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# At Home in the Free-Market World: The Neoliberal Cosmopolitan Man in Salman Rushdie's *Fury*

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To risk stating the obvious, the end of the last century saw a radical shift in borders and boundaries. The rise of the Internet minimized divides in space and time, networking vast numbers of people across the globe through computers and eventually cell phones. The transnational organizations like the European Union offered new regional experiments in governance and trade—the more economically focused entities like NAFTA echoing the EU in its orchestration of the mobility of capital and commodities, though not of people. The scientific community's dire warnings of a warming planet also underscored how intricately connected local environments are. In the face of these significant changes, cosmopolitanism was revitalized as a means of theorizing an individual's place within an increasingly networked and hybridized world. Given the sweeping nature of these integrations, theories of cosmopolitanism come from a variety of disciplines, making it challenging to see a coherent answer or project. Philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah offer a moral approach to the subject; literary and cultural studies like Bruce Robbins and Paul Gilroy focus on its (multi)cultural dimensions; and social scientists such as Saskia Sassen and Ulrich Beck explore political and legal ramifications of the term.<sup>1</sup> With this variety in perspectives, it can be difficult to determine how cosmopolitanism might assuage the growing pains of our sprawling global village.

Moreover, recent complications in the interconnectedness of transnational projects and organizations make this determination all the more crucial as the Right rises across Europe in response to the largest refugee crisis in decades and the United States continues to tighten its own borders. A series of regional insurgencies, economic crises, and prolonged wars has also rocked much of the world: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Global Recession, and the Arab Spring to name but a few of these destabilizing events. Cosmopolitanism's appeal in such moments is obvious: the concept purports to celebrate and protect difference while recognizing a commonly shared human existence—one that transverses national boundaries and local affiliations in deference to our common humanity. Such a deeply human perspective would, in theory, negate the hegemonic impulses of the Global North, while spreading the ideals of peaceful, liberal democracy and economic prosperity to a culturally rich, though economically poor, Global South. Few would disagree that such a humanistic idealism is sorely needed as the morning news brings images dead Syrian children washing up on Turkish beaches and young Nigerian women kidnapped into sexual slavery by Boko Haram.

These dire circumstances, concerning as they may be to cosmopolitans, demand a concrete politics of action that the theory has yet to provide. One need not look further than the Syrian Civil War and

resultant refugee crisis or the continued violence of Boko Haram to see an absence of political will among those “citizens of the world.” To be fair, there is a strong tension between the philosophical/cultural/social ideal and the lived realities of people situated in highly transnational contexts. Indeed, this tension has clear moral, cultural, and political implications that structure people’s local lives, determining their access to citizenship, to resources, to social institutions, to cultural practice, and more. Simply put, this tension begets the following question: How does one live humanely in an economically and culturally transnational world?

This essay will consider the limits of answering that question through a cosmopolitan lens. Specifically, I briefly review several dominant strands of cosmopolitan theory, particularly for their universalizing tendencies. Next, I consider how an uncritical adoption of a universalizing perspective can lead to the reproduction of a neoliberal cosmopolitanism, which seriously compromises the concept’s ability to remedy economic, social, and political inequalities. Finally, I turn to Salman Rushdie’s cosmopolitan novel, *Fury* (2001), to render the limits of neoliberal cosmopolitanism, acutely seen in the novel’s cynical acceptance of neoliberal economic policy and its transformation of women into sexualized commodities.

### **Dreams (and Nightmares) of a Cosmopolitan Language**

Before arguing for cosmopolitanism’s limitations, I will pause here to review its possibilities by briefly considering the work of several notable scholars on the subject. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, sociologist Paul Gilroy, and humanities professor Bruce Robbins have all turned to the ancient Greek concept to theorize humanitarian solutions to various transnationally felt social problems. Written for a general audience, Appiah’s philosophical exploration attempts to revitalize the term so that we may use “minds and hearts formed over the long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become.”<sup>2</sup> Cosmopolitanism will instruct different people to now live peacefully together in a culturally hybrid world. Resisting Appiah’s idealism, Gilroy rejects traditional expressions of cosmopolitanism as elite projects that stultify culture and difference, advocating for a “cosmopolitanism from below” whose vitality is expressed through London’s multicultural popular texts.<sup>3</sup> Robbins takes a third track, situating cosmopolitanism as a viable response to the problematic patriotisms and resultant militarism alive and well in the Global North, most explicitly in the United States.<sup>4</sup> To some degree, the differences in definition bespeak disciplinary differences, though all three authors converge on the idea that a transnational perspective is vital to addressing people’s pressing needs for dignity and peace.

Not ignoring the impressive insights each text offers to philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies, a striking commonality is found across all pieces: cosmopolitanism—be it of the moral, grassroots, or political variety—must forge a transnational path that eschews the pitfalls of liberal universalism and cultural relativism. Appiah’s metaphor of conversation, Gilroy’s expression of convivial cosmopolitanism, or Robbins’s condemnations of “I’m great, you stink” narratives all attempt to tread this path. Additionally, all three authors weave academic work and popular texts (autobiography or cultural) into their analyses, in effect, modeling the hybridity they seek to protect while appealing to the universalizing norms that render the hybridity comprehensible. That is, borrowing Appiah’s metaphor, a shared language must be spoken for a conversation among others to ever occur, and a sort of popular cosmopolitanism provides a rich and productive mother tongue.

However admirable the goal, the dream of a cosmopolitan “language,” to revise Adrienne Rich’s poem, imposes universalizing tendencies that require the utmost scrutiny. Whose universalities will structure the conversation, the conviviality, or the “I” in these theoretical formations? As cultural geographer David Harvey notes, “There is, therefore, always an imperializing moment in any attempt to make

that [appeal to universal notions of freedom and liberty] particular formulation, drawn from the one place and time, the foundation for universal policy.”<sup>5</sup> In and of itself, a universalizing perspective need not be oppressive; in practice, however, it often is, as the histories of colonization, capitalist expansion, and socialist counter-expansion readily demonstrate. To turn to Harvey again, the metanarrative that informs much of the recent turn to cosmopolitanism is that of liberally informed individualism, be it the political or economic varieties.<sup>6</sup> Here, appeals to human rights or economic freedom are ensconced with the nation state, itself cast as an institution perpetually behind the times of global networks of information, trade, and culture.<sup>7</sup> To revise the nation into the current moment, the remedies of liberal democracy and free trade, always already intertwined in popular political Anglo-American discourse following the Blair-Clinton years, must be administered across the globe to bring about a global utopia of freedom and prosperity. Thus, journalist Thomas Friedman can stage the opening narrative of *The World Is Flat* unironically on a golf course in Bangalore where multinational corporate skyscrapers direct his aim. In his ahistorical vision, the arrival of western business signals India’s entrance into the global community (as if centuries of modern imperialism and ancient global trade did not).

I will pause now to define my key term of neoliberalism and consider its relationship with cosmopolitanism. In her seminal analysis of neoliberalism in the non-Western world, anthropologist Aihwa Ong recognizes the multiple meanings of this contested term. In the Global South, neoliberalism can signify American neoimperialism, managed by intermediaries like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, and expressed through the hard drive for free markets in hitherto closed spaces. In domestic critiques, neoliberalism is understood as a form of neocolonization through which the United States acquires vital resources through military invention, mostly notably seen in the Iraq War. In American political discourse, however, Ong notes how neoliberalism is rarely used to describe the political, economic, and cultural shifts in post-70s America. Here, easy conflation of political and economic freedom allow conservative politicians and organizations to dramatically scale back institutionalized social services and promote policies that increase elite wealth and power. Thus, neoliberalism can be broadly understood as “radicalized capitalist imperialism that is increasingly tied to lawlessness and military action.”<sup>8</sup>

David Harvey, another important thinker on the subject, takes a slightly different track in his monograph on neoliberalism. Through a Marxist lens, Harvey seeks to historicize neoliberalism’s hegemony as economic policy and as political philosophy. His macroeconomic definition of the term echoes some of Ong’s formations: a celebration of private enterprise and of the individual (in the idiom of “responsibility”), distrust of state regulation, and advocacy for the free and rapid movement of capital everywhere, from foreign direct investment to outsourcing of production processes.<sup>9</sup>

Tracing its philosophical iterations from Locke to Mills to Kant, Harvey explores how earlier expressions of liberalism readily conflated an individual’s humanity with her/his/their economic productivity. This conflation is universalized as the human condition: a condition that exceeds the particularities of place and that demands self-governance and freedom from pre-modern tyrannies. Borrowing from postcolonial critics, Harvey underscores the liberal thinker’s selective application of the label “human” to justify imperial projects and the disenfranchisement of women, children, and people of color everywhere. The neoliberalism of today, Harvey contends, is expressed through these same problematic idioms of “freedom” and “individualism,” structured by the grammar of capitalism and conquest. In this way, neoliberalism becomes the vehicle for elite groups across the global to carry out a transnational class project, the fruition of which is their rapid and vast enrichment. As cosmopolitanism often requires a similar class privilege, I contend that neoliberalism is the universalizing shadow looming over many cosmopolitan projects.<sup>10</sup> The resulting neoliberal cosmopolitanism offers the appeal of a humanitarian perspective without sacrificing the economic and social privileges neoliberalism has conferred on the few at the expense of the many.

What does a neoliberal cosmopolitanism look like? I turn now to a literary analysis of neoliberal cosmopolitanism and then to its fictional illustration in Salman Rushdie's work to answer that question.

### The Ambivalent Tourist: Rushdie's Neoliberal Cosmopolitan

As literary critic Timothy Brennan notes, cosmopolitanism elicits "among other things, a thirst for another knowledge, unprejudiced striving, world travel, supple open-mindedness, broad international norms of civic equality, a politics of treaty and understanding rather than conquest."<sup>11</sup> This breadth in definition resonates with the problematics of cosmopolitanism discussed earlier, but offers the new, potentially productive element of ambivalence: "[cosmopolitanism] is a fundamentally ambivalent position" that shifts in definitional key terms depending on "whose prejudice, knowledge, or open-mindedness one is talking about."<sup>12</sup> This ambivalence allows for dangerous slippages from critique of dominant ideologies to a subtle acquiescence to them, and for Brennan, it is U.S. cultural and economic hegemony that shifts from problem to inevitability in the critical turn to cosmopolitanism. Focusing on post-Marxist cultural theory and postcolonial literature, Brennan illustrates how the cosmopolitan dismissal of nationalism and fixed cultural identities implicitly serves the interests of transnational capital, whose power brokers effectively argue in similar ways for a neoliberally run world.<sup>13</sup> The political and literary limits of cosmopolitanism emerge through its easy dovetailing with neoliberal projects.

To consider literary cosmopolitan ambivalences, we would rightly turn to the work of Salman Rushdie, one of a host of cosmopolitan postcolonial authors.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, to consider Rushdie's work in the high period of neoliberal cosmopolitanism, we would turn to his dot-com, post-9/11 novel, *Fury* (2001).<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously a *fin-de-siècle* novel, a mid-life crisis narrative, and a satiric portrait of America, *Fury* presents the tale of Bombay-born, Cambridge-educated, and Manhattan-exiled Professor Malik Solanka. Earlier in life, the cosmopolitan professor turns away from the academy and towards educational television, namely to a show featuring puppets and philosophy. Little Brain, his star puppet, becomes a cultural sensation for her savvy interviews of great philosophical thinkers and stylish looks, and Solanka becomes very rich as a result. Despite his economic success, he is repeatedly overcome with a violent rage, one that drives him to almost kill his sleeping wife and child. Fleeing to Manhattan, he abandons his family to save them and seeks to lose his rage in America's vapid pop culture. The rage of the city, however, only heightens his own, until he finds emotional solace and sexual outlet in affairs with two young, gorgeous cosmopolitans: Mila Milo and Neela Mahendra. Even a quick review of the novel's plot illustrates Brennan's idea of cosmopolitan ambivalence and Harvey's exploration of its neoliberal underpinnings: the neoliberal city is sublime to Solanka, inspiring in him awe, horror, and rage. His access to its riches and an elevated social position from which to mock the aspirational hoards is conferred by his cosmopolitan past. Even his inexplicable sex appeal is attributed to his easy charm with elite women wherever he finds himself. Indeed, Solanka is the contemporary cosmopolitan with all its ambivalences: he is repelled by conspicuous consumption and attracted to dot-com wealth; he is enamored with the crowd and enraged by individuals; he is culturally comfortable and socially agitated in the various metropolises he calls home.

Before examining the novel further, a word must be said on Rushdie's own status as a cosmopolitan author and his relationship to the cosmopolitan ambivalence of the well-heeled set. Lest we commit the authorial fallacy, we should gesture towards one of Rushdie's numerous claims to a cosmopolitan, liberal perspective on art and politics. A host of essay collections make his political alliances clear.<sup>16</sup> A mix of literary criticism, nation theory, and religious critique, each collection reveals his tacit acceptance of the secular nation state expressed through a politically liberal perspective. Rushdie travels widely across subject matter and spaces, too—a cosmopolitan Solanka perhaps echoes. In one essay in particular, Rush-

die comments that “liberal capitalism or democracy of the free world will require novelists’ more rigorous attention, will require reimagining and questioning and doubting as never before.”<sup>17</sup> Refraining from questioning or doubting the current economic order, Rushdie proposes that, while inevitable, neoliberal capitalism must be monitored by artists as those projects come to non-Western spaces.<sup>18</sup> A little later in the same piece, he positions the novel as a cosmopolitan arena for democratically preserving particularity in the midst of the transnational: “Literature is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear *voices talking about everything in every possible way.*”<sup>19</sup> The novel’s purpose is to educate readers on complex political realities, and it is telling that Rushdie imagines that purpose through the (neo)liberal trope of the individual.

With this take on the novel as an imagined cosmopolitan space, we should also situate our analysis of *Fury* in Rushdie’s more contemporaneous nonfiction, which quickly illustrates his deepening cosmopolitan ambivalence in his critique of fundamentalist violence and acceptance of Western neoimperialism. Immediately after the attacks on 9/11, Rushdie publicly aligned himself with the United States, describing his political position as one aligned with those rooted against fundamentalist violence and supporting the sending of “our shadow-warriors against theirs” (though tempering his call for US militarism with appeals for better intelligence: “No more Sudanese aspirin factories to be bombed, please”).<sup>20</sup> Later in the editorial, his acquiescence to internal surveillance and US militarism shifts into an excoriating of the critique of American geopolitical hegemony: to argue that American foreign policy wrought the 9/11 attacks is “appalling rubbish” and “sanctimonious moral relativism.”<sup>21</sup> Rushdie’s individual experiences with the fatwa aside, his sudden rush to defend the actions of a right-wing American president and ignore an American neoimperialist legacy in the Middle East warrants some consideration. Rushdie cannot defend the metropole and the globally oppressed in the same breath, thus he sacrifices the latter to align himself with the former. Suddenly, there are fewer voices speaking in Rushdie’s private, cosmopolitan imaginary of the novel.<sup>22</sup>

Moving back to *Fury*, we see the novel doing little to explicitly recover the cosmopolitan Rushdie. The failure is painfully ironic as *Fury*’s geographic and historical backdrop, financially booming New York City of the late twentieth century, seems the perfect ground for a cosmopolitan confrontation of neoliberal practice.<sup>23</sup> In a cursory engagement with neoliberalism, Rushdie considers postcolonial issues of location and belonging in a historical moment marked by the mass dislocation and the selective enrichment of late capitalism, and these concerns echo earlier cosmopolitan writings—of Bruce Robbins in particular. Yet the novel’s protagonist suffers from perpetual identity crises that continually distract him from meaningfully engaging his surroundings. Largely, the crisis is gendered—his male mid-life nightmare figures women as emasculating and treacherous, as even his prized puppet adopts the stereotypical demon-woman role—a theme reminiscent of Rushdie’s earlier demon woman, Sufiya Zinobia of *Shame*. Such personal turmoil frustrates any explicitly postcolonial challenge to the neoliberal status quo.

However, a closer reading of the narrative reveals more than a crisis of masculinity: Rushdie also articulates an ambivalence towards the postcolonial migrant’s negotiations of the neoliberal order. Such ambivalence could certainly open up a space of critique as Brennan suggests, so it is worth lingering over Solanka’s uncertainties in his neoliberal environs. Solanka is simultaneously enamored and disgusted with the glittering spectacle of American wealth, thus lending a critically interesting ambivalence to his perceptions of New York as the representative American space: one he believes is dominated by the towering lady of liberty, and one he recognizes as ravaging the developing world for cheap labor and resources. Marking his own placelessness, Solanka embodies the locational ambivalence of migration as he has traversed and settled on three continents without feeling completely at home on any of them. Partially out of wanderlust and partially out of self-help, Solanka arrives in America to find a release from the horrible fury that grips him and that likely has cosmopolitan origins: he survived a disturbing

childhood in a colonized land (in India), matures within in the racially isolating educational system of the colonizer (in England), and flees both pasts for the mindless self-absorption of the present neo-imperial power (in the U.S.). Through Solanka's desire for and unease in each potential homeland, Rushdie may be subtly critiquing (and implicating himself in his approval of) America's global oppressive hegemony in economic and cultural realms. As postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha has theorized, the ambivalence of mimicry and colonized identity can propose a means for resistance, acting as a living reminder of the paradox between colonizers' homogenizing project and racist rejection of native assimilation.<sup>24</sup> In Rushdie's text, Solanka's migrant position may allow him that same subversiveness in the context of globalized finance and multinational corporations.

Logically, an initial critique of neoliberalism comes in the form of Solanka's disorientation in the heart of American financial power. Opening with a survey of the metropole's wealth, Rushdie establishes Professor Solanka's voyeuristic relationship with the neoliberal, American city living large off financial speculation. At first, he seems to be there to watch the spectacle of the opulent city unfold. Indeed, unencumbered by work or financial need himself, Solanka spends much of the book playing the affluent tourist or flâneur. But he is no vapid tourist. Both Solanka and the narrator are attuned to the ludicrous consumption that surrounds them as affluent Americans register their cosmopolitanism through conspicuous consumption—and protagonist and author disdainfully render their judgments. In the opening pages of *Fury*, Rushdie wryly catalogues spectacular wealth and conspicuous consumption:

limited-edition olive oils, three-hundred-dollar corkscrews, customized Humvees, ... outsider art, featherlight shawls made from the chin-fluff of extinct mountain goats. So many people were doing up their apartments that supplies of high-grade fixtures and fittings were at a premium ... In spite of the recent falls in the value of the Nasdaq index and the value of Amazon stock, the new technology had the city by the ears: the talk was still of start-ups, IPOs, interactivity, the unimaginable future that had just begun to begin. The future was a casino, and everyone was gambling, and everyone expected to win.<sup>25</sup>

The rapid-fire descriptions of cosmopolitan goods and financial investment convey both the whirlwind atmosphere of Solanka's new environs as well as the seductive lure of the wares themselves; thusly, his ambivalence is registered. Rushdie's characteristic sarcasm can be heard in the lines quoted above, but the speedy sentence structure does more than illustrate the metaphor: it also imparts the siren's song of America's conspicuous consumption in Solanka's ears. Shortly after this mocking description, the consumer-carnival that greets the professor from his apartment-window gazing is only somewhat negative to him or to the narrator—as Solanka's story unfolds, we see his easy affiliations with the nouveau riche and the dot-com world. Early on, Solanka eagerly wanders through streets that offer makeshift bazaars, then identity parades, and finally spontaneous dance parties. The deeper the professor digs into the city, the more Rushdie distances Solanka's experiences from any potentially savvy global critiques. Grounded in neoliberal cosmopolitanism as Solanka is, the distance comes with his rather smooth transition into life with Manhattan's elite. As he sheds his touristic and flâneur-ish perspective, his critiques all but vanish. Indeed, Solanka is at home in this elite world: he speaks the language, secures rental property in a fashionable neighborhood, socializes with old friends, takes several younger lovers, and helps create a profitable website.

Of course, it is his cosmopolitan identity and elite class position that allow for such a smooth transition into New York City life. Situating Solanka's critiques within a more cosmopolitan context, we begin to see Rushdie's creation of a "globetrotter," to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's concept: a wanderer by choice, easily adapting to homogenized niches, carved into local landscapes by highly mobile elites.<sup>26</sup>

Within the same paragraph that critiques American culture as costly spectacle, “there were circuses as well as bread,” Solanka marks himself as a “metropolitan of the countryside-is-for-cows persuasion” who gladly walks alongside his “fellow citizens” of the American global city.<sup>27</sup> Extending this egalitarian vision of said global city, Rushdie grants Solanka a modicum of class awareness as he ponders the ease with which he has abandoned his London-based family and home. He cannot translate his flight into a Hindu rejection of the material world as “a sanyasi with a duplex and gold card was a contradiction in terms.”<sup>28</sup> The professor’s methods are self-consciously “first world” (in Bauman’s terms) as he travels unimpeded by spatial, national, or economic constraints thanks to recent neoliberal efforts to reduce those barriers.<sup>29</sup> Ever the neoliberal cosmopolitan, Solanka can uproot, traverse the globe, begin housekeeping, and rebuild himself—wherever his gold card is accepted.

Even the ostensibly progressive source of Solanka’s wealth, Little Brain, illustrates how neoliberal cosmopolitanism can co-opt the dream of a global culture. Brennan’s analysis of cosmopolitanism and its potential subversion of neoliberal power structures speaks directly to this quandary, as cosmopolitanism is essentially a subtle product of its subject of critique: neoliberal economic and cultural hegemony. Cosmopolitanism’s inefficacy is compounded then by “an [American] argument about the importance of a white, middle-class minority in the political sense of the term”<sup>30</sup>—a minority that defines the parameters of what Stuart Hall calls “global mass culture.”<sup>31</sup> To Hall, the easy, instant arrival and absorption of American images across physical and linguistic boundaries is a form of cultural imperialism rather than the spontaneous mixing of local cultures. Indeed, linguistically localized as Anglo-American, these pop cultural signs are rendered universal because of their purported accessibility, and their transmission across the globe makes them so. Thus, the continuities between cosmopolitanism and Anglo-American cultural/economic hegemony prevent the former from thinking beyond the classed, racial, and (I would add) gendered norms imposed by their geographic origins. In short, through neoliberally informed cosmopolitanism, Anglo-American racism, sexism, and classism go global. *Fury* shifts this problem back to the Anglo side of cultural production: Solanka’s Little Brain and her accompanying television show can exemplify Western beauty and racial norms, celebrate the Western canon of philosophical thinkers, and be a global phenomenon.

Beyond culture, Rushdie also illustrates the limits of cosmopolitanism as meaningful critique of neoliberalism’s specifically economic oppressions. Solanka’s early criticisms of consumerism skim the surface of globalized production and wealth, which one scene illustrates well. On his first walk through the neighborhood, Solanka notes a street vendor’s imitation designer handbags and references a name-brand secondhand store, labeling both as signs of global economic inequality. The crime resides in America’s apathy towards its wealth, which drives the upwardly mobile of developing nations mad with envy. Rather than turn his flâneur-ish eye onto the manufacturing sector, perhaps stumbling across an apartment-turned-sweatshop or a trafficked laborer, the professor’s thoughts circle around the wealth itself and its assumedly tragic, poor distribution among the world’s bourgeoisie. He cannot look behind the label (or imitated label), so he never questions the possibly exploitative production involved in manufacturing the clothing or the non-elite migratory flows that bolster that industry. Nor does he pause to describe the actual persons hawking the illegal wares, who are unlikely to participate in any lavish consumption. Solanka interacts only with other cosmopolitans, migrants by choice, rather than those migrants of necessity.

One might argue that Solanka’s indifference to immigrant working-class struggle is in itself a critique, both of the situation and of the protagonist himself. However, Brennan’s explanation of the Southern, cosmopolitan writer’s treatment of transnational life offers an explanation for Solanka’s class-based apathy, as the writer “join[s] an impassioned political sarcasm (a situated satire) with ironic detachment, employing humor with a cosmic, celebratory pessimism.”<sup>32</sup> Even if Rushdie is mocking Solanka with his tepid criticism of neoliberalism and the bourgeois of the Global South, the very effect of that criticism is

detached and cursory, resulting in an implicitly fatalistic vision of global class structures as imperturbable. Moreover, Solanka's stumblings into other overly political metaphors do not speak highly of his critical acumen. The spectacle of New York and his emotional neediness are too distracting. Encountering a celebration of sexual and then of national identity, Solanka represses his troubling memories of violence (realized and potential) within his various families, all while "rub[bing] shoulders and [getting] jiggy" with the vulgar masses.<sup>33</sup> The crowds become spaces in which to dissolve as Malik, ever the flâneur, sees the gay pride marches and Puerto Rican girls there "to lose themselves" as well.<sup>34</sup> It is an ironic interpretation as both gatherings are the public performance of marginal identities; this publicized naming and claiming of otherness draws Solanka in, which he interprets as "the unarticulated magic of the masses," promising the "satisfying anonymity" he desperately desires.<sup>35</sup> Solanka's reading of collective self-negation can only be a projection of what he needs New York City, and by extension, America, to be: the ahistorical, apolitical country; the land of perpetual, self-centered self-construction. It is the perfect articulation of the neoliberal obsession with individualism, tinged with a hint of economic privilege and consumeristic desire.

Revealing the illusion of neoliberal cosmopolitan detachment, Solanka embraces American vapidness and narcissism. Indeed, for the first half of the text, New York City figures as the ultimate panacea for the migrant man's mid-life crisis:

It was precisely his back-story that he wanted to destroy. ... He had come to America as so many before him to receive the benison of being Ellis-Islanded, of starting over. Give me a name, America, make me a Buzz or a Chip or a Spike. Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing. Enlist me in your J. Crew and hand me my mouse ears! No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be. I'll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead.<sup>36</sup>

The soporific thrill of American ignorance to global realities—criticisms for which Rushdie later upbraids British journalists covering Ground Zero—this is the viagra for Solanka's creative impotence. To drug himself with culturally sanctioned amnesia means to forget history, including the geopolitical and economic policies that signify the U.S. as a neocolonial force. Indeed, Solanka readily jumps into the neoliberal cyber-marketplace that elides the reality of the sweatshop, the death squad, and perpetuation of global poverty. Parroting tech-marketing rhetoric, Rushdie celebrates the Internet's revolutionary time-space collapse as "available to all, at the merest click of a mouse,"<sup>37</sup> rendering a virtual cosmopolitan identity as infinitely accessible. Never does this cosmopolitan mind that the chip-manufacturing sector relies heavily on sweated labor in the Global South or that the digital divide is a local as well as global chasm. For this cyber venture on an online Little Brain, while augmenting Solanka's already impressive wealth, assuages his masculine crisis. Thus, it is the unapologetic and uncritical participation in the new global economy that Rushdie cites as curative for Solanka's anxieties about age, gender, and identity.

### Gendering Cosmopolitanism

Importantly, the tech economy is not the only problematic solution for his migrant hero. Rushdie rather dramatically turns Solanka towards women as a site of psychological relief. Here, again, we see an ambivalence that veers to the uncritical and oppressive. As Ambreen Hai suggests, Rushdie's feminism is an ambivalent one, revealing potentially liberating and insightful critiques of patriarchy.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, both central women in the text, Mila Milosevic and Neela Mahendra, share the protagonist's migrant and cosmopolitan identity, suggesting an agency drawn from class position and cultural mobility. Relevant to

the context of the transnational is the considerable scholarly work and human rights reporting that continually describe women as the most exploited of those who suffer the short-ended stick of our new global economy. On the flip side of that gendered coin, Mila and Neela represent independent, economically powerful women thriving in the global city. That representation counters the homogenized portrait of the immiserated and violated “Third World woman” that dominates most Western cultural presentations of women in the Global South.<sup>39</sup> That the women initially figure as fellow cosmopolitan immigrants cannot be ignored as a challenge to homogenized portraits of Southern women’s disempowerment.

Indeed, Mila’s entrance into the text offers the potential for cosmopolitan bonding as she and Solanka immediately recognize each other as “outsiders” in America. Sharp-eared Mila detects the colonial accent in Solanka’s voice and hails him as a fellow European migrant. She too has caught Solanka’s wandering eye, and not for wholly sexual reasons at first. Despite her decidedly American dress—baggy clothes, black D’Angelo Voodoo baseball cap—Mila appears too striking to pass for the khaki-clad, Nike-wearing denizens of Solanka’s treasured America. Her appearance is doubly significant, molded as she has after Solanka’s beloved and first puppet character, Little Brain. Now lost to her global-cultural icon status (a loss that figures as a primary source of his creative rage), Little Brain once signified for Solanka spunky intellectual vivacity: L.B., the ultimate cosmopolitan, was “his hip, fashion-conscious, but still idealistic Candide”<sup>40</sup> who travels through time to interview famous, male (of course) philosophers. Rushdie deliberately sends Mila into the narrative as Solanka’s first human, creative lifeline as she mimics a past sign of artistic energy and an idealized expression of the cosmopolitan elite.

Soon, however, her palliative status ends, illustrating the limits of cosmopolitanism to right emotional wrongs of the past. Mila’s compassion for the ruin inflicted by Solanka’s fury comes from her own experience of a father destroyed by the demons of divisive nationalisms and historical conflict, echoing that which cosmopolitan solutions propose to redress. After the professor confides in Mila about his loss of Little Brain and his flight to New York, she explains the death of her mother, a life on the literary superstar circuit with her talented, ex-pat father, and his sudden death during his return to Serbia. The explanation reveals her as another well-educated globetrotter, raised in the conference rooms of prestigious, international literary gatherings and educated by the finest tutors. Also a victim of childhood trauma, Mila shares in Solanka’s desires to dissolve painful pasts into American pop cultural oblivion. More importantly, though, she illustrates the failure of that self-abnegation. Later, when Malik enters Mila’s apartment he is quick to notice that even the room “was trying hard to be an all-American apartment but failing badly,” with posters of American pop icons overshadowed by massive bookshelves filled with Eastern European literature.<sup>41</sup> As neither she nor Solanka can forget their pasts, Mila decides that Solanka must revitalize himself through artistic creation by bringing another puppet world to life. So he does, with Mila’s help. Her particular method of assistance is where Mila’s character settles into a portrait of perversity and feminine deviance.

With Mila, Rushdie shifts from ignoring the class privilege of the cosmopolitan experience to overlooking the gendered privilege of these men of the world. Fellow female cosmopolitans come to serve Solanka’s creative and physical needs as Mila most explicitly inspires and services him through incestuous role play. The quick objectification by Rushdie’s cosmopolitan protagonist is not terribly surprising, as some critics of cosmopolitanism have noted the limited gender analysis in the theory. As anthropologist Maila Stivens has argued, the cosmopolitan perspective is also often doubly coded as elite and as masculine.<sup>42</sup> Cultural studies scholar Mica Nava, whose work explicitly addresses feminine cosmopolitanism in the British metropole, also concedes that “the specificity of *gendered* relations to elsewhere and otherness, whether racist or anti-racist, has attracted little attention.”<sup>43</sup> Rushdie’s gender blind spot merely mirrors the common trends of cosmopolitanisms to ignore the gender inequality inherent in (trans)national mobility and privilege.

However common, this particular blindspot is incredibly troubling, as the following close reading will reveal. And the neoliberal slant of Mila's gendered objectification is also notable and even more disturbing, given the overt references to incest. As is inexplicably common in *Fury*, Solanka's late-middle-age charm ultimately drives the young beauty mad with passion for him. This passion will serve economically productive ends as part of Solanka's artistic flow is dammed by more than fury's scars and cosmopolitan wanderings: he has become creatively impotent. Mila, mimicking the earliest, original version of Little Brain, becomes an older, real version of his doll-daughter. Afternoon discussions between the professor and woman take an unsettling turn when the encounters gradually become sexualized. Getting her own key to his apartment, Mila comes to the professor every afternoon, dressed in a baby-doll nightie, to sit upon a pillow perched on the professor's soon-to-be excited lap and grope him for several hours. Mila explicitly labels herself in these scenes as a lustful Lolita, a living doll for his cathartic amusement: "Everybody needs a doll to play with... You don't need it anymore, all that rage. You just need to remember how to play."<sup>44</sup> Here, the intellectual, wordly Mila is reduced to sexy muse whose prowess unleashes Solanka's profitable creativity, updated for the cyber marketplace.

As Solanka and Mila's encounters become more problematic, Solanka's powerlessness is reiterated as he fails to refuse Mila and to see the cosmopolitan city that he once imagined as gleefully harboring. Indeed, the global city all but dissolves as Rushdie situates the narrative in the private space of Solanka's bedroom. It isn't until the sexual culmination of their illicit afternoons, rather than the acknowledgment of their mutual perversity, that Solanka emerges out of the bedroom and out of his funk. After one of their petting sessions, Solanka keeps Mila from leaving by sharing with her his hypothesis on the varying translations of the fellatio in English and American contexts. Fellatio is rare and signified as extremely intimate in England; whereas, in the United States, its commonality results in a desire for female sexual purity and male satisfaction. Narratively, the tirade gives Mila the inspiration and excuse to remove the pillow in "an unexpected and overwhelming escalation of their end-of-afternoon routine."<sup>45</sup> Through a narrative jump in time, Rushdie elides the highly probable oral sex scene between Solanka and Mila, through which she can conveniently satisfy the professor without asking him to transcend too taboo a boundary—no matter how metaphorical it is between them. That evening, the professor renews his old creative pursuit of dollmaking with "new fire," after a pep talk from Mila heavily laden with sexual innuendo:

There's so much inside you, waiting, she had said. I can feel it, you're bursting with it. Here, here. Put it into your work, Papi. The furia. Okay? ... Make me dolls that come from [the original Little Brain's] neighborhood—from that wild place in your heart... Blow me away, Papi. ... Make adult dolls, R-rated, NC-17 dolls. I'm not a kid anymore.<sup>46</sup>

Sexual metaphor saturates Mila's talk and inspires Solanka to start creating those wilder dolls to fulfill Mila's desire—the incest taboo turned global commodity. Mila ceases to be a sexual deviant, becoming a less disturbing muse, albeit still a figure whose power comes from her sexuality. She is now "genuinely inspiring," and with her "potent urgings," Solanka's "long congealed and damned" ideas to "burn and flow."<sup>47</sup> Interestingly enough, Mila's dropping of her childlike, doll persona in the speech becomes narrative reality for her. The afternoons with Papi cease, though not for any ethical reasons. Solanka simply finds a more beautiful cosmopolitan with which to replace her, Neela, who ends up, not dumped, but dead.

Borrowing from Aijaz Ahmad's "symptomatic reading" of misogynistic feminine representations in *Shame*, I read Rushdie's continual figuring of women as monstrous virgins or sexy muses as compromising any meaningful critique of neoliberalism that Solanka's earlier cosmopolitan ambivalences might

have suggested.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, if one's goal is to complicate neoliberal power dynamics, then reproducing misogynist images of women suggests a limited attempt at best. Here, we are reminded of Stiven's critique of cosmopolitan discourse as uncritically grounding itself in masculine privilege.<sup>49</sup> Rushdie's call for "rigorous attention" to current geopolitical events sounds rather weak if his "reimagining" ratifies gender inequalities, and the only voices echoing in the cosmopolitan imaginary of the novel are patriarchal.<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately, through unsettling narrative and conspicuous silences, *Fury* illustrates the shortcomings of cosmopolitan ambiguities in the negotiations of present-day neoliberal ventures and gendered inequalities. We should, as Edward Said suggests, offer readings "that gives voice to what is silent or marginally present" in metropolitan novels that introduce colonial space as a backdrop or plot device.<sup>51</sup> Those with a cosmopolitan perspective, it seems, would have even stronger impetus to do so. In this essay, I have outlined the limits of cosmopolitanism to complicate current global power structures, particularly in the ways in which it might simply reproduce them. What is surprisingly missing in Rushdie's text is an engagement with the problematic gender and class realities that allow a cosmopolitan man, of colonial origins or not, to prosper from an exploitative world economy that has dramatically widened the gap between rich and poor. What *Fury* does illustrate is gendered inequalities, but only as experienced by elite cosmopolitan women. A narrative so interested in stock-market fortunes and cyber revolutions as well as once-marginalized colonial identities (be they South Asian or Eastern European), could easily articulate the exploitive practices of neoliberalism. And a writer explicitly concerned with the careful evaluation of liberal capitalism should have little trouble imagining the persons forced to live in squalor and work in quasi-prisons so that his protagonist's global city can be paved with gold. Though Solanka crosses continents, we never glimpse a sweatshop or slum. Indeed, Rushdie resolves his narrative with Solanka's return to the distinctly American metropole to reclaim his role as bourgeois father. The global city and Solanka the cosmopolitan, for all their ill-begotten wealth, are supplanted for the restitution of patriarchy and the rejection of narrative challenge to neoliberalism. Cosmopolitanism purports to offer a non-oppressive identity in a transnational world. However, the theory is easily appropriated by neoliberal values and projects, as *Fury* readily demonstrates. Indeed, Rushdie's novel offers us little more than cosmopolitan elitism and unsettling gender constructs.

#### Notes

1. An inventory of this scholarship would be too large to include in this essay, but, for a sample of salient publications across disciplinary divides, see Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (2006), Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), Robbin's *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (2012) and *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (1998), Gilroy's *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (2004), Sassen's *The Global City* (1991), and Beck's *Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006).
2. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: An Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Walking through the term's philosophical history and his own cosmopolitan upbringing, Appiah sees cosmopolitanism as a discursive strategy through which one can tolerate difference. The metaphor of conversation frequently appears to encourage the requisite familiarity of difference, rather than its acceptance, which would ostensibly make for a peaceful, or at least tolerant, world community.
3. Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004). Specifically, Gilroy deploys cosmopolitanism to get outside of more singular analyses of race and gender to both critique and revive multiculturalism in Great Britain. The term allows him to

- then critique the erasure of the multicultural city in the whitewashed film *Notting Hill* and the colonial nostalgia alive and well in British football chants. Cosmopolitanism's possibilities reside in its popular expressions from the city itself as seen in several multiracial pop artists, including the hip hop artist *The Streets* and Sasha Baron Cohen's parody, *Ali G*.
4. Bruce Robbins, *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). Continuing in his exploration of a "new cosmopolitanism," Robbins calls for a globally mindful view to combat the perpetual militarism of the United States and economic inequality. His "new, dirty cosmopolitanism" seeks to revise the neoliberal agenda into one of local and global social justice. As is well known, Robbins is not one to throw the national baby out with the cosmopolitan bathwater.
  5. David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
  6. Ibid.
  7. These arguments are popularly represented in much of Thomas Friedman's work, namely in *The World is Flat*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005) and *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (New York: Picador, 2008).
  8. See Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-4.
  9. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
  10. David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Similar arguments are made by international-relations scholar Peter Gowan in "Neoliberal Cosmopolitanism," *New Left Review* 11 (2001): 75-93; sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos in "Beyond Neoliberal Governance: The World Social Forum as Subaltern Cosmopolitan Politics," in *Law and Globalization from Below: Towards a Cosmopolitan Legality*, ed. De Sousa Santos and Rodriguez-Garavito, 29-63; and sociologist Craig J. Calhoun in "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002): 869-897; among others.
  11. Timothy Brennan, "Cosmo-Theory," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 659.
  12. Ibid, 659.
  13. Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
  14. In an earlier work, Brennan classifies Rushdie as "Third-World Cosmopolitan" writer, including Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Derek Walcott, among others. Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).
  15. Salman Rushdie, *Fury: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2001).
  16. See, for example, Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin, 1992), *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (New York: Random House, 1987), and *Step Across the Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: Random House, 2002).
  17. Salman Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred" in *Imaginary Homelands*, 426-27.
  18. Rushdie's concern in the larger piece is the rise of fundamentalist Islam as the new foil to Western liberal democracy and capitalism in the post-Soviet era.
  19. Ibid, 427. Emphasis in the original.
  20. Salman Rushdie "Fighting the Forces of Invisibility," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2001. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/10/02/fighting-the-forces-of-invisibility/5ef65046-32ed-4888-ad3c-f009d4347e64/>

21. Ibid.
22. Brennan historicizes an earlier qualifying of his once progressive politics, reading Rushdie's more muted criticisms of the Thatcher-esque conservatism as a direct result of the fatwa and his attendant, precarious position. With his life at stake, Rushdie found himself dependent on the British government, with its long history of working-class and immigrant repression, all the more heightened during the introduction of neoliberal policies. His dependence, Brennan argues, muted any leftist criticisms of his new-found protectors. Thus, "the Rushdie that the fatwa kidnapped" was a serious and savvy writer who openly opposed imperialism, orientalism, and anti-democratic movements. See Timothy Brennan, "The Cultural Politics of Rushdie Criticism: All or Nothing," In *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K. Hall, 1999), 120.
23. Indeed, it is not by chance that the Occupy Wall Street movement was born in New York as it unfolded in the heart of Wall Street. That movement offered a sort of cosmopolitan politics to redress the economic ravaging of much of the Global North and South post-the Great Financial Crisis. Rushdie's Solanka is too caught up in the glittering excesses of free market to notice the seeds of those politics around him.
24. Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Men" In *Locations of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
25. Rushdie, *Fury*, 3-4.
26. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
27. Ibid., 6.
28. Ibid., 82.
29. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*.
30. Brennan, *At Home in the World*, 310.
31. Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti & Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 378.
32. Brennan, *At Home in the World*, 41.
33. Rushdie, *Fury*, 7.
34. Ibid., 7.
35. Ibid., 7.
36. Ibid., 51.
37. Ibid., 187.
38. Ambreen Hai, "Marching in from the Peripheries: Rushdie's Feminized Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism" In *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K. Hall, 1999). 16-50.
39. This argument is most famously argued by Chandra Mohanty. See Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in *Feminist Review* 30, (1988): 61-88.
40. Rushdie, *Fury*, 17.
41. Ibid., 176.
42. Maila Stivens, "Gender, Rights and Cosmopolitanisms" in *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*, ed. Pnina Werbner (New York: Berg, 2008).
43. Mica Nava, "Domestic Cosmopolitanism and Structures of Feeling: The Specificity of London" in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran and Ulrike

- Vieten (London: Sage, 2006), 42.
44. Ibid., 130.
  45. Ibid., 137.
  46. Ibid., 138.
  47. Ibid., 138.
  48. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), 152.
  49. Stivens, "Gender, Rights and Cosmopolitanisms."
  50. Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred," 426-27.
  51. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 66.

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