transforms nostalgia into a powerful tool of historical critique. Wenzel echoes the evenhandedness of Brown's effort to critique identity politics without dismissing the substance of its various constituent appeals; moving past the melancholia of wounded attachments, anti-imperialist nostalgia seeks out latent critical utility in the kind of political projects often thought of as minor, tarnished, or unfinished. For an anti-imperialist nostalgic interpretation of the welfare state's legacy, displaying the necessary "cognizance" involves attending to the very real discordances between the welfare state's theoretical promise to provide a

social safety net for all, and the sobering reality of its structural discriminations on the bases of race and gender.

*Second-Class Citizen* can be read as politicizing the description of imperialist history and its legacy in a similar fashion to Rushdie and Wenzel, and it tends towards Wenzel's critical standpoint in particular. Its unstinting style has been cited as proof of the authenticity of its account of a poor Nigerian woman's life. For instance, Chris Weedon suggests that Emecheta's mode of delivery, a third-person perspective limited to Adah's voice, is "a technique that allows the narrator to mediate Nigerian difference for an implied British readership" (22). Similarly, Ashley Dawson's valorization of Emecheta's London novels as "documentary fiction" allows him to situate her fiction (and others') more easily within his broader critical project in *Mongrel Nation*, in which he "documents the history of resistance by African, Asian, Caribbean, and white Britons to . . . insular representations of national identity" (97, 7). These interpretations of the novel as authentically representative of black women's experience in 1960s Britain guide Dawson's conclusion that reading her novel against the contemporary hegemony of neoliberalism lends it added poignancy: "Adah's journey toward autonomy is even harder to imagine today than when it was originally told" (119). For Dawson, the neoliberal present grants the novel a tragic cast, which runs counter to the novel's own argument that to deem the unfulfilled promises of the past tragic is to indulge in nostalgia. That way of thinking causes Francis, for whom "the description 'second-class' . . . had become so condition[ing] . . . that he was not only living up to it but enjoying it," to encourage Adah to dwell on the poverty of their circumstances in London (Emecheta, *Second* 40, 39). Adah steadfastly refuses to regard her once-revered dream of the United Kingdom as tragically shattered; for her, poverty represents an unremarkable obstacle to be faced with an unpretentious resourcefulness. This willingness to adapt to the exigencies of the present indicates what Jennifer Wenzel means when she describes anti-imperialist nostalgia as a "desire not for a past moment in and for itself but rather for the past's promise of an alternative present: the past's future" (17). Far from lamenting past social democratic victories that have been irretrievably lost and/or revealed as oppressive, then, Adah's repeated appeals to anti-imperialist nostalgia reveal *Second Class Citizen* as a cipher to the political possibilities of Britain's welfarist past.

Significantly, Emecheta demonstrates the patent lack of solidarity between black and white women in her depiction of her protagonist's attempts to obtain childcare. Adah works long hours at the library to support Francis's studies, as well as her growing family, and consequently needs to find someone to watch her children while she is at work (49). After a lengthy search, she believes she has found a solution in Trudy, a mother herself, who agrees to look after her daughter Titi and son Vicky. Trudy's various initial merits—"Francis praised Trudy to the skies. She was clean, well-dressed and very friendly . . . [and] was just a block away"—quickly give way to the fact that what she does best is look after

Francis's sexual desires, while Adah's children are left to wander unsupervised and undressed outdoors (50, 64, 52). The encounter with Trudy highlights the differential treatment women receive from agents of the British welfare state on the basis of race. As Trudy is "a registered daily-minder . . . [of] the Borough of Camden," Adah has recourse to complain to her supervisor (52). When she brings Miss Stirling into the picture, however, Adah discovers that she is not taken as seriously as she might be, as "Trudy was making all the running," telling lies about Adah's children's onerously difficult behaviour—"Adah's kids drank five pints of milk a day"—in order to shore up her image with her supervisor (52-3). Adah is left to await Trudy's next misstep while fruitlessly imploring Stirling to find state childcare spaces for her children (54). Despite having told Adah that spaces are unavailable, Stirling is mysteriously able to find some once Vicky becomes dangerously ill with meningitis as a result of further negligence by Trudy (63). Emecheta's narration evaluates Adah's response to her experience of British institutional medicine throughout this entire ordeal:

She [i.e. Adah] could not control herself any more. She had had so many things to bottle up inside her. In England, she couldn't go to her neighbour and babble out troubles as she would have done in Lagos, she had learned not to talk about her unhappiness to those with whom she worked, for this was a society where nobody was interested in the problems of others. If you could not bear your problems any more, . . . [a]tttempted suicide... was a way of attracting attention to one's unfortunate situation. And whose attention do you attract? The attention of paid listeners. Listeners who make you feel that you are an object to be studied, diagnosed, charted and tabulated . . . the likes of Miss Stirling. (67)

Not only do the officials let Adah down when she might reasonably have expected assistance, but she also lacks the secondary recourse to a social circle with which to commiserate or share advice on a more informal basis. The one person who intervenes on her behalf is Stirling, who only dispenses relief once Vicky's life is threatened, and whose detached and bureaucratic manner of describing Adah's life as a "case" could be said to echo the very insensitivity to cultural difference that guided the development of colonial anthropological logic itself, not to mention its subsequent re-application in British governance. This coldly classificatory diction tempts Adah to speculate that racist prejudice played a part in her concerns about Trudy not being taken more seriously when they were first reported. This speculation corresponds with Amina Mama's observation that "[f]inancial difficulties and inadequate childcare facilities particularly affect the black single mother," as do "[u]nfamiliarity with the legal intricacies involved in retrieving children from the state agencies, and the racism of officials involved in disputes that arise" (30). While Emecheta's text does not explicitly suggest that racism is the reason for Stirling's slowness to act, the episode nonetheless serves to show the difficulties caused by the ineluctable knowledge deficit faced by recent arrivals to Britain. Adah's lack of acculturation leaves her unsure of what is

reasonable to expect the state to provide, while her lack of community supports magnifies her exposure to the austerity of state officialdom's "paid listeners," who, if they are not overtly racist, are at least far from proactive in helping her to find her footing in British society.

However well compensated state employees were for their services to the public, Emecheta's novel shows that such payment did not cover much in the way of initiatives designed to aid non-native Britons like the Obis with the cultural barriers they face. Adah's anxiety about Vicky's hospitalization for meningitis aptly shows the consequences of the insensitive state health apparatus: "[w]hy was the name of the hospital Royal Free? Was it a hospital for poor people, for second-class people? . . . Were they sending her Vicky to a second-class hospital, a free one, just because they were blacks?" (60). Internalized though this misunderstanding is, it demonstrates the extent to which access to state aid presupposes a level of cultural knowledge that Nigerian migrants like the Obis cannot reasonably be expected to have. The rules of Britain's National Health Service remain arcane to them, as is evident from their attempts to treat Vicky's swollen ear on Christmas Day. Dismissing Adah's worries that finding a doctor on a holiday would be as impossible as it was in Nigeria, Francis calls their regular doctor. Adah's anxiety reflects the ongoing influence of her colonial education on her perception; from the normatively feminine deference to white male authority she learns from her Christian missionary teachers in Lagos (28, 52) to her daily encounters with casual racism in London, she finds that both societies' anthropological premises resolve in the same direction: towards a patriarchal white supremacist hierarchy. Readied by these past and present experiences to preemptively lower her expectations when confronting authority, she presumes that the NHS will mean more of the same: "[s]he guessed . . . [medical treatment for Vicky] was their right, but maybe this was a right that could be easily explained away, because they were blacks" (136). Francis returns with the police instead of their family doctor, and they in turn call in a different doctor, whom the Obis have not previously encountered. Despite the good grace with which this unfamiliar physician delivers the relatively benign diagnosis of a bed bug bite on Vicky's ear, the couple's concerns persist after the doctor leaves: "he went leaving a nasty pit in their stomachs" (138). The Obis' uncertain grasp of the social conventions upon which access to the entitlements of the British welfare state hinge becomes corporeal in the form of their son's ailing ear, not to mention their own unsettled stomachs.

Such anxiety cannot simply be explained away as the displacement of properly internalized (hence irrelevant) feeling; as Sianne Ngai details, because anxiety involves a form of projection, it works to "reinforce the boundary between center and periphery, and thus the distinction between 'here' and 'yonder' on which the experience of threat depends" (211), an insight that sheds light on the politics of anxiety in this situation.<sup>20</sup> Adah's worries serve to compound the liminal subject position to which she is consigned *vis-à-vis* the British nation-state. Her perception of herself as a

racialized and gendered body is reinforced when she realizes she lacks the requisite cultural knowledge to interact properly with the NHS; the anxiety that attends the encounter makes her feel personally responsible for the inaccessibility of the full benefits of British citizenship. In this manner, Emecheta depicts the endemic insecurity that results from the unreasonable expectation that all citizens, no matter how recent their arrival, will somehow intuit both what rights they have and how to access them in a statist social welfare regime. While the welfare state was one among numerous sources of anxiety for postwar migrants to Britain, regarding it through the lens of anti-imperialist nostalgia reveals the affects produced by dint of the welfare state's (disavowed) postcolonial origins, affects which undermine its ostensibly impartial provision of social goods.<sup>21</sup>

The welfare state's tendency to produce anxious subjects suggests a further complication to the above reading of Adah's encounter with Trudy. As much as Francis's philandering is evidence of heteropatriarchal male privilege, viewing his actions through the lens of Emecheta's notion of "feminism with a small 'f'" indicates how such a judgment is a culturally specific moralizing gesture,<sup>22</sup> outside of which Adah's tolerance of this behaviour emerges as a kind of *quid pro quo*. In Emecheta's essay, she argues somewhat provocatively that "polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her. . . . Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time" (555). While polygamy may lack stigma in Igbo culture, in Britain Adah's efforts to gain leverage in her arrangement with Trudy by acquiescing to her husband's impropriety come to nothing. As none of her British acquaintances regard marital fidelity as Adah does—that is, as a resource that any poor woman would naturally bargain with in the effort to maintain her family's standard of living—the result is that she "felt like a fool. She was learning. People here do not tell everything, they do not say things like: 'I even allowed my husband to sleep with her as part of the payment'" (Emecheta, *Second* 67). Adah's pragmatism regarding her husband's sexual desire may be an effective means of getting occasional relief from his attentions, but her perception of extra-marital sex as transactional sets her cultural reference points on a collision course with Trudy's, whose own moral code cannot conceive of her liaisons with Francis as partial compensation for her babysitting services. Even anti-essentialist feminisms, however, may ultimately strain to regard polyamory as a coping mechanism for women as Emecheta's endorsement does.

Carby, ever-watchful for Western feminist thought's more presumptuous excesses, whereby practices like "polygamy . . . are linked in reductionist ways to a lack of technological development," refuses to defend polygamy on its own terms, instead emphasizing how Western women are themselves more culpable for such institutions' endurance than they might wish to admit (221-2). For Emecheta's part, her novel

demonstrates that benefiting from culturally-licensed male polyamory is a rather more complex negotiation than she indicates in her later essay. While Adah is initially enthusiastic about Francis's resourcefulness in response to her distaste for sex with him,<sup>23</sup> her enthusiasm quickly turns to anger when she realizes that by allowing him to sleep with the woman under whose watch Vicky caught meningitis, she has not only put her children at risk, but also has knowingly borne infidelity to do so. She rebukes Francis, saying, "you buy her pants with the money I work for, and you both spend the money I pay her, when I go to work. I don't care what you do, but I must have my children whole and perfect. The only thing I get from this slavish marriage is the children" (Emecheta, *Second* 42). This statement underscores the stakes of family for Adah; the future promise of her children's success is the *sine qua non* that allows her to continue assenting to the daily indignities she faces at the hands of her husband.

Recalling Imogen Tyler's discussion of how British citizenship reforms undercut migrant family relationships, Adah's investment in her children might well resonate with the kind of "poignancy" that Ashley Dawson retrospectively ascribes to Emecheta's novel. Were Adah a migrant mother raising children under Britain's current citizenship regime, her life might well resemble the account Tyler gives of Sonia, a Somali refugee whose daughter Mary was imprisoned along with her mother "indefinitely from birth because under the British Nationality Act [of] 1981 . . . children born in Britain to non-citizen mothers are not entitled to British citizenship" (69). While Adah's exhortation that hers "must be perfect children" appears unlikely enough in the circumstances she faced, such perfection would be even less imaginable were they, as Mary and other children of the undocumented are in Britain today, "in the extraordinary position of *having entered Britain illegally at birth*" (Tyler 69). In this light, it becomes tempting to argue against the critique of the welfare state advanced thus far, as its current decline seems to further threaten the endurance of the black family as a site of resistance. After all, severe though she was, Miss Stirling did eventually provide Adah with quality childcare (Emecheta, *Second* 67). An anti-imperialist nostalgia for the welfare state, however, would strike a balance between these two perspectives; to rephrase Emecheta once again, socialism with a small "s" would involve a less doctrinaire approach to social democratic policy. Black women like Sonia deserve access to the belief that motivates Adah: namely, that despite the day-to-day strife she is forced to endure, her children have a chance at a better future. At the same time, if government institutions of social welfare are to be revived as guarantors of that chance, they must produce less of the kind of anxiety that is so characteristic of Adah's encounters with the state.

As Hazel Carby has indicated, smaller scale encounters that take place in the domestic and the maternal realms may well resolve in ways that reinforce misogyny and racialization. A politics that favours renewing the social democratic project by returning to a focus on bureaucratic

institutions and broad policy, however, ignores such smaller scales at its peril. Consider how Margaret Thatcher's famous epithet, "[t]here is no such thing as society," relies on a caricatured notion of the family: "[t]here are individual men and women and there are *families* and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first" (28, emphasis added). However normative this individualist conceptualization of the domestic has become, and however warranted a scrupulously critical attitude towards this and other oppressive family dynamics may be, regarding these as the family's only possible valences not only abandons domesticity to the discursive maneuvers of the right but also risks the racist pathologization of the black family that Carby identifies (Carby 215). For instance, a blanket critique of domesticity cannot admit the historical role of supporting anti-racist resistance that bell hooks argues the black family has played; she terms it a "homeplace," with "the subversive value . . . of having access to private space where we do not encounter white aggression" (181). hooks draws attention not only to the importance of contesting conventional significations of the domestic, but also to the urgency of reimagining social forms more generally. It appears that Thatcher pitches her rhetoric so as to elide the continuity between social democratic and neoliberal orders with regard to identity. Far from freeing black families and/or women, the decline of social democracy has heralded an ever-more deliberate state leveraging of gender and race, recalling here both Tyler's analysis of citizenship regulation and migrant women, as well as Hatherley's account of "austerity nostalgia."

While the conditions they describe may well cry out for more redistributive and socially just policies, the notion that simply turning the British political clock back three decades would automatically lead to a more accommodative mode of governance is itself an uncritical form of nostalgia. As Esty shows, the British welfare state's anthropological managerialism was developed as a colonial apparatus, where one of its essential strategies was turning social differences like gender and race into political fault lines; small wonder, then, that Adah's migration from Nigeria to Britain is characterized by anxiety. By demonstrating how a past system of state aid can be a hindrance, *Second-Class Citizen* suggests by extension that only by making difference a central legislative priority can a remodelled welfare state avoid reproducing the burdens on migrant women like Adah that it would ideally alleviate. Read as an archive of anti-imperialist nostalgia, Emecheta's account of 1960s British migrant life yields insights that complicate contemporary calls for the wholesale revival of social democracy, and points towards how socialism with a small "s" might be imagined.

## Notes

1. Hatherley indicates that official mobilizations in response to purported austerity nostalgia have taken place since at least 2009, as Labour government campaigns sought to promote its electoral chances and record on law-and-order issues. For a more recent example, Richard Seymour argues that recent British government-sanctioned food advisories are similarly rife with austerity nostalgia, which he distinguishes from *A Girl Called Jack*, Jack Monroe's recipe blog about life as a single mother on a weekly food budget of £10. For more on the controversy around the blog's putative aestheticization of poverty, see Seymour's coverage in *The Guardian*:

[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/austerity-cooking-jack-monroe-hijacked-moralisers?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/austerity-cooking-jack-monroe-hijacked-moralisers?CMP=tw_t_gu)

2. The British Justice Ministry describes the program as follows: "Community Payback aims to increase public awareness of the work done by offenders as punishment and to make reparation for their crimes. The introduction of high-vis[ibility] orange jackets in December last year ensures that the public can see that justice is being done and that offenders are making amends for their crimes in the community." For the full Ministry of Justice report, see "Community payback keeps Britain tidy," at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease100909c.htm>.

3. The "Broken Windows" theory of policing was first promulgated by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in "Broken Windows: the Police and Neighborhood Safety," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March, 1982); their argument was that the vigilant prosecution of so-called "petty crime," like the eponymous offence the policy references, would aid in forestalling more serious offences. For more on the policy's now-discredited reputation, as well as its most notable exponent, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, see Stephen Metcalf's account in *Slate*: [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the\\_dilettante/2006/05/the\\_giuliani\\_pre\\_sidency.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_dilettante/2006/05/the_giuliani_pre_sidency.html)

4. Patricia Chu points out that world wars provided a context for the progressive constraining of subjects of Anglo-American states, as "[n]ational identity and consciousness of it had not been transcended but newly instantiated, and in new ways, by state power" (163).

5. For an account of neoliberalism that focuses on left complicity to its current hegemony, see Jodi Dean's *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, 1-18.

6. The dubious reputation of the Nigerian civil service is well documented: "The model of Civil Service bequeathed to Nigeria by her colonial master (Britain) was narrow in structure and objectives. It was



basically structured in such a manner that enabled colonial masters to successfully extract the much coveted financial and material resources needed by their controlling metropolitan powers . . . [and] was therefore marked by a lack of accountability and absence of transparency” (Anazodo, Okoye, and Chukwuemeka 2).

7. The welfare state’s policies generally included: “a mixed public-private economy, with the government taking an active role both in its management and distribution of the proceeds. This redistribution occurred through selective public ownership (nationalization) of major economic sectors and through the growth of the social welfare state, both through direct provision (health and education) and transfer payments (pensions, unemployment insurance). This became a generally shared ideology spanning the center-left to center-right in the postwar period” (Studlar 4).

8. For a description of the 1958 Notting Hill riots, a paradigmatic instance of such vulnerability, see Dawson’s *Mongrel Nation*, 13.

9. The anthropologization of the British economy refers to a growing reliance on representational abstractions common in former colonial administrative practices (i.e. the very processes that create racializing and gendering stereotypes) due to the increasingly complex social whole for which Keynesian economic reforms seek to account. Anthropological logic was not limited to the context of British decolonization alone, but is rather part of a broader trend that the modernization signals for the politics of identity. Rey Chow clarifies how identitarian formations like race are subject to the paradoxical procedures of modern knowledge production as outlined by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*: “the increasing objectification of the world that Foucault so eloquently elucidates can be historicized as part of an ongoing imperialist agenda for transforming the world into observable and hence manageable units, and the intensification of abstract theoretical processes, likewise, must be seen as inseparable from the historical conditions that repeatedly return the material benefits of such processes to European subjectivities” (Chow 2).

10. Swanson describes a mid-twentieth-century shift in designations for individuals and groups viewed to be socially problematic, as the previous emphasis on mental deficiency gave way to “a more ‘sympathetic’ approach,” one which nevertheless facilitated new techniques to compel subscription to British cultural norms (33).

11. The emphasis in argumentation here on the strategic manipulation of citizenship policy corresponds with recent cultural histories that trace the impact of mid-century legislation that restricted access to rights for migrants to Britain. In addition to Patricia Chu and Ashley Dawson, see also Kathleen Paul’s *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the*

*Postwar Era*, as well as Nadine Attewell's 2014 *Better Britons: Reproduction, Nation, and the Afterlife of Empire*.

12. In particular, see Amina Mama's study of black women's home and work lives in the 1980s, which detects the enduring trend of black British women's overwhelming reliance on state aid and disproportionate vulnerability to legislation that alters the category of citizenship. Mama highlights the crucial economic gap filled by black women in "the 'caring' professions (nursing, teaching, community and social work) . . . [that] exploit oppressive notions of 'femininity' and yet actually involve heavy labour" (26). She also reveals that black women are subject to forms of discrimination whether they are employed in the private (particularly pay inequity, see 26) or public sectors: "all aspects of the welfare state are being increasingly policed in ways that particularly affect Black people. These changes affect us as women disproportionately because in accordance with our [domestic] roles . . . , we come into more frequent contact with all agencies in our own right" (29).

13. This formulation is indebted to Aihwa Ong's conceptualization of transnational subjectivities according to a rubric of "flexible citizenship," a key component of which is states' continuing role in policing population flows for their own interests: "[s]tate regimes are constantly adjusting to the influx of different kinds of immigrants, and to ways of engaging global capitalism that will benefit the country while minimizing the costs. For instance, nation-states are reworking immigration law to attract capital-bearing subjects while limiting the entry of unskilled labor" (136).

14. Brown indicates how constitutive this apparent contradiction of institutionalized identity political formations is: "politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their exclusion from it, for their own perpetuity as identities" ("Wounded" 398).

15. Carby makes this observation while criticizing the attribution of pathos to images of black women as inarticulate and thus abject victims in feminist sociological research (219-20).

16. Representative examples of this laudatory mode of invocation include Crawford Killian's "Tony Judt's Last Act: Sounding the Alarm" in Canadian left liberal *The Tyee*, and Zadie Smith's 2012 meditation in the *New York Review of Books* on the closing of the Willesden Green library, "The North West London Blues." For a dissenting view on Judt's oeuvre, see Dylan Riley's "Tony Judt: A Cooler Look" in the *New Left Review*.

17. This assumption builds on a point Judt makes in an earlier book, *Reappraisals*, during a discussion of the now-failed effort to gain popular support for a European Union constitution in which Judt cautions against “the temptation to make a virtue of present tensions,” and suggests that supranational economic polities like the EU will inevitably struggle “to create a bond between human beings that transcends older boundaries and to make out of these new institutional forms something that really is a community” (407).

18. For more on previous governments’ roles in anticipating Thatcherite Conservative cuts, see Stuart Hall et al’s *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*.

19. Wenzel’s notion of “anti-imperialist nostalgia” is indebted to Renato Rosaldo’s essay, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” which covers similar cultural ground to Rushdie, including “the writing of colonial officials and popular 1980s films like *A Passage to India*” (68). See Rosaldo’s *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis*, 68-87.

20. The central role for projection in Ngai’s primarily spatial (as opposed to the more typical post-Enlightenment temporal) account of anxiety becomes clear as she continues, “depict[ing] anxiety less as an inner reality which can be subsequently externalized than as a structural effect of spatialization in general” (211).

21. For instance, advocating a wholesale return to the prior structure of the NHS, where the criterion of equality ensured not only universally standardized care but also a blanket approach to patients’ cultural differences, is no less problematic than more recent initiatives, such as the Tony Blair government’s dubious justification of enhanced patient “choice” as the reason for forcing hospitals to compete for funding (Cribb 224).

22. Inasmuch as it risks becoming an unqualified defence of heteronormative monogamous marriage, itself an institution based on ensuring male privilege and property rights, the proscription in British culture of polygamy comes to resemble what Wendy Brown calls “moralism as anti-politics.” Brown observes how forms of morality that traffic in “expressions of moralistic outrage implicitly cast the state as if it were or could be a deeply democratic and nonviolent institution; conversely, it renders radical art, radical social movements and various fringe populations as if they were not potentially subversive, representing a significant political challenge to the norms of the regime, but rather were benign entities and populations entirely appropriate for the state to equally protect, fund, and promote” (*Politics* 36).

23. "Francis was dissatisfied and started shopping around outside for willing women. Adah was quite happy about this; she even encouraged him. At least she would have some peaceful nights" (Emecheta 29).

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