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## Come Together? The Deconstruction of Community in the Contemporary Black British Short Story

In their introduction to *Theorien der Gemeinschaft*, Lars Gertenbach et al. argue that debates about communal identity revive at times of collective crises (2010, 54). In the British context, it was predominantly in reaction to several waves of large-scale immigration from the former British colonies after the end of the Second World War that questions of national community came to the fore. By the late 1970s, the largely African, Caribbean, and South Asian migrants and their descendants had become a visible 'black British' presence that forced white Britain to "confront its postcolonial history [...] as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*" (Bhabha 2004, 9). That Britain is still struggling to come to terms with its postcolonial legacy became strikingly obvious in PM David Cameron's controversial observation at the Munich Security Conference 2011 that the policy of multiculturalism has failed in Great Britain.

Black British writers and artists have made a vital contribution to the ongoing discourse on the redefinition of Britishness. Novels like Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) are widely celebrated as "herald[s] of hybridity" (Schoene 1998, 117). Appropriate as such assessments may be, the scholarly focus on the black British novel has tended to overshadow the creative achievements in other genres. In discussing select short stories by three contemporary black British writers, namely Hanif Kureishi, Jackie Kay, and Hari Kunzru, I aim to illustrate how the short story form serves these authors as a vehicle not only to imagine "*a new way of being British*" (Kureishi 2011, 34), but also to challenge exclusionary notions of community.<sup>1</sup> Several of their stories experiment with what Mark Stein, following David Hollinger, has called a 'postethnic' stance (Stein 2004 and 2000, 108-142; Hollinger 1995). They transcend the confines of a postcolonial context in order to explore questions of community on a more general, even ontological level. This becomes especially apparent when reading these stories against the background of deconstructivist conceptualisations of community, in addition to the customarily applied postcolonial concepts of communal identity like Stuart Hall's "new ethnicities" (1996a, 236; 1996b and 1997) or Homi K. Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (2004, xvii; 2000).

In what follows, I shall illustrate that Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of a differential, non-essentialist and dynamic 'singular plural' community (1991a; 2000; 2003) is a particularly useful means of investigating the representation of community in the black British short story. After a brief outline of my theoretical framework, I analyse Kureishi's "Straight," Kay's "My Daughter the Fox," and Kunzru's "Deus Ex Machina" with a view to the following questions: what kind(s) of community do these narratives represent? Which narrative strategies do they employ to explore issues of

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<sup>1</sup> Kureishi, Kay and Kunzru are not the only black British writers who use the short story in this way. A similar tendency is also discernible in the short fiction written by Zadie Smith and Suhayl Saadi.

communal identity? And, last but not least, what do they imply with regard to the specific capability of the short story and, ultimately, literature?<sup>2</sup>

### Theoretical Framework

Black British writing is habitually read through the lens of postcolonial theory. While postcolonial concepts of collective identity yield valuable insights into stories that explicitly deal with questions of migration, ethnicity, and belonging, they prove less applicable to postethnic stories in which ethnic markers are absent or a character's ethnic identity has ceased to be of major interest (cf. Stein 2004, 137; Stein 2000, 136-139). In order to show that Kureishi, Kay, and Kunzru's postethnic stories are vitally concerned with community on a deep-structural level, it is necessary to apply deconstructive conceptualisations of community to their fiction.<sup>3</sup>

The 1980s gave rise to a debate about the deconstruction of community in France, in which philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and Jacques Derrida participated. These philosophers were heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger's argument in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) that *Dasein*, or the human being-there, is essentially being-with (1977, 161), and as such first and foremost indeterminate potentiality (1977, 57). Additionally, their philosophies of community were indebted to George Bataille's conceptualisation of 'communautés électives' ('communities of choice') (Gertenbach et al. 2010, 156). All deconstructivist philosophers have striven to free the concept of community from its traditional associations with homogeneity and essentialist substance in order to open it towards a recognition of its constitutive internal difference and its commonalities with the apparent external Other. Nancy's writings on community are amongst the most important contributions to the philosophical deconstruction of community. On the basis of the idea of 'co-ontology' developed in *Being Singular Plural* (1996), Nancy has conceptualised a differential, non-essentialist, dynamic, and continuously interrupted 'inoperative community' of 'singular plural' beings in works such as *The Inoperative Community* (1986) and 'The Confronted Community' (2001). He emphasises that "there is no original or origin of [communal] identity. What holds the place of an 'origin' is the sharing of singularities" (1991a, 33). Moreover, Nancy argues that

there is no entity or hypostasis of community because this sharing [...] cannot be completed. Incompletion is its 'principle', taking the term 'incompletion' in an active sense, however, as designating not insufficiency or lack, but the activity of sharing, the dynamic [...] of an uninterrupted passage through singular ruptures. That is to say, [...] a workless and inoperative activity. (1991a, 35)

The French attempts at a deconstruction of community were internationalised when the Italian philosophers Roberto Esposito and, most notably, Giorgio Agamben

2 Although I can only offer short, sketchy analyses of these stories here, the discussion of three short stories by three different writers intends to show that the deconstruction of community is a general feature of the contemporary black British short story.

3 The ensuing survey of deconstructivist philosophies of community is based on the summary provided in Schötz (2013).

published their philosophies of community in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Employing a terminology that is reminiscent of both Nancy and Derrida's works on community, Agamben proposes a transnational, entirely inclusive, and inoperative 'coming community' of "whatever being[s]," i.e. singular "being[s] *such as [they are]*" (1993, 1). In *The Coming Community* he stresses that such a community of whatever singularities is not based upon common properties but upon belonging itself.<sup>5</sup>

### Hanif Kureishi: "Straight"

The first widely acclaimed British-born writer of New Commonwealth descent, Hanif Kureishi, is also a highly prolific writer of short fiction. Almost unnoticed by literary critics and scholars, Kureishi has established himself as one of the most eminent British short story writers in the course of the last three decades. He has published four collections of stories to date: *Love in a Blue Time* (1997), *Midnight All Day* (1999), *The Body and Seven Stories* (2002), as well as an edition of *Collected Stories* (2010), which includes eight "New Stories." His short fiction appears to mark a turning point<sup>6</sup> in his oeuvre insofar as it is less concerned with the articulation of hybrid British Asian subject positions that defined his early screenplays and the by now canonical novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* (1995). Instead, it introduces the postethnic stance that has come to characterise his middle and most recent works.<sup>7</sup>

Not only are ethnic markers strikingly absent in the majority of his stories, but they also tend to foreground themes that have a wide, arguably transethnic appeal. They explore masculine subject positions in the post-feminist era, the conflict between individualism and social or familial commitment, relationships, and marriage, fatherhood, friendship, and homosexuality. In doing so, Kureishi's stories highlight that the depicted characters are united by the human concerns they share irrespective of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity, or national identity. They deconstruct exclusionary notions of (British) community in order to propose an inclusionary, transethnic community of human beings. In focalising the narrated events through the respective protagonists, the short stories as a whole indicate that such a community is singularly plural in the Nancean sense because it simultaneously gives voice to the idiosyncratic singularity of each character *and* stresses their common concerns.

The short story "Straight," first published in *The Body and Seven Stories* (2002), may serve to illustrate this conception of community that appears to permeate Kureishi's short fiction. On the surface level, this extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative relates, with the help of interspersed flashbacks, how the middle-aged protagonist

4 A further instance of the growing internationalisation of the discourse may be seen in Wolfgang Iser's conceptualisation of 'transculturality.' The German philosopher developed this notion of a differential, inclusive, and open community in the 1990s. However, his recent focus on the biological nature of transcultural commonalities signals his turning away from a deconstructive school of thought (2009).

5 Agamben explicates: "In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) – and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-*such*, for belonging itself" (1993, 1-2).

6 Writing in 2001, Bart Moore-Gilbert considers Kureishi's turn to the short story form and the concomitant shift in focus "something of a watershed" (152).

7 Cf. Stein (2000; 2004, 108-142), Volkmann (2005), and Schötz (2013). See the latter for an in-depth analysis of the depiction of community in Kureishi's short fiction.

changes his life after he has been rescued from drowning by a "tall and dark-skinned" taxi driver (Kureishi 2010, 552). Brett forsakes the transient pleasures of a hedonistic lifestyle in favour of a more thorough, sober, and "straight" way of life. However, closer analyses suggest that the notorious "incident by the river" (Kureishi 2010, 550) has also facilitated a change in Brett's conception of community.

Prior to his encounter with the taxi driver, Brett's affiliations with other people tended to be superficial. His friendships have been grounded on the shared consumption of large amounts of alcohol and drugs, shallow talk, and joint visits to the same club. Accordingly, hardly any of his alleged friends notice the change he has recently undergone even though some of them have known him for more than two decades (Kureishi 2010, 549). Moreover, the protagonist's relationships with other people are constrained by his exclusionary, Anglo-centric understanding of national identity. He automatically infers from the taxi driver's skin colour that he is "a North African of some sort" (Kureishi 2010, 552), defining his rescuer as an ethnic and national Other when, in fact, he appears to be a hybrid black British. As a student of Law, the driver trains to uphold the legal status quo and become a vital part of British society. Additionally, we learn that he has firmly settled down in England by starting a family with two children.

Significantly, apart from challenging Brett's monocultural understanding of Britishness, the momentous encounter with the taxi driver has the protagonist glimpse<sup>8</sup> an alternative way of communal bonding. Although the man wears "worn-out shoes" and has to support his family through taxi driving whenever he is not studying (Kureishi 2010, 552), he refuses Brett's offer of dry clothes and "raise[s] his hands in protest" when the protagonist attempts to pay his dry-cleaning bill (553). Disconcerted, he emphasises: "Anyone would have done this thing!" (553). His insistence that "anyone," any singularity, would have helped Brett indicates his belief that all human beings share certain attitudes, values and customs, regardless of their specific cultural or ethnic background. The narrative suggests that amongst these human commonalities are compassion, the readiness to help others selflessly, and respect for life. More importantly, however, the story graphically portrays the Nancean insight that human beings share, above all, their 'finitude.' Rescued from drowning, Brett learns that community is not based upon a 'common being' or substance, i.e. a shared white British ethnicity, but upon a 'being-in-common' (Nancy 1991a, xxxviii-xxxix; Nancy 1991b, 7-8). According to Nancy, such a "[c]ommunity without community" (1991a, 71) is "a bond that forms ties without attachments, [...] a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites *through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude*" (1991a, xi; emphasis added).

Thus, the liminal near-death experience causes the protagonist to alter his previous conception of community, opening it out towards any other. At the end of the story, Brett sets out to find the driver, wishing to offer him help either with his children or housekeeping, and hoping for a profound, "[g]ood talk" (Kureishi 2010, 559). He intends to become friends with the man who has made him realise the sharing of singularities. Since the black British taxi driver encourages Brett's inclusive

8 In the fashion of the modernist short story, "Straight" centres around a significant moment in the protagonist's life that allows him an insight into the nature of human life. Kureishi's story thus stands in the tradition of practitioners like Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and James Joyce, who call this experience variably 'moment of being,' 'glimpse,' or 'epiphany' (Mergenthal 2005, 192-193).

conceptualisation of a 'singular plural' community, the short story seems to point to the fruitful effect that the coloured alleged Other may have on the white British Self. Brett is vaguely aware of the fact that "something about the man had influenced him" (Kureishi 2010, 556).

### Jackie Kay: "My Daughter the Fox"

As Susan Tranter observed in 2008, "[i]n the last 20 years or so, Jackie Kay has moved from marginal voice to national treasure" (n.p.). While the black Scottish writer is primarily known for her poetry and her award-winning only novel *Trumpet*, Kay "should be," as one critic remarks, "just as celebrated for her short fiction" (qtd. in Kay 2006, dust jacket). So far, she has published no less than three collections of short stories. In 2002, the *Irish Times* greeted her first collection, *Why Don't You Stop Talking*, by stating: "[I]f stories like these can still be written, the much-maligned short story form must still be alive, not to say kicking" (qtd. in Kay 2002, dust jacket). Her second collection, *Wish I Was Here* (2006), earned her the British Book Awards Decibel Writer of the Year Award. Most recently, in 2012, *Reality, Reality* was published.

In her short fiction, Kay deals with the same themes that have come to characterise her work in general, i.e. the sociocultural construction of individual identity, Scottish national identity, hybrid black British identity, gender identity (particularly femininity), and lesbian relationships. Significantly, the majority of her short stories are postethnic inasmuch as they are equally concerned with black and white British characters. In fact, they increasingly obscure the portrayed characters' precise ethnic background. Additionally, they tend to focus primarily on issues other than the protagonists' ethnic identity. As a concern with ethnicity recedes into the background of many stories, the narratives appear to foreground the commonalities shared by all characters irrespective of their colour, ethnic background, gender, and sexual preferences. Similar to Kureishi's short fiction, the stories explore the possibility of an entirely inclusionary community of 'singular plural' beings. That such a community is based on 'interruption' rather than "the hypostasis of the 'common'" (Nancy 1991a, xxxix) is made apparent through Kay's preference for singular and idiosyncratic autodiegetic narrating instances. In her discussion of Kay's poetry and the novel *Trumpet*, Alison Lumsden explicitly points to the writer's "overarching ontological concern with the ways in which identity and subjectivity are constituted" (2000, 87). According to Lumsden, Kay's texts display the ontological belief that "we need [...] to be able to come together on the basis of our differences and not on the basis of our similarities" (Kay qtd. in Lumsden 2000, 85). The ensuing analysis intends to show that a similar ontological concern with the formation of a deconstructivist, differential community is at work in Kay's short fiction.

Michael Parker calls "My Daughter the Fox" "[o]ne of the most intriguing, perfectly realized tales in *Wish I Was Here*," considering it "a fable worthy of Angela Carter" (2008, 326). So far, most reviewers and scholars have interpreted the apologue as an illustration of "the strains and challenges of motherhood" (Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins 2011, 249), particularly as a mother has to accept "the inexorable necessity of letting 'her child' go" when she is grown up (Arana 2009, 255). The Kafkaesque element of the fox daughter has frequently been read as the metaphor of a child that

turns out strikingly different from its parents (Arana 2009, 255). Nevertheless, it may be argued that this magical-realist short story can also be understood as an allegory of community formation. What makes Kay's story especially fascinating is its ambivalent stance towards community: the narrative can be read in terms of Nancean community thinking or as staging an essentialist notion of community, depending on which elements one foregrounds.

The short story explores the relationship between a forty-year-old Scottish mother and her animal offspring. Contrary to her midwife and the staff at the hospital, the narrator cries with happiness after she has given birth to her fox daughter. Unlike her unfaithful ex-boyfriend, Anya gives her the feeling of being loved and understood by someone who is utterly loyal (Kay 2006, 88-89). The mother happily acknowledges that apart from the red hair that Anya shares with her father, "she was mine. I swear I could see my own likeness, in her pointed chin, in her high cheeks, in her black eyes" (88). She comes to love her daughter so dearly and unconditionally that she feels transformed into an entirely new person, someone who defines herself first and foremost through her role as a mother and has lost almost all interest in her looks, in socialising, and in professional success. She ultimately cherishes her daughter's company so thoroughly that "[she] couldn't actually imagine [her] life without her now" (98). Apart from being a loving community of mother and child, the depicted constellation transgresses the boundaries of species to denote a community of human being and animal. The trans-species community constitutes a 'singular plural' co-appearance of singularities in the Nancean sense insofar as mother and daughter establish a loving, communal bond, while maintaining their singular identities. This becomes especially apparent in the narrator's account of her grown-up daughter: "Part of her wanted to do everything the same way I did: sleep under covers, eat what I ate, go where I went, run when I ran, walk when I walked; and part of her wanted to do everything her way. Eat from whatever she could snatch in the street or in the woods" (94). Thus, mother and daughter may be said to represent the deconstructive notion of a non-identitarian, highly differential and non-essentialist community. Furthermore, as a community of a human parent and an animal child they may be taken to epitomise Nancy's observation in *Being Singular Plural* that "an ontology of being-with-one-another [...] must be an ontology for the world," that is "for each and every one and for the world 'as a totality'," including "both the sphere of 'nature' and [*sic*] sphere of 'history', as well as both the 'human' and the 'nonhuman'" (53-54).

The transgressiveness of the envisioned kind of community becomes blatantly obvious in the hostile reactions of the other characters. While the otherwise "stern" midwife utters "a blood-curdling scream" (Kay 2006, 88), the staff make the mother leave the hospital immediately in the middle of the night because "the fox was a hazard" (Kay 2006, 89). Adhering to her inclusive notion of community, the autodiegetic narrator reflects: "It was awful to hear my daughter being spoken of in this way, as if she hadn't just been born, as if she didn't deserve the same considerations as the others. They were all quaking and shaking like it was the most disgusting thing they had ever seen" (Kay 2006, 89). Later her mother is horrified at the sight of her grand-daughter and Anya's father denies his fatherhood, declaring his ex-girlfriend insane. Passers-by looking into the pram are shocked and lost for words, while friends warn the narrator of the potential dangers that living with a wild animal poses (Kay 2006, 91-93). Nurseries are not willing to regard Anya as a 'child,' and her colleagues exchange

awkward glances, suggesting that she is mad (Kay 2006, 96-97). In short, the narrator sums up: "Nobody was as sympathetic to me as I thought they might be. It never occurred to me to dump Anya or disown her or pretend she hadn't come from me" (Kay 2006, 92). Society's unanimous ostracisation of Anya highlights how unusual the mother and her fox daughter's inclusionary, non-essentialist community is. But the harsh exclusion of Anya and her stigmatisation also function to intensify the communal bond between mother and child.

Yet, notwithstanding this progressive allegorical conceptualisation of community, the short story also illustrates that a traditional, exclusionary, and essentialist notion of communal identity continues to prevail and is, ultimately, hard to overcome. If the fox daughter is read as a magical-realist blood relative of the narrator, their community becomes essentialist and biologicistic rather than constructed and differential. Furthermore, even if we stick with the previous deconstructivist interpretation of their community, we have to acknowledge that the mother is "thrilled" whenever her daughter "was a fox like other foxes, when [she] could see her *origins* so clearly" (Kay 2006, 94; emphasis added). Indeed, she eventually loses Anya to the other London foxes that frequent the house to claim her daughter on grounds of her species, i.e. her biological origin.

### **Hari Kunzru: "Deus Ex Machina"**

In 2003, Hari Kunzru was named one of *Granta's* twenty 'Best of Young British Novelists,' and it is as the author of the award-winning novels *The Impressionist* (2002) and *Transmission* (2004) that Kunzru has come to the forefront of critical debates. Nevertheless, the writer, whose works have been translated into twenty-one languages, has also published numerous short stories in various newspapers and magazines as well as the short-story collection *Noise* (2005). In her study of *British Asian Fiction*, Sara Upstone has aptly noted that all of his works – whether they thematise globalisation, terrorism, consumer culture, or the cyborg – are preoccupied with postmodern "reflections on selfhood, subjectivity, and what it means to be human" (2010, 158). Since Kunzru addresses these theoretical concerns that are often neglected by contemporary British Asian authors, Upstone considers him "the natural successor to Kureishi and Rushdie" (2010, 163).

Kunzru's short fiction illustrates that his philosophical treatment of subjectivity and the human being has important repercussions for his understanding of community. Set in a variety of places, from England to Jordan and China, his short stories give voice to a deconstructive global community of singular human beings. Their ontological concern with community becomes strikingly obvious in their treatment of transethnic issues relevant to all human beings, their lack of interest in a character's specific ethnicity, and their explicit focus on 'human beings,' 'humanity' and 'human society.' Since the short story "Deus Ex Machina" encapsulates Kunzru's conceptualisation of community in nuce, it may serve as an instructive example here.

First published in *Vintage New Authors* in 1998, "Deus Ex Machina" is the piece of writing that brought Kunzru to the attention of a literary agent and initiated his career as a professional writer (Aldama 2006, 110; 112). Like the discussed stories by Kureishi and Kay, this magical-realist short story is postethnic. While various textual signs suggest that the 28-year-old protagonist Christina is white British, the narrative

is not overly concerned with her or any other character's ethnicity. Instead, it primarily deals with the themes of failed love, self-doubt, and suicidal depression, which are arguably postethnic inasmuch as they may pertain to all human beings irrespective of their skin colour, ethnicity, or religious creed.

From the beginning of the story, the omniscient, homodiegetic angelic narrator distinguishes between the "immaterial," spiritual world and the material world of people or "human society" to which Christina belongs (Kunzru 2005, 14; 22). The very first sentence introduces the reader to this dichotomy: "People say that everyone has a Guardian Angel" (Kunzru 2005, 14). On the one hand, this distinction between the angelic and the human world results in a deconstruction of conceived notions of religion. The narrating Guardian Angel informs us that the spiritual world is to be imagined as "a Synthesis of All Religions" (Kunzru 2005, 14). Additionally, it stresses that "organized religion" in the form of the "church is entirely optional," for "[s]incerity is important [...] [b]ut all these jihads and crusades, these isms and schisms, arguments over how many fingers to make the sign of the cross with, or whether to have images or smash them up, that's all way off the point" (Kunzru 2005, 15).

On the other hand, the clear-cut demarcation between the spiritual and the human evokes a global, transnational, and transethnic community of human beings and, thus, calls for an ontological reading. In other words, the omniscient and omnipotent narrating instance introduces an ontological perspective onto "humans" (Kunzru 2005, 22). Throughout the text, it speaks of humanity as such, using words and phrases like "every human" (Kunzru 2005, 26), "human fallibility" (Kunzru 2005, 24), and "human society" (Kunzru 2005, 22). Contrary to the angelic sphere where differences between religious creeds appear to have been nullified completely, the imagined human community is highly differential. Instructively set in London as one of the world's most heterogeneous cities, the major characters' names – Christina, Paulette Conolly, Suzie DeBrett, and Harakami Yukio – suggest that the depicted metropolitan community comprises people of various ethnic, national and, possibly, religious origins. This community may be called transethnic, transnational, and indeed cosmopolitan because it transcends these differences and unites the portrayed characters by means of what the angelic narrator considers – not without irony – typical human commonalities, i.e. a complete deference to computers (Kunzru 2005, 24), an attraction to ancient transcultural chat-up lines (Kunzru 2005, 19), the habit of making mental lists of "things that make the heart quicken" (Kunzru 2005, 26), and an experience of unhappy love relationships.

However, the imagined community of human beings does not fuse the unique differences of its members into a homogeneous unity. Rather, it may be read as a deconstructive community that simultaneously emphasises the ontological similarities of its members and their singularity. Although it repeatedly stresses the shared human traits of the narrated characters, it sketches each figure as a singular, idiosyncratic individual. Accordingly, the depicted events are focused through multiple character-focalisers. Thus, Kunzru's short story envisions a Nancean 'singular plural' community, i.e. a potentially global, non-essential, differential community. That such a community is 'inoperative,' dynamic, and forever incomplete or 'coming' as it unceasingly opens itself towards any other (Nancy 1991a, 71), is illustrated clearly by the fact that Christina's life is saved by a heretofore unknown Japanese cartoonist, who is just moving to



London and will become part of the urban community and Christina's circle of friends and acquaintances.

### Conclusion

In reading Kureishi, Kay and Kunzru's postethnic short stories against the background of deconstructivist philosophical concepts of community, it has become apparent that these black British texts exceed the postcolonial context in which they are set, exploring communal identity on an ontological level pertaining to *all* human beings. In varying degrees, all stories deconstruct traditional exclusionary and monocultural notions of communal identity, and instead imagine a highly differential, transethnic, and potentially transnational dynamic community of singular beings. They provide concrete, tangible examples of abstract philosophical conceptualisations like Derrida's 'community without community' (2005, 42), Nancy's 'inoperative community,' or Agamben's 'coming community' of beings-such-as-they-are.

The aesthetic structure plays a vital role in staging these forms of community. While the short stories employ various narrative situations to explore communal identity in a deconstructivist vein, they all make use of at least one idiosyncratic character-focaliser in order to foreground singularity and difference. In addition, the discussed stories suggest that magic-realist elements may facilitate a new perspective on community. Above all, the case studies have shown that "short fiction offer[s] an opportunity to explore new ways of being" (Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins 2011, 9). It remains debatable whether the short story is, as some critics have argued, the literary form that is best suited to represent suppressed and excluded voices on the margins of society (Korte 2003, 10-11), thereby challenging the prevailing concept of communal identity. Yet, the genre's brevity certainly encourages experimentation with regard to form and content, allowing for a markedly free exploration of alternative notions of community. According to Nancy, literature in general is uniquely able to deconstruct a conventional, identitarian understanding of community. Literature, as opposed to myth, exposes the co-appearance or "compearance" (Nancy 1991a, 66) of singularities by articulating a singularly plural sharing of finite voices (1991a, 80). Since literary writing "affirms a sharing of sense which is irreducible to any fixed identity or meaning," it is particularly suited to "reveal[] to us our being-in-common," which is the very "sharing of finite sense" (James 2006, 200). Hence, Nancy concludes, "being-in-common is literary" (1991a, 64).

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