

## The Postcolonial Symbolism in *The Black Album*: The Affinity of Deedee and Shahid

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### Abstract

Degabriele states “political sexual and cultural ambivalence” (p.1) are in *The Black Album* in which the sexual part is from the liberated relationship of Deedee and Shahid and the cultural ambivalence lies on his way in search of self-identity. They could have sex appeal because “they share the same musical and cultural taste” and thus they “seduce each other” (Degabriele, 1999, p.3). Although sometimes they have disagreements, when it comes to sex, these conflicts are settled down. Even their love transcends Shahid’s role in his friends’ national religious group. The reason might be when confronting between inside human nature and outside constituted world disciplines, human nature finally wins because to adjust personal behavior is more accessible than change the whole world. However, since the relationship is actually unfair as Shahid is an unmarried young immigrant male student and his rich native white teacher Deedee living in “nearly fashionable neighborhood” (Kureishi, 2009, pp.26-27) is married and fairly more mature. She has amassed intellectual than he has. Hence, as a woman with a strong independent will compare to a disoriented big boy she handles him like a wolf to a chicken. Therefore, this essay undertakes to decode the affinity of Deedee and Shahid as a symbolism of postcolonism in which they have imbalanced power of relation, conflicts between ideological strong culture and weak culture and the bilateral compromises.

**Key words:** *The Black Album*; Postcolonism; Affinity

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### 1. IMBALANCED POWER IN THE AFFINITY OF DEEDEE AND SHAHID

The intimate relationship of Shahid and Deedee is apparently in an unbalanced condition. Deedee Osgood is a protagonist in *The Black Album*. She is Shahid’s lecturer and her ex-husband Dr. Brownlow is a teacher at the same college. Deedee is a tough woman with a strong personality but that might be the reason she is acknowledged by her students that she is a great teacher in such a notorious college under Kureishi’s description:

The college was a cramped Victorian building, an old secondary school, twenty minutes’ walk away. It was sixty per cent black and Asian, with an ineffective library and no sports facilities. Its reputation was less in the academic area but more for gang rivalries, drugs, thieving and political violence. It was said that college reunions were held in Wandsworth Prison. (Ibid., p.14)

Most of the college students are from immigrant families. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* analyses that the psychology of Blacks (refer to the immigrants from the outside culture in general) who lives in the white world where “a certain sensitizing action takes place” (p.264). He identifies both of the colonizer and the colonized (the Other/the guise of the white man) are encountering a mind twist in which could produce a fragile psychic structure and then “a collapse of the ego” (Fanon, 1967, p.264). If the black man loses his spiritual action, his behavior would have no guidance and stop behaving (Ibid.). His status and self-esteem are scrambled, which could match the situation that Kureishi depicts the students,

black and Asia in the notorious college as the others are wearing white masks to guise as the white man in order to accustom in the white culture. However, when the white men exclude them, their self-identification would be garbled and they might misconduct even be put into the jail. Shahid has a few friends at school but later he almost forgets them since

some he had come to despise for their lack of hope. Almost all were unemployed. And their parents, usually patriotic people and proud of the Union Jack, knew nothing of their own culture. Few of them even had books in their houses (Kureishi, 2009, p.16).

These incomers love the country they live even more than their original country but the country of the privileged white men does not bear their hope. Although the bounded job opportunities might account for their unemployment issue, the worklessness could be retrieved to Fanon's "stops behaving". As a matter of fact, Deedee is welcomed in the college because she sharply observes the difficult position of her students is "a lack of inner belief" (Ibid., p.18). She gives her students her "full attention" (Ibid., p.17) and she shows her sympathy and empathy and rouses the behaving of the hopeless students. When Deedee encourages Shahid to write a paper on a talented mulatto signer Prince, he is really happy because Prince is his idol. Shahid likes Deedee's teaching style but still doubts what living skills could be learned from the course.

Yet he was discomfited by the freedom of instruction Deedee offered. She and other post-modern types encouraged their students to study anything that took their interest, from Madonna's hair to a history of the leather jacket. Was it really learning or only diversion dressed up in the latest words? Were students in better colleges studying the stuff to give them the advantage in life? Could this place be like those youth clubs that merely kept bad kids out of trouble? (Ibid., p.16)

Actually, college education on one hand is to keep "bad kids out of trouble" (Ibid.) by supervision and moral lessons but on the other hand Deedee's objective is to stimulate the students to know their interests and find themselves. Shahid is excited when Deedee talks about the racial discriminations in American: black people could not be allowed to watch a film in downtown Washington, half of American cities reject miscegenation, a fifteen years old teenager was lynched for whistling at a white woman in 1955 and with emotion she mentions King Malcolm, Cleaver and Davis who fight for human rights (Ibid.). At that time, Shahid realizes that these immigrants including himself are regarded as second-rate citizens and they lack esteem. Deedee also has the personal experience of not being accepted in her adolescence. Her true personal life begins with the rebellion of leaving school at the age of sixteen. Moreover, she absolutely leaves her parents because she says her parents dislike her. However, Deedee still enjoyed her teenage life. Without the parents' control, she seems had more freedom to go to punk clubs,

work in bars, do some escort work. She had been mostly interested in going out, music and men. Fortunately, she was accepted for university and she became a teacher after graduation.

Shahid first initiatively met Deedee because of his friend's recommendation at her London office with Prince, Madonna and Oscar Wilde pictures pinned above the desk and a quote shows her belief in liberty—"All limitations are prisons" (Ibid., p.15). Deedee plays a record of Price to inspire her students to pursue their freedom. Her unique way of teaching and her life attitude impresses Shahid and evokes his admiration. He manages to be close to her and Deedee wants to on intimate terms with him too. Shahid joyfully accepts Deedee's invitation to the cafeteria and goes to the library with Deedee. After her leaving, he finds a note inviting him to her house for a dinner. And then after several dates, they soon have an affair which is developed to an attachment. It seems the student and his lecturer have a romance that they fall in love with each other. Deedee brings such an influential impact on Shahid in two sides: on one hand, as a well-bred university teacher, she inspires Shahid to search and think; on the other hand, she opens the door of a room full of drugs, parties, sex, desire and passion to him. She is rather extraordinary and always teaches new things to Shahid. Deedee's divorce again exemplifies her exceptional independent personality. Her ex-husband Browlow was a top student of Cambridge University. He should work at Harvard or Yale but he choose to teach "the underprivileged niggers and wogs an' margin people" (Ibid., p.19) for popularizing his communist thought in the name of helping the marginal students. However, Deedee believes that he cares politics only (Ibid., p.33), which means Deedee thinks he is not so honest and that's why they are apart. Deedee pursues a quite different genuine life and she is interested in other things such as culture and pleasure.

Deedee dislikes the fundamentalist group of Shahid's friends, criticizes it and worries that such a radical group leader Riaz would have pushed negative pressure on him. In fact, whether Deedee's ex-husband Browlow believes in communism or the fundamentalist group of Shahid's friends has the faith of Islam, they are all engaged in politics. On the contrary, Deedee genuinely is an individualist who believes in hedonism and liberalism. Her motto is to release human nature and she cognizes her directions well. At last, Shahid leaves his ultimate and political friends and Islamic religion and gets together with his liberal and genuine lover Deedee.

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## 2. CONFLICTS BETWEEN IDEOLOGICAL STRONG CULTURE AND WEAK CULTURE

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Bishop in *Western Mathematics* addresses the western world manipulates the cultural invasion through three

main medias—"trade, administration and education" (p.73). Shahid accepts his education in London, which conveys not only the prosperous metropolis but also the education from his college influence his mind and behavior that he was "educated away from their culture and away from their society" (Bishop, 2006, p.73).

Shahid's fantasy of identification to the western culture or the strong culture indicates his inferiority on his native culture and loss of his own identity. He absorbs social bias of the first world to indirectly admit that his homeland culture from the third country is relatively weak. Although Chili and Shahid's Papa is dead, Shahid is born in a rich immigrant family from Pakistan with two shops in Kent. That's why he does not need to worry about economy and could afford to develop his search for self. When he meets Riaz Al-Husseini, Riaz influences him in the value system for his consistent creed. Riaz is an essential character in the novel. He was born and raised in a small town in Pakistan and has the religion of Islam even later he becomes the leader of a fundamentalist group of Moslems as a religious zealot in his college when he moved to London for further education. He believes Islam only and hates to acknowledge himself as an Englishman, he accepts education in England though. Riaz argues with Shahid about the issue of identity when they meet at the first time:

"I'm suggesting, what do these people – our people – really have in their lives?"

"They have security and purpose, at least."

"They have lost themselves, then."

"How?"

"Surely, if that is all they have. It makes sense!"

(Kureishi, 2009, p.5)

When Pakistani are merely pursuing "security and purpose", Shahid contempts them as they "lost something" (Ibid.), which are, aesthetics and self as he says:

They can't love the arts, for instance. And at the same time they despise their own work and laugh at their customers for boiling their ugly bodies on foreign beaches and going off to karaoke bars. (Ibid.)

Shahid partially notices some Pakistanis are lazy and he shows his resentment, which is not only a loss of identity but a diffident to his national culture. As he is well-educated in the Western College, it's impossible for him not to learn about the significant part of the national culture of his original country but his self-abasement largely comes from the constituted oriental images from the privileged westerners. Said in his book *Orientalism* addresses Europeans mould the negative images of the Orientals (p.109). They believe the Orientals and Muslims "in particular, are lazy, their politics are capricious, passionate, and futureless" (Said, 1978, p.109). He quotes Elie Faure's hostile remarks on Orientals that "the Orientals' bodies are lazy, that the Orient has no conception of history, of the nation, or

of *patrie*, that the Orient is essentially mystical" (Ibid. p.144)—and "unless the Oriental learns to be rational, to develop techniques of knowledge and positivity, there can be no rapprochement between East and West" (Ibid., p.144). Said clearly knows the mind of the superior white men's mind that "difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things" (Ibid., p.203). He argues not to focus on expelling difference since "role of national as well as cultural differences in the relations between human beings" are constituted (Ibid.). Otherwise, hostility could be exaggerated by polarization and conflicts and wars and imperial control would not bring peace (Ibid.). However, in the novel, Shahid's friend Riaz thinks the questions such as: What are his compatriots Pakistani looking for? What are their meanings of life? He is actually thinking about their national identities but it is quite difficult especially when they are in foreign countries. They are living in other people's eyes as what Shahid is vexed:

... in that part of the country, more of a freak than I did normally.

I had been kicked around and chased a lot, you know. It made me terrifyingly sensitive. I kept thinking there was something I lacked. (Kureishi, 2009, p.6)

In fact, the source of his misery is from his own loss of identity, national dis-identification and the immigrant country's bias. He ignores human beings are always migrating and in their immigrant counties they unavoidably absorb the living country's culture. In his mother country Pakistan even also some people dislike him or are disliked and hierarchy exists at the same time. Shahid has mentioned other people's hostility in his school time that six boys chanted at him "Paki, Paki, Paki, Out, Out, Out!" (Ibid., p.43) in the United Kingdom and he believes the Thatcherites were racists (Ibid., p.52). Another example for hostile discrimination is that Shahid and his friends deal with a harried case of a Bengali family. The family had been "stared at, spat on, called "Paki scum"—for months, and finally attacked" that the husband and wife had been hit, their family had been harassed and even the attackers, twelve and thirty-year-old criminals had threatened them to "slaughter the children" merely because they come from Bangladesh (Ibid., p.53). Shahid told Zulma although they thought they were intellectual and had status because of rich, the racists would think them of Pakis and being patronized (Ibid., p.52). When he thinks about these discriminatory things, his psychological anxiety makes him "paranoid" (Ibid., p.6). This is a serious mental illness since he's extremely ambivalent: On the one hand, he knows it is wrong—"I don't think I can talk about it. But perhaps I should" (Ibid.); on the other hand, his ideas are oddly crazy: "I wanted to be a racist" (Ibid., p.7). His mind was tied in knots of wild things like "killing-nigger" (Ibid.) and he hated "all foreign bastards" (Ibid.). Chad sharply asserts:

“I already said you only a vessel”! (Ibid.) He means that Shahid absorbs social bias in the colonial country already because he believes racism has been existed for a century and “there’s a bit of Hitler in all white people” (Ibid.). In Shahid’s family in Karachi, his relatives veritably admire English culture. They like bootleg alcohol and videos from England. Young people in the family are enthusiastically fond of religion which “links to a strong political feeling” (Ibid., p.54). Even when Shahid wants to teach his female cousins some Yoga positions, her brother rudely interfered because Yoga reminded him of “bloody Hindus” (Ibid.), he hates that his Papa’s generation to do foreign degrees, learn English accents and British snobbery and suppose their own people inferior though. In other words, these colonized already accept the ideology of the strong culture in their eyes. When they are discriminated, they contempt their reckoned inferior people with a privileged posture learned from the colonizers.

Shahid’s father’s creed is: “Working until my arse aches” (Ibid., p.54). That’s why he and Chili don’t learn a lot about their religion and the reason he eventually could leave his friends going for Deedee. His belief is quite different from his friends Chad and Riaz who have a fanatical love to Islam. Chad thought that he was homeless and had no country (Ibid., p.64). Therefore, he did not know “what it is to feel like a normal citizen” (Ibid.). Riaz has a similar past with Deedee that he leaves home because he dislikes his drunkard father. But he was kicked out of his parents’ house while Deedee initiatively left. He said “if one’s parents did wrong they should be thrown into the raging fire of hell” (Ibid., p.65). Although Shahid’s parents’ aim of moving to England is to “make an affluent and stable life in a country not run by tyrants” (Kureishi, 2009, p.32) and they have reached their goal indeed, Shahid’s uncle uses a metaphor of a bride in her new family to describe their immigrant situation:

It’s easy for people, especially if they’re young, he said, “to forget that we’ve barely arrived over in England. It takes several generations to become accustomed to a place. We think we’re settled down, but we’re like brides who’ve just crossed the threshold. We have to watch ourselves, otherwise we will wake up one day to find we have made a calamitous marriage”. (Ibid., p.32)

Genuinely, what he means is their powerless situation without roots in the new environment. They need to be careful and prudent to verify their survival in a long run. These are examples of when confronting the privileged culture of the first world country, they should be tame to “become accustomed to a place” (Ibid.). Otherwise, the new comers would perceive being absolutely excluded from the society where they have been living and should have carried their hope and future. Therefore, the frustration of the colonized causes them to weaken the self-esteem and then they sense “a collapse of the ego” (Fanon, 1967, p.264) not only because of the

more powerful native people’s self-protection but also themselves’ self-restraint.

### 3. THE BILATERAL COMPROMISES

In the end of *The Black Album*, Deedee and Shahid become a couple by the compromise for getting along with: Deedee’s divorce and Shahid’s leaving his friends’ union, which symbolize a polyphyletism or hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha notices the individuality of the colonized, who have a different vision to observe the world: one is from the colonizer and another is from the colonized. However, the colonized can not feel a sense of belonging to both of the two cultures, which a feeling hanging on the two ambivalent cultures is called “unhomeliness” (Bhabha, 2004, pp.13-15). No sense of belonging breeds such a mood from being abandoned by two cultures proceeding a “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 1994, p.8) of identity of the colonized or the conquered.

such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism (Ibid., p.136).

Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* addresses that Negroes live with this “double consciousness” and perform a fragmented and disguised life and readily to be radical. Bhabha affirms that a paradoxical mental state exists in colonization. When the two cultures of the colonizer and the colonized are mixed, a new culture would be generated and the nature and features of the new culture transform the previous cultures. Bhabha observes this dynamic, interactive and intensive squeezing process as hybridity (p.25). Actually, Bhabha affirms that identity is neither a priori nor a finished product but a problematic process to an image of the totality (p.51). In other words, it’s nothing for the proud white man to feel a sense of superiority and black people should not be self-disdained. No matter what kinds of identities they held in the past and at present, changes would happen since that’s a dynamic progress.

Shahid and Deedee experience such an active repelling and adopting process because of their different identities but they compromise for their inter-appealing personalities and love. They often quarrel with each other for their arguments for beliefs and Shahid’s involvement in the fundamental group but once it comes to sex they temporarily forget about their disagreement. However, Shahid obviously considers he should make a choice between Riaz’s fundamental group and a liberal life with Deedee. He has the psychological conflict between wishing to stay with Deedee or follow his friends. To him, it is not a question about believing its truth or falsity but about joining and brotherhood. In reality, Shahid worries early on the thinking of identity itself. He doubts the significance of sheer dedication to tag identities such as “man, woman, gay, black, Jew” (Kureishi, 2009, p.55).

In the meanwhile, he figures out the primary things are the expectations of these dedicated people. As a matter of fact, he observes the disagreed opinions between Brownlow and Riaz, although it seems Brownlow supports Riaz's pursuing and Riaz superficially respects Brownlow. Shahid analyzes Brownlow's psychology that he was born in a fine breeding and he is in the ruling class, who patronizes and always shows his superiority. Comparing with God, or the others in the higher rank, he would become a minority in an inferior level. Moreover, Brownlow criticizes Riaz being "a slave of superstition" (Ibid., p.58). Brownlow himself has not an insistent belief as he says he follows Russell who holds "The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms" (Ibid., p.57). Hence, Brownlow distrusts Riaz's belief. In fact, Brownlow and Riaz have a thing in common: both of them are playing politics in point of fact.

When Shahid sits in Riaz's House and thinks about the whole situation, sarcastically, he feels a bit happy about Chili's trouble but on the other hand he shows his sympathy. His brother Chili has a quite different life attitude comparing to him. Chili has "defiant courage, much arrogance and some nobility to be so reckless" (Ibid., p.87) and greed while Shahid has no spontaneous hope and courage. Shahid walks around in Riaz's house and tries to find something interesting but he only notices Riaz's poems that he has no interest to read and only wants to bear in the chair he sits in. He thinks about his future on the dilemma that Riaz is on one side and Deedee on the other side, he thinks more of Deedee though. It seems he's an awkward man without a resolution as "He believed everything; he believed nothing" (Ibid.). With these mixed thinkings and ideas, he loses himself:

His own self increasingly confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would be alternate from hour to hour; sometimes all crashed into chaos. He would wake up with this feeling: Who would he turn out to be on this day? How many warring selves were there within him? Which was his real, natural self? Was there such a thing? How would he know it when he saw it? Would it have a guarantee attached to it? (Ibid.)

His situation is terribly bad as Kureishi mentions he "lost in such a room of broken mirrors" (Ibid.).

Lacanian's concept of *The Mirror Stage* is from his psychoanalysis theory which supposes infants recognize themselves from viewing his/her image or the other objects in the mirror at the age of six to eighteen months. Hence, *I* is assigned a twofold value in which identification is the relationship between *I* and the outside world. Lacan uses psychoanalysis to examine formation of the *I* or the Freudian ego in the opposed to the Cartesian philosophy which presupposes the origins of the fully conscious self, a unified whole and governed by reason, arises from the internal production of thoughts/Cogito (Je

pense, donc je suis - *I think, therefore I am*) (Lacan, 2010, p.1164). On the contrary, human psyche is, to Lacan, a *paranoiac* knowledge of self-realization and an illusion to some extent that will continue to haunt us later in life (Ibid., p.1164, 1166). There are three growing stages of an infant to search *I* in Lacan's speech on *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire* in September of 1960:

**Table 1**  
**The Growing Stages of an Infant (R.I.S Order)**

<b>The real</b>	Need→demand→the other
<b>The imaginary</b>	The mirror stage→suppositional subjectivity constituted
<b>The symbolic</b>	Language→social <i>I</i>

In the Real Order, Lacan believes an infant needs something and he demands the others by crying or other actions to attract attention. And in the Imaginary Order in which there is a mirror stage, a model for the relationship between the *I* and its image of itself: looking at the mirror, the child, with jubilation, comes to the realization of his/her own image and at the moment the child assumes what he sees in the mirror transforms him/her to the identification process. With the assumption of the image, *I* is precipitated in a primordial form" (Ibid., p.1164), leading to the Idea-I, "the source of secondary identifications" (Ibid., p.1165). "This form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" and this form will remain irreducibly discordant with the subject's own reality of their self. The identification process requires the subject's anticipation of his/her gestalt, the maturation of the bodily form, which is exterior and of different sizes. The gestalt "symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*" as it yields a rigid structure of the *I*, sense of alienation and resemblance to statues (*imagos*). Some of the intrapsychic implications of this stage are the image of the fragmented body in dreams, the fortification of the *I*, a means of symbolic reduction and a genetic order of ego defense, following by hysterical repression, obsessional inversion and paranoiac alienation (Ibid., p.1167). Thereupon knowledge becomes mediated through the desire of the other, therefore, the *I* becomes defensive regarding natural maturation in order that normalization requires cultural mediation. In the Symbolic Order this infant grows up to an adult who has learnt language and becomes a social *I*. He/She knows the misrecognition of the ego in the past and is aware of the existence of more conscious and unconscious.

Nonetheless, in the above quote, Shahid is in the mirror stage as a baby since he asks "Which was his real, natural self?" (Kureishi, 2009, p.87) in search of the ego of himself, where he can apperceive fragmented selfs and the others in the broken mirrors, i.e. there is no self. His life is too mediocre. He is not an outstanding student at

the college and he does not have a passion to be brilliant. Nevertheless, since his parents are very hard-working, under their influence, he at least does not want to waste his life. Actually, he really needs a person to care for him, guide the way and confirm his existence. From that point, he decides to make his life better. After that, he discovered a magazine *New Directions* and looks at the erotic pictures and articles. He feels anxious with the pictures and words and questions what are the minds of these girls to make such pictures. After all, he was pleased with these pictures that sexy women straddle cars. Accordingly, he goes to the bathroom, puts on make-up and dresses as a girl and looks himself in the mirror. As his idol Prince—"He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too" (Ibid., p.15), he tries to look himself in another way, to scrape together the conceivable *I(s)*. Suddenly Riaz comes back and Shahid changes clothes in a hurry. Then he calls Deedee to say he wants to meet her. They are happy to express their yearning as lovers on the phone.

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## CONCLUSION

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In *The Black Album*, Kureishi explores the postcolonial issue by the symbolism of the intimate relationship of the mature white woman lecturer Deedee and her immigrant student Shahid through presenting their attraction to each other at the beginning, arguments in the middle and eventually getting together by uneasy compromises. In fact, Kureishi describes the dislocated identity or fragmented sense of belonging of Shahid and his ambivalent sexual and political identity (Degabriele, 1999, p.1). However, to simplify the question—what is self-identity? If someone cares a lot about his self-identity, how can he blend in a community where Zuckerberg in Harvard Commencement 2017 mentions for becoming bigger "to achieve things we couldn't on our own". On the contrary, if one loses self-identity, he wouldn't feel happy since he won't know the meaning of his existence. The ways to solve this problem could be traced in Bhabha's "hybridity" (p.25) and Zuckerberg's "citizen of the world". Zuckerberg answers

In a survey asking millennials around the world what defines our identity, the most popular answer wasn't nationality, religion or ethnicity, it was "citizen of the world". That's a big deal. (Zuckerberg, 2017)

His conception of a "global community" indicates the new global time calls understanding and love with great

opportunities and challenges to pursue dreams in the global progress other than confronting and patronizing, although it sacrifices some of national, city's and personal diversities. Deedee and Shahid, they have imbalanced power though, love and the yearning for liberty gather them together. That also pinpoints a way for the colonizer and colonized to live in a harmonious shared world space in the postcolonial epoch. When the strong culture encounters with the relatively weak culture, a better thing is not to assimilate the weak culture but working together to produce a new culture to keep both of the advantages. When a culture can be called a culture, it has value to exist and this value probably is respectable and accountable. Leaving some space for the living of the others together as the highest goal and creates genuine happiness in "the forces of freedom, openness and global community", which against "the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism and nationalism" (Ibid.).

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