

POST-BREXIT BRITAIN AND SOCIOECONOMIC DISTRESS IN ALI SMITH'S *AUTUMN*

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Abstract: *Ali Smith's novel "Autumn" (2016) is a Brexlit novel that depicts aspects of English society associated with a landmark in British history, the 2016 referendum that decided its exit from the EU. The article focuses on socioeconomic aspects touched upon by Smith, including the social division among communities and the communitarian disunity, financial and economic hardship, bureaucratic insensitiveness, the issue of immigration, as well as the public social submissiveness or protest while facing all of these plights. Even though these may not be the central themes of Smith's novel, the depiction of the 'hard times' of people living during a time of change, uncertainty, division, chaos and mixed feelings emerges as an equally important concern, as the current paper aims to explore.*

Keywords: *Brexit, "Autumn", social division, bureaucracy, economic hardship, immigration*

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Article history: Received: 24 February 2022; Reviewed: 30 March 2022; Revised: 10 April 2022; Accepted: 11 April 2022; Published: April 2022



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Citation (APA): Culea, M., & Suci, A. I. (2022). Post-Brexit Britain and Socioeconomic Distress in Ali Smith's *Autumn*. *Studies in Linguistics, Culture, and FLT*, 10(1), 25-38. <https://doi.org/10.46687/ZNJA7084>.

Introduction

Nominated for the 2017 Man Booker Prize, *Autumn* (2016) was seen by critics as the first Brexit novel (Rau, 2018, p. 36). Also pertaining to *Brexlit*¹, as announced in the abstract of this article, the novel appeared in the post-Brexit period, reflecting the associated tensions in the British society of that time. It is the first novel of Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet, a series whose titles allude to the possibility of making connections between the character of nature, with its seasons, and the nature of human life in society. While there are cyclical phenomena in human life as there are in nature, this cyclicity may not always involve positive aspects. It is, indeed, the case of *Autumn*, the season in the title indicating that, unfortunately, negative aspects in society, economy and politics have followed a cyclical pattern and have determined the extant situation. At the same time, the public decision that ultimately meant a break (from Europe, from a string of connections) was unfortunately based on already existing cleavages in society, in the internal fabric of the UK as such.

Though autumn should indicate a time of harvesting the crops of summer, the fruits appear to be bitter, and its AE correspondent, fall, seems to represent better the state in which the British society finds itself. The novel foregrounds numerous socio-economic difficulties largely attributed to the political mismanagement in the period following the public referendum vote that decided UK's withdrawal from the EU, in spite of existing differences of opinion on the matter. Smith does presents a UK that seems to be in its autumn or late years, perhaps gloomily predicting an irreparable crisis, in postmodern vein but, in line with the metamodern² spirit, there are touches of hope and dreams of unity. Cutting and pruning in autumn prepare vibrant growth in spring, so expectations of revival may be envisaged even though, for the time being, the leaves of discontent fall and the image created looks bleak.

Just as decay and deciduousness are specific to nature in autumn, there is rupture and disintegration in the British communities, as well. Daniel Gluck, the male character from the novel, feels the imminence of death on a personal level, yet collectively there is also a feeling of damage and disintegration. For Daniel, there still is escape: in nature, by the power of imagination, where he feels transformed and young again, but for the others, escaping in nature is not possible, living a life of desolation and grimness. On the streets, in civil institutions, there is only dismalness and widespread apathy following the Brexit vote.

1. A term coined by Kristian Shaw in *Brexlit. British Literature and the European Project*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

2. For explanations of the concept of 'Metamodernism' see Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010).

Lack of morality and sincerity in the world of politics, along with inconsideration for the people have largely contributed to the social fracture depicted by Smith. The common people feel divided, they suffer the deception of having been lied to, they can no longer feel the communitarian spirit, rupture is manifested through forms of indifference, disconnection, and even through rejection, racism and discrimination. Disconnection does seem to be a key-word in recent British history regarding its relation to Europe and, consequently, its internal condition. Britain's relations to the EU and, by extension, to Europe, have always been complicated (Ellison, 2005, p. 517), even strained, in matters of integration and unity which, together with other topics, have paved the way for the referendum. The topic Britain and Europe has always been a sensitive one, and after its accession to the European Community in 1973 Britain has been called "an awkward partner" (Rollings, 2014, p. 339). Some years before the referendum, the relation continued to be tense, with Britain calling for a radical revision of EU's expenditure, on a general background that disclosed Britain's reluctant attitude regarding economic and monetary union.

Resisting integration and unification on a range of issues, Britain has transferred this attitude to its own society, so it is perhaps no wonder that cleavage exists in the British society itself, among its communities. An echo of Winston Churchill's words, the recent events concerning the relation between Britain and Europe have culminated in discussions on Britain's path from "being 'with but not of' Europe to being, arguably, 'of but not with' Europe" (Ellison, 2005, p. 532). This is because the continuing presence of the past suggests that the inauspicious season we are witnessing is inevitably part of a cycle unfolding in time, of a "logic that has been unfolding in the United Kingdom since the election of Thatcher in 1979. (...) The intense focus on 2016-17 loops back repeatedly to absorb the longer history of our present – the historical presence of the past" during a "revolutionary time" (Boxall, 2019, p. 288) Not only does such a momentous event bridge the gap between the past and the future, but it also assists our understanding of the present, closing this gap precisely because it has been prepared by an accumulation of facts and attitudes.

Firmly rooted in 'now', the novel repeatedly points out that "this 'now', however strange it may feel to us, may only be yet another crisis in a long human history of conflicts and cataclysms: 'the worst of times. Again'. (p. 1) This was not the first time a nation found itself divided." (Rau, 2018, p. 37)

Social division and communitarian (dis)unity

Although fragmentation also applies to other aspects regarding the narrative in *The Accidental* (2005), an earlier novel, the following praise from the *Daily Telegraph* of 21 May 2005 confirms the author's literary engagement with the postmodern concept of disintegration. This novel, too is "grounded on the idea

of fracture – a fissiparous splintered artefact” (Bradford, 2007, p. 74). From the beginning of *Autumn*, a sense of falling apart, together with decay, brittleness and death loom over, yet there is a sense of acceptance or even resignation. The noun “harvest” appears in two of the three mottos, the verb “to harvest” appears in part 1 in a song sung by Daniel, yet it is left unexplained; perhaps there is little “to harvest” (Smith, 2016, pp. 3-4), as the consequences of separation are unpleasant: after Brexit, the country is split into two, heavily polarised and confused, bringing to the surface many of the crises affecting the society, including an “affective” (Horton, 2014, p. 16) one.

Social alienation and lack of rapport have become apparent: people at the Post Office share the “uncommunal communal chairs” (Smith, 2016, p. 18), not talking to each other or interacting in any way. The set of shared values they once had and cherished is now gone. Communal harmony and solidarity left way for internal division in society resulting from people’s attitude to the Brexit problematics, taking two opposing views as Remainers or Leavers. Community relationships are now severed and silent and even manifest conflict dominates the social mood. The sense of community itself is broken, contradicting Huxley’s “community” words (Smith, 2016, p. 17), presenting a situation in which people live together and yet (are) terribly alone and indifferent to each other. Devoid of cooperation, these shared public spaces become spaces of solitude.

Rating Smith a postmodern novelist, especially due to her employment of point of views, Monica Germanà (Acheson, 2017, p. 5) refers to other novels written by Smith, but which can be connected with *Autumn*. In *The Accidental* (2005), the lack of authentic bonds within the family is a reflection of the larger “sense of fragmentation, solipsism and isolation” (Acheson, 2017, p. 6) shared by societies worldwide. In *Autumn*, neighbourhoods are grim and the lack of conviviality further entails lack of solidarity. No longer being close-knit, communities are dismantled, which corresponds to lack of warmth, cooperation and harmony. Attachment is missing, people’s interests and attitudes are no longer unified by common strands, their social values are now overtly different, so the sense of community itself is under threat. To give but a few examples, at the post office, people are not talking to each other, things are announced to fall apart from the first page of the book, the village where Elisabeth’s mother lives is “in a sullen state” (Smith, 2016, p. 53), fences are built enclosing former common land (Smith, 2016, p. 55), and “half the village isn’t speaking to the other half of the village” (Smith, 2016, p. 54).

Division and separation exist on multiple levels: within the self, within the family, within local communities, on the island, between the UK and the EU. Disunion is also relevant to discussions on the notions of national identity and the Britishness concept: the former is split, the latter appears to be no longer valid, so the focus is on Englishness along with the protection of the other

“ness-es” on the island instead. The former cohesive sense of nation being split, communities are fragmented, and this has repercussions at the level of the individual, and also negatively affects his/her private self. Although Elisabeth, the main female character in the novel, understands society has gone through a profound transformation and that she can never trust the words “Wisdom. Justice. Compassion. Integrity” heard from politicians and the media, she realizes she must adapt and overcome the state of confusion all this has caused her, as she ponders: “Who am I? Where am I? What am I?” (Smith, 2016, p. 202) It all came along with a sense of displacement, which can be removed by rediscovering the (lost) sense of belonging:

She rubbed the condensation off the mirror, stood in the echo of herself just standing in a bathroom. She looked at her blurred reflection.

Hi, Elisabeth had said down the phone to her mother next morning. It’s me. At least, I think it is.

I know exactly what you mean, her mother said.

Can I come and stay at yours for a bit? I want to get some work done and to be a bit closer to, uh, home. (Smith, 2016, p. 198)

Supporting symbols reinforce the recurrent ideas of separation, confinement, and enclosure within the island or ideas concerning Britain’s relations with Europe. *The fence* and *the line* suggest the existence of demarcations and boundaries of all sorts, from physical to ideological, ethnic, and political. Along with breaking the ties within and between communities, barriers were put in place or strengthened. There is, denotatively, a divide at the post office, while its significance goes much deeper than what this physical object represents, an object of separation that is normally found in such institutions, for reasons like privacy and maintenance of order. It is the sense of separation, disunity and estrangement it alludes to, in public spaces where sharing is no longer valid.

There are also other public spaces which are no longer public or where access is restricted. The enclosure of common land depicted in the novel also suggests a limitation of rights, of freedom, which is hard to accept, as Elisabeth’s mother laments:

That’s where the new fence has gone up, she says. Look.

She is pointing to the word *common* in the phrase *common land*.

Apparently a fence three metres high with a roll of razorwire along the top of it has been erected across a stretch of land not far from the village. (Smith, 2016, p. 55)

The bonds of social communion are fractured, ideological and emotional frontiers exist between members of the society, and England’s ties with the

world are broken, too. Furthermore, communities are fenced off, are broken into two opposing parts, and access to certain places is granted only to the extent agreed by an obscure institution, as it happens on the now privately owned land where a security agent warns her she is “in direct contravention” (Smith, 2016, p. 141), without knowing who owns now a formerly shared public “landscape”. Elisabeth is almost assaulted by a security agent when daring to walk along the fence line of a former common land area, now privately owned for some dubious purposes. In an act of defiance, she satirically unmasks his own imprisonment while living in a state of deception and servility as opposed to her freedom to do what she thinks and what she wants: “It looks from here like you’re in prison.” (ibid.)

On the whole, various types of visible and invisible barriers separate and divide communities, the repetition below enforcing the pervading sense of separateness at all levels of the English society:

All across the country, the country was divided, a fence here, a wall there, a
line drawn here, a line crossed there,
a line you don’t cross here,
a line you better not cross there,
a line of beauty here,
a line dance there,
a line you don’t even know exists here,
a line you can’t afford there,
a whole new line of fire,
line of battle,
end of the line
end of the line,
here/there. (Smith, 2016, pp. 59-61)

Brexit caused or, better said, deepened community scission, as the lack of communitarian spirit is not new to Elisabeth’s mother. Now, people in her village no longer communicate, as they “either look down, look away or stare her out. People in the shops (...) speak with a new kind of detachment.” (Smith, 2016, pp. 53-54) Equally, they regard each other “with a new kind of loftiness.” (Smith, 2016, p. 54) Now that the vote clearly revealed two strong opposing parties, people are indifferent to each other and show a sense of superiority. Moreover, “half the village isn’t speaking to the other half of the village”, which only adds to the already existing community fragmentation since “no one in the

village speaks to her anyway or ever has despite the fact that she's lived there nearly a decade now." (Smith, 2016, p. 54).

Living in a divided and discordant society dominated by feelings of disdain towards the others, and equally scorning the political world which has failed to deliver its promises, the dominant mood of the English people is that of silent acceptance and resignation. A week after the Leave vote, the village where Elisabeth's mother lives is in a "sullen state" (Smith, 2016, p. 53), feeling resentment and repression. However, the bad weather is an omen of approaching hard times. Open protest and reaction are seen in the characters of Elisabeth and her mother, each in her own way, motivated by different reasons. Elisabeth's mother's protest is physical and violent, as she throws objects of the past in the face of an unsatisfactory present, with its many obstructing fences, thus symbolically opposing the sense of difference and separation existing in her present society by the force of the past, with its forgotten values. At the end of the novel, she literally throws a barometer, which symbolizes change, in the fences (now there were two) demarcating the former common land.

Her mother's maintenance of the bonds with the past and the sense of unity is suggested by her participation in a TV show where people appreciate antiques. Visiting an antique shop, which houses thousands of objects from the past, one has the impression of looking at "a huge national orchestra biding its time" (Smith, 2016, p. 219) to play the symphony of the past. However, in postmodern deconstructive spirit, there is a hint that allegiance to the past, which is what Leavers promoted, may be misleading, since while looking for what "you think is going to be history" you may actually find "endless sad fragility" (Smith, 2016, p. 218) in a past which may have been reconstructed to look like "the real thing(s)". (Smith, 2016, p. 220)

She also vocally adheres to the Remain feeling, showing her attachment to Scotland, where these feelings were stronger. Though she values the past and protests against forms of division and separation, she also proves to be open-minded, embracing the new in relation to human connections. A possible interpretation is that, extending this to national politics, Smith believes in the combined working of the (best of) the past without rejecting the possibilities opened by new connections and networks.

Elisabeth's reaction is of a more symbolical and intellectual nature, directing her biting linguistic sarcasm toward absurd norms and rules in public civil services and against prejudices and conventionalities of the academia, her openness being suggested by Daniel's interpretation of her surname, Demand, apparently meaning "de monde", of the world (Smith, 2016, pp. 50-51). Far from being subservient, Elisabeth resists being manipulated and subverts the authority of the system when, for instance, at the Post Office, after so many bureaucratic

impediments, she insists on having her documents sent to the Passport Office at her own risk.

Public service hindrances, or who is wrong in the head?

Just like in the case of politicians, the civil service system, part of the state's administration, is associated to the apparatus that is in charge of the nation and rules it. Also connected to the Establishment, the elite group that exercises power and has an effect on policies of the day, the civil service is also resistant to change. Elisabeth's play with words regarding "the power of suggestion" and "the suggestion of power" (Smith, 2016, p. 26) wittily ironizes the absurdity of a system that holds the power or just thinks it does, while obviously being ineffectual and obsolete.

The inefficient civil services add to already existing problems and further deepen social tensions. The rapid service at the Post Office is not rapid at all, Elisabeth sadly finds out, at the beginning of the novel, with long waiting times that make the excessively complicated administrative policies, based on numerous stipulations, seem unbearable and utterly inhuman. Administrative absurdities, excessive papers, futile conventions, indifference and insensitivity towards the fellow-citizens border on the absurd. Elisabeth's photo for her new passport seems to be misfit, which makes her face the wrong size, her head the incorrect size, then her eyes the wrong size, which makes her feel as if having done something wrong or illegal. Thus, it appears it is unsuitable or abnormal to be smart, demanding, yet very normal and relaxed, as you may risk being ill-doomed by society, or accused of some crime, and this is what Elisabeth feels. On the one hand, this signals that the representatives of this system treat people in a biased way, assuming from the start that they have done bad things. On the other hand, it shows that there is a huge divide between normal people's wishes, expectations and actions and the state administration, which treats its citizens badly.

Bureaucracy serves as a hindrance to simple services for citizens rather than as a facilitator. Elisabeth faces the idleness of civil servants who are busy to allocate numbers to non-existent customers. Besides their continuous fault finding and despondency, Elisabeth also spots the corruption involved: the Post Office collaborates with a photographer and thus forces citizens to buy their services. The civil servants have perfectly attuned themselves to the insensitiveness of the system: they feel in charge, show despondency and indifference and see evil where there is only stark normality. However, their attitude seems to indicate, as suggested by Elisabeth's play with words, that beauty is a thing of the past, whereas the new world is anything but brave and agreeable. Reversing the intertextual reference from Huxley's *Brave New World*, Elisabeth expresses regret at people's lack of courage along with their lack of moral and mental

strength to face difficulty and absurdity in the new world, and attributes bravery to the former times of a “brave old world”. (Smith, 2016, p. 29)

Besides the glitches mentioned concerning the public administration, Smith also signals the deficiencies in other free services for citizens, such as the medical system. Here, too, problems are not solved because of papers, a printed utility bill being a better identification document than a library card from one’s workplace. Confidential data or identification papers seem to be more difficult and pressing conundrums compared to health issues.

Socioeconomic change and hardship

Between 1939 and 2000, shifts in the structure and ownership of economy, patterns of employment, levels of investment and experience of industrial relations contributed to reductions in the country’s growth potential (Pemberton, 2005, p. 193). With manufacturing in decline, services have gained in importance, and changes and fluctuations were recorded in areas regarding nationalization, Britain’s international trade, employment and expansion of workforce, income levels, or consumption rates. However, on the whole, economically speaking, comparing the beginning of the twentieth century with its later years, one can notice that changes have led to improvements (*ibid.*, p. 180). Without being able to match the economic achievements of its imperial times, recording a steady decline in comparison to that age, the end of the twentieth century’s major anxieties revolved around a weakened economic performance, political and constitutional problems, the loss of empire, the non-competitive character of British society, overspending, overmanning, the problem of balance of payments, poor management, restrictive practices, low investment, low productivity, and the behaviour of political elites (Oakland, 2005, pp. 5-11).

The novel does not delve deep into the problematics of poverty and financial scarcity or matters of social class as, for instance, Sue Townsend does, in *The Queen and I* (1992), in which a demoted monarchy painfully experiences the hardships of the underclass and the working class lives in difficult conditions, too. Still, it exposes the difficult social situation of intellectuals, confirming that socioeconomic insecurity does not affect only the lower levels of the social ladder. Elisabeth *Demand* (our emphasis) is a lecturer living on a limited budget and having little hope of ever having her own house, while also being temporarily employed in a university. Her mother thinks she is “living the dream” (Smith, 2016, p. 15), perhaps hers, not exactly Elisabeth’s, given that “the dream means having no job security and almost everything being too expensive to do and that you’re still in the same rented flat you had when you were a student over a decade ago”. (*ibid.*)

Despite her unstable social status as an academic, she has a free spirit and a sharp mind, permanently broadening her horizon due to extensive reading and her interest in the arts. As if representing the voice of young intellectuals like her, she is *demanding* a better life and more social stability. Additionally, she sets high standards for herself and the others, and she also has the courage to speak her mind and say the truth, in order to fight convention and ridiculousness.

In an age influenced by social and economic factors that have transformed modes of production and consumption, the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the services industry have affected the uses attached to public spaces, which are now managed for profit. Smith reveals the central role of consumption, reuse and trade in contemporary times. In the age of consumption, new uses are given to old buildings, which are exploited for profit, as it is the case of the commercialization of old buildings that served common municipal uses. The old Post Office building is now used by private traders, as a chain store, now part of the business cycle. The sense of lost greatness in favour of business-making also defines the former grand municipal building, now a store selling clothes and perfume. This recycling of the old buildings mirrors the shifts in economy and society towards intensive commercial practice and further speaks of people's changed attitudes regarding the use of this public space along with their enhanced individualism. It shows the effect of consumerism on towns and the subsequent changes given that "something that inherently belonged to the townspeople has now been commercialized and became a consumer market" (Simkova, 2020, p. 269).

Immigration issues: "You lot are on the run and we're coming after you"

The evolution of Britain after WWII needs to be understood taking into account the contribution of migrants (Panayi, 2014, pp. 247-248), despite general hostility showed towards them. After the 1970s, citizens of the EU coming to Britain have formed an important group of migrants. Occupying mostly jobs the British themselves did not want to do or could not do, legal and illegal immigrants have been important contributors to British economy and society. The medical sector is one of the domains to which migrants have contributed significantly, and which is also mentioned in the novel. Realizing the threat concerning their future after Brexit, Elizabeth ponders that "she hasn't so far encountered a single care assistant here who isn't from somewhere else in the world" (Smith, 2016, p. 111). Confirming this apprehension, BBC reports in 2017 revealed that

nurses from the European mainland had been turning their backs on the UK. There had been an 89 per cent drop in the numbers signing up to work in Britain in the year after the Brexit referendum, as compared to the year before. On top of that, there had also been a 67 per cent rise in the number of EU nurses and midwives leaving the register – this was almost certainly

because so many more than before were now leaving the UK earlier than they otherwise might. They felt that they were not wanted, even though they knew that they were very badly needed. (Dorling & Tomlinson, 2019, p. 180).

After WWII, political efforts to control immigration have been constant, though the approaches of political parties have differed, and recent history shows that the integration of migrants is still problematic, as “ethnic segregation, lack of friendship with members of different groups” and “endogamy” still exist (Panayi, 2014, p. 252).

Immigration from Britain’s former colonies, along with that from other European states, has continued to be a matter of concern for recent British history. Mostly conceived as a threat to the British “ethnically homogenous nation” (Webster, 2005, p. 106), migration has constituted a hot topic, adding to the issues used as pro-Leave factors. The necessity to reduce immigration was one of the most important factors used by politicians and people inclined towards voting Leave. Former Conservative governments had promoted the same anti-immigration policies, while the polarisation in society also maintained the sense of difference. In communities which were no longer united, the rejection of the other came as a natural outcome. Moreover, in rural communities like the village where Elisabeth’s mother lives, resistance to newcomers or foreigners is even more blatant, there is an utter lack of communication even though she has been living there for ten years.

The existing opposition in society is also manifested at the level of approaches to immigration, under the influence of politicians. The quotation from this section’s title, “*You lot are on the run and we’re coming after you*” (Smith, 2016, p. 197), rendering the threat of a right-wing spokesman, confirms that anti-immigrant feelings were stimulated by Eurosceptic politicians, fuelling racist feelings in society and, subsequently, the maltreatment and discrimination of immigrants. Instigation by some politicians may have determined the discriminatory vandalic act of painting a cottage’s front “with black paint and the words GO and HOME.” (Smith, 2016, p. 53) Later on, there is an answer given by the dwellers to this act of hatred. The message is still there, but “underneath someone has added, in varying bright colours, WE ARE ALREADY HOME THANK YOU and painted a tree next to it and a row of bright red flowers underneath it.” (Smith, 2016, p. 138) The brightness of the colours and the nature painted reinforce the positive message, as if wishing to replace the grimness of the black colour accompanying the hate words. It may also indicate that the immigrants have reached a level of integration that they now see the host country as their home. The migrants seem to make an earnest request for sympathy and support, acknowledging the importance of ethics in treating the ‘other’. It is the kind of (Christian) ethical basis for migration that needs to be built that Ben Ryan

draws attention to in his edited volume (Ryan, 2018). However, it appears this plea for acceptance was understood as an act of defiance, which was punished by those that respond to otherness with violent rejection and even crime: “There are flowers, lots of real ones, in cellophane and paper, on the pavement outside the house, so it looks a bit like an accident has recently happened there.” (Smith, 2016, p. 138.) At the end of the novel, the hate words are now gone from the front of the spray painted house, which has been repainted in bright seaside blue. Apparently suggesting hope, serenity and, of course, a new beginning, it may also indicate the easy concealment of acts of hatred and xenophobia in society, as “it’s like nothing’s ever happened.” (Smith, 2016, p. 253)

Anti-immigrant messages and threats like the one quoted in this subchapter’s title are accompanied by others, shouted by “thugs” in the street, overtly opposing “Britannia” to all unwanted incomers. They promise acts of violence against the “Poles”, the “Muslims”, the “gyppos”, and the “gays” (Smith, 2016, p. 197), confirming that Brexit only heightened anti-immigrant feelings. It is only unfortunate that, as the novel confirms, some “felt the referendum result licensed them to freely express racism and xenophobia” (Rau, 2018, p. 36).

All this is supported and encouraged by the political world. Her mother’s rage reaches a climax when hearing the latest political decisions bordering on inhumanity concerning the treatment of refugees, as the news says “about our new government cutting their funding for the houses where the kids who arrive here as asylum seekers have been staying, and the report said those kids are now going to be dumped in the same high-security places they put everybody.” (Smith, 2016, p. 254)

Her subsequent act of violence while throwing objects at the fences symbolically signifies the charge of the past upon an unfeeling present. She plans to reject it and to keep on “bombarding that fence with people’s histories and with the artefacts of less cruel and more philanthropic times” (Smith, 2016, p. 255).

Conclusion

Among other important aspects of the British society in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, Ali Smith identifies and laments the continuing separation within the British society itself, as well as that between Britain and Europe. Definitely in a critical point in history, Britain goes through a state of crisis, at the level of the individual, the family, society, politics and economy. The novel communicates, at multiple levels of society, politics and economy too, that affectivity and ethics in relation to one’s group and to those seen as others, and the necessity to create and reinforce bonds in a globalized world, are imperatives the British society must address. It does so by drawing “attention to the individual and society’s dynamic affective relations and to the ethical importance of the ‘other’” and proposes “new possibilities for personal, national

and global becoming in an era of conservative reification” (Horton, 2014, p. 16). Social fragmentation, rejection of the ‘other’, problems in the civil service mechanism, or socioeconomic insecurity need to be amended and, through her novel, Ali Smith signals this imperative necessity for the British society that is still trying to cope with the post-Brexit (troubling) realities.

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