

‘This is a tale of friendship, a story of togetherness’: The British Monarchy, Grenfell Tower, and Inequalities in The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Abstract

The fire at Grenfell Tower, a block of public housing flats in The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, in June 2017 has come to epitomise the growing divide between Britain’s rich and poor in the last decade. Yet, the proximity of Kensington Palace, home of many senior British royals, has been almost entirely ignored in scholarship and commentary on the Grenfell Tower atrocity. This is especially remarkable given the philanthropic ‘work’ the monarchy has undertaken since the fire’s aftermath. This paper explores *Together: Our Community Cookbook* (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018), a cookbook released by Meghan Markle as part of her royal charitable ‘duties’, to raise money for The Hubb Community Kitchen - a group of women displaced in the fire, who prepared meals for survivors in the aftermath. The cookbook repeatedly emphasises unity, collectivity and *togetherness*: the importance of a local community response to rehabilitate Grenfell survivors. By analysing the cultural politics of *Together* through radical contextualisation, this paper argues that in releasing the cookbook, the British monarchy itself is incorporated into this narrative of community and recovery, which erases the classed and racialised inequalities between the monarchy and Grenfell survivors (and, indeed, those in similar socioeconomic positions). Fundamentally, the cookbook obscures the ongoing culpability of ‘the elites’ for the sociopolitical and socioeconomic inequalities experienced by citizens in Britain. *Together* evidences how inequalities in contemporary Britain are normalised and legitimised in the public imaginary through media

representations, obscuring the structural inequalities that underpinned the conditions at Grenfell, and instead individualising the survivors as ‘responsibilised’ neoliberal subjects.

Keywords: British monarchy, Grenfell Tower, inequality, London, elites, food cultures

Introduction: ‘Left to die here by all of you’

‘Kensington and Chelsea... is a microcosm of everything that has gone wrong in our country in the past few years’

(Emma Dent Coad, MP, in Gentleman, 2017)

On 14th June 2017 at about 1am, a fire broke out in Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey block of public housing flats in North Kensington, London. Firefighters arrived within six minutes to find the fire already spreading rapidly up the exterior of the building via the cladding. It took 250 firefighters 24 hours to extinguish the flames, and at least 72 people died.

Inquiries after the fire found that residents of the building, owned by the local council as part of a complex of social housing in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, had repeatedly registered concerns about lax fire safety procedures, including no sprinkler systems, faulty emergency lighting, and too few emergency exits. Investigations also established that the exterior cladding used to improve the building’s appearance for wealthy neighbours was highly flammable, and had been used by the management company instead of fireproof alternatives because it was cheaper (Symonds and Ellison, 2018). As Ida Danewid argues, ‘neoliberal ideology and decades of privatisation, cuts, gentrification and deregulation thus formed the

context in which the fire had been made possible' (2019: 2), whereby profit is put before safety, and wealthier residents before poorer (McRobbie, 2017).

The fire epitomises the growing divide between Britain's rich and poor in the last decade. Indeed, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is an area embodying 'gross level[s] of economic inequality' with the poorest and richest living in close proximity (Shildrick, 2018: 784). Scholars have critically analysed Grenfell Tower to interrogate injustice, stigma and poverty in urban areas (MacLeod, 2018; Shildrick, 2018), the racial and ethnic divides in imaginaries of 'the working class' considering the majority of Grenfell residents were people of colour, migrants and/or refugees (El-Enany, 2017; Bulley et al., 2019; Danewid, 2019), 'disaster capitalism' and the pursuit of profit (Preston, 2019), and the politics of austerity, privatisation and displacement in contemporary London (McRobbie, 2017; Cooper and Whyte, 2018; Hodkinson, 2018; Bulley et al., 2019).

However, while Tracy Shildrick describes the visceral visual comparisons between 'luxury tower blocks and the haunting images of the burnt out shell of the Grenfell Tower' (2018: 784), the opulence of nearby Kensington Palace arguably provides an even more stark visual contrast. Kensington Palace is a royal residence set in Kensington Gardens, less than two miles from Grenfell, and currently the official London residence of royals including the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (Prince William and Kate Middleton), and Princess Eugenie and her husband Jack Brooksbank. At the time of the fire the Duke and Duchess of Sussex (Prince Harry and Meghan Markle) also resided there. The proximity of Kensington Palace to Grenfell has been almost entirely ignored in scholarship and commentary on the Grenfell Tower atrocity. This is especially remarkable given that many members of the royal family, including Queen Elizabeth II, Prince William, Prince Harry and

Meghan Markle, visited the Grenfell Tower site in the aftermath, as part of the philanthropic ‘work’ the monarchy regularly engages in. All senior royals undertake such ‘work’, and these events and/or patronages are ‘strategic, timetabled and managed forms of self-presentation’ which act as symbolic markers of value for the institution (Clancy, forthcoming).

In 2018, as part of her royal role orchestrated by the monarchy, Meghan Markle released a cookbook, *Together: Our Community Cookbook* (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018), which celebrated recipes from The Hubb Community Kitchen: a group of women displaced in the Grenfell disaster, who used the kitchen at nearby Al-Manaar mosque to prepare meals for survivors. All profits from book sales went to The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Duke and Duchess of Sussex¹ - the former primary charitable vehicle for the younger royals - for the benefit of The Hubb Community Kitchen. Markle’s foreword to the book emphasises unity and collectivity: ‘*Together* is more than a cookbook. This is a tale of friendship, and a story of togetherness’ (2018: 6). It aims to document a multicultural group of women who come *together* through food. While this may describe the women of Grenfell, the inference is that this *togetherness* includes Markle. In so doing, Markle, The Royal Foundation, and most importantly *the monarchy as an institution* are incorporated into this story of resilience and unity.

This article critically engages with this notion of *togetherness*, and argues that such a narrative works to erase the realities of inequality, and classed and racialised violence, in Kensington and Chelsea in a period when the Borough is more divided (economically, culturally and socially) than ever. The paper uses *Together* as a case

¹ In June 2019, the charity was split into separate organisations for each couple: The Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s ‘resignation’ from the monarchy in January 2020 means the latter has since been disbanded.

study through which to consider how inequalities in contemporary Britain are normalised and legitimised in the public imaginary through media representations, where structural inequalities are either entirely erased, or (re)made into individualised issues of empowerment and responsibility. The case study method has been criticised as exploratory and heavily interpretative, and of course there are limitations to how much my analysis can be extrapolated. However, it creates a space to develop a critically reflective textual analysis. I draw on classic methods of (British) Cultural Studies to undertake a radical contextualisation of the cookbook's cultural politics, for example in relation to macroeconomic forces in London real estate or broader histories of wealth accumulation and colonialism, in order to bring together the individual case study and its political, economic, cultural and social implications.

I propose that not only is the monarchy economically and socio-culturally insulated from tragedies like Grenfell, it is also central to the institutional inequalities that facilitated Grenfell's occurrence. That is, the cookbook obscures the ongoing culpability of 'the elites' for the sociopolitical and socioeconomic inequalities experienced by citizens in Britain. Academic scholarship, critical journalistic accounts, and public commentary typically overlook the monarchy's role in reproducing contemporary inequalities (aside from some key exceptions, such as Biressi and Nunn, 2013; Littler, 2017). The British monarchy is often positioned as 'traditional' and archaic, an anachronism to corporate forms of wealth and power, and therefore irrelevant. The royals are represented as the antithesis of the austerity policies and cuts that many blame as the cause of the Grenfell fire, in terms of both the policies of the state, and of the 'elite power' of global investors gentrifying the London property market. That is, the royals symbolise a paternalistic (or

maternalistic) and patronising morality in opposition to the immorality of the ‘new elites’, embodying values of history, heritage and protection against ‘external threats’.

This article emerges from a longer research project on monarchy and inequality (Clancy, forthcoming), which argues that ‘new’ and ‘old’ wealth intersect and converge in contemporary Britain through blurred social, political, cultural and economic behaviours. That work maintains that, rather than being irrelevant, we cannot talk about inequalities in Britain without talking about the monarchy. Likewise, this article contends that the proximity of Kensington Palace to Grenfell makes these inequalities (temporarily) hyper-visible, where we can consider the role of monarchy in maintaining, and producing consent for, contemporary inequalities and forms of corporate, neoliberal capital. As Mr Mohamed, a resident of Grenfell, shouted at the Queen’s departing figure when she visited in the fire’s aftermath: ‘where was the Queen before this? Where was the government? Where was the media? ... [we have been] left to die here by all of you’ (Independent.ie Newsdesk, 2017).

The article opens with an account of inequality in neoliberal London today, before summarising the textuality and materiality of charitable cookbooks as a specifically feminised form of activism. The first analysis section focuses specifically on social class, arguing that wealth inequality in Kensington and Chelsea, which has historical precedent in histories of monarchy and aristocracy, is erased in the story of *Together*. The next section develops this by focusing on racial inequalities, and how *Together*’s emphasis on diversity (and in part, post-racialism) through food cultures overlooks the politics of race and racism in Britain today. Following this, the article addresses *Together*’s emphasis on ‘empowerment’ through philanthropy, and how this responsabilises individuals whilst abdicating the state of accountability. To

conclude, the paper queries which (classed, racialised) bodies in society are deemed ‘disposable’.

This is not an article criticising Meghan Markle as an individual, nor the individual women in the cookbook, both of whom have been subject to variously in/direct racist, sexist and classist abuse. Rather, this article is about what *Together*, which – crucially – *has been commissioned on behalf of the British monarchy’s philanthropic ‘work’*, reveals about inequality in Britain today. It is worth noting that this paper was written before Prince Harry and Markle’s announcement that they would ‘step back’ as senior royals, at which point the benefactors of the couple’s charity work arguably altered, although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this (see Clancy, forthcoming).

Geographies of Wealth and Power in Contemporary London

The UK is one of the most unequal countries in the Western world (The Equality Trust, 2017), where the richest 1,000 people own more wealth than the poorest 40 per cent of households (The Equality Trust, 2017). Due to these widening inequalities, according to the Social Metrics Commission, seven million people in Britain are trapped in ‘persistent poverty’ (Butler, 2019).

This story of inequality is writ large in the capital city. London has 95 resident billionaires of the 417 global billionaires in the *Sunday Times Rich List* (The Sunday Times, 2019). The City of London is central to global finance capital and transnational investment systems (Norfield, 2016), and operates as key player in offshore finance capital investments to store the wealth of individuals and corporations (Shaxson, 2011; Atkinson et al., 2017; Burrows et al., 2017).

Investments in housing and land have led to widespread (super-)gentrification as a

form of social cleansing (Butler and Robson, 2001; Butler and Lees, 2006) and rentier capitalism (Cunningham and Savage, 2017; Christophers, 2019).

The capacity for London to be a safe haven for global wealth stems partly from the historic wealth of landlords and ‘long-established land-based wealth holdings by the Crown, the English aristocracy, Oxbridge colleges, major charities, and national and local government bodies and agencies’ (Atkinson et al., 2017:183–4; Webber and Burrows, 2016; Shrubsole, 2019; Clancy, forthcoming). The British monarchy still owns a variety of (variously independently-run) land and property portfolios across the UK, including The Crown Estate with a capital value of £14.1 billion in 2018 (The Crown Estate, 2018), the Duchy of Lancaster, valued at £534 million in 2017 (Prynn 2017), and The Duchy of Cornwall worth over £1 billion in 2018/19 (Osborne, 2019). Such persistence of landed power demonstrates how ‘old wealth’ and ‘new wealth’ intersect and converge through comparable accumulations of wealth.

In addition to classed inequalities, racialised and imperialist histories of London as a global city underpins the role of racial capitalism. Analysing Grenfell, Ida Danewid argues that ‘a broader pattern of racialised dispossession and displacement can be discerned’ (2019: 3), whereby ‘the rise of global cities is underpinned by a racial and imperial political economy that produces some people and places as “surplus”’ (2019: 4). This is none more so the case than in Kensington and Chelsea. The north (where Grenfell Tower is located) is in the top 10 per cent most deprived areas of England, whereas Kensington Palace is in the 10 per cent least deprived (MacLeod, 2018). The distance between the two extremities constitutes a mere seven-minute walk. The majority of Grenfell victims were people of colour, including migrants and refugees who constitute London’s ‘racialised poor’ (Danewid,

2019) working predominantly in the service economy (e.g. cleaners, drivers) (Mcdowell et al., 2009). According to the 2011 Census, the ward of Notting Dale where Grenfell Tower is situated had 52.8 per cent White groups, 6.9 per cent mixed ethnicity, 8.6 per cent Asian, 19.5 per cent Black, 6.7 per cent Arab and 5.5 per cent other ethnicity (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2012b). This is compared to Campden, home of Kensington Palace, where the White group makes up 78.3 percent, mixed ethnicity 5.1 per cent, Asian 9.2 per cent, Black 2.1 per cent, Arab 3.1 per cent, and other ethnicity 2.2 per cent (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2012a). By these figures, Notting Dale has 25.5 per cent more non-white groups than Campden. Given these divides, it seems pertinent to explore the borough's most famous residents, the British monarchy.

Charitable cookbooks and gendered activism

Cookbooks, and charitable cookbooks, are a specifically feminised genre, associated with cisgender women (Bower, 1997; Neuhaus, 1999; Theophano, 2016). Since the seventeenth century, women have recorded and exchanged recipes using cookery manuscripts (Theophano, 2016). Such publications 'served women as meditations, memoirs, diaries, journals, scrapbooks and guides', entangling their domestic lives, desires and feelings with more public mediations (Theophano, 2016: 6). Similarly, the civil rights movement in the 1950s engendered the recording of Black history, including recipes primarily by Black women, as political tools of representation (Zafar, 1999). Charitable cookbooks were established in the US after the Civil War, where women's charitable organisations released cookbooks to raise money for victims (Bluestein Longone in Bower, 1997: 18). This was a specifically gendered form of activism, relying on the publication and commercialisation of women's

knowledge that has traditionally been domesticated in the home as part of feminised forms of caregiving.

Kennan Ferguson (2012: 698) argues that to ask whether charitable cookbooks as a feminised literature form are ‘emancipatory or oppressive’ to women poses problematic binary suppositions of agency versus lack thereof. Rather, Ferguson proposes that more pressing questions concern how these cookbooks ‘engage a process of community building’, whereby they ‘literalize... identity and belonging’ (ibid.). My intention in this article is not to strip the *Together* women of agency in the publication of their recipes, nor to suppose their unquestioning acceptance of class inequality and monarchy. We can assume nothing about the politics of any contributor or reader of the cookbook, and like all cultural studies research, the affects and implications I detail here are neither universal nor unchanging. Rather, I want to engage with Ferguson’s questions and problematise the function of *Together* as ‘community building’ when it obscures the structural and systemic differences between those communities, and indeed, when it erases the role of one group (the elites) in the very oppression of others (the working classes, the racialised poor, women, etc.).

Together: Our Community Cookbook (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018) was released on 20th September 2018, and features fifty recipes from women at the Hubb Community Kitchen. It includes recipes from a multicultural, global group of women, including their names and ethnic backgrounds in order to attribute the dishes to particular people and places, such as ‘Munira Mahmud’s Egyptian lamb fattah’ (2018: 30), ‘Leila Hedjem’s Lebanese vegetable lasagna’ (2018: 85) and ‘Oxana Sinitsyna’s *Mannik* Russian semolina cake’ (2018: 114). The aforementioned ‘traditions’ of cookbooks as feminised forms documenting domestic lives are

reflected in *Together's* textuality and materiality. The recipes are interspersed with double-page photograph collages of the women cooking, eating and chatting, sometimes with their children or other family members. Intergenerational domesticity is referenced in the introductions to the recipes, where multiple women attribute their food to female relatives, such as 'the traditional bread my Mum used to make' (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018: 92) and 'my Mum is my inspiration' (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018: 110), promoting affective bonds vested in assumptions of familial intimacy. Many couch their interest in cooking with heteronormative fantasies of the nuclear family and traditional feminine roles: 'this dish is my husband's favourite, so naturally it was the first one I learned to cook after we got married' (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018: 57), and 'when I was growing up I hated cooking... then I got married and... suddenly everything changed' (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018: 71). Such language ensures the feminised cookbook form is reproduced.

As of March 2019, 130,000 copies of the book had been sold worldwide through major book sellers, and £204,031 had been donated to Al-Manaar Mosque with a further £28,520 to projects related to the women in the Kitchen (The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, 2018). A launch event in September 2018 featuring Markle, Prince Harry, and Markle's mother Doria Ragland generated international interest in the book's release. In her first public speech since marrying into the monarchy at the event, Markle compared her own story to that of the diasporic community in Grenfell: 'I had just recently moved to London, and I felt so immediately embraced by the women in the kitchen' (Bailey, 2018). In so doing, Markle stakes her own claim on a story of

migration, alienation and community building. In the next section, I will demonstrate how this continues in the book itself.

‘Here we are... together’: erasing classed inequalities in Kensington and Chelsea

Markle has penned a three-page foreword to the cookbook, which begins ‘*Together* is more than a cookbook. This is a tale of friendship, and a story of togetherness’ (2018: 6). The copy makes repeated reference to unity and community, particularly through food (a theme I return to later): ‘here *we* are... *together*’ (2018: 9); ‘*we* have come together with a *united* vision’ (ibid.); ‘*our* hope’ (ibid.); ‘the *universal connection* to *community* through the baking of bread’ (2018: 8) ‘the *communal bond* of *togetherness* through *sharing* food’ (ibid.; all my emphasis). The title word, ‘*Together*’, is repeated nine times. This infers shared experiences, goals, and visions, incorporating the monarchy into the women’s stories of resilience and hope and supposing that the recovery process is of equal responsibility to every member of the community.

However, the wealth inequalities in Kensington and Chelsea elucidate that the ‘burden’ of Grenfell only falls on one demographic: the working classes (and people of colour, see below), while the upper classes remain insulated. Indeed, the urban, geographical, and sociopolitical history of Kensington and Chelsea is a history of unequal development, with the monarchy and aristocracy central to the geopolitical shaping of the Borough as a wealthy corner of the London metropolis. In the sixteenth century, Chelsea (then a separate Borough) was known as the ‘Village of Palaces’ due to manor houses built by prominent monarchs and aristocrats (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2020). Kensington Palace was originally built in 1605 as a two-storey mansion, before being gradually expanded by various aristocrats and monarchs. In 1705, John Bowack described how the arrival of the Royal Court

stimulated the development of the previously-remote Kensington to ‘make it appear rather like part of London, [rather] than a country village’ (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2020). Queen Victoria’s birth at Kensington Palace in 1819 was commemorated upon her death in 1901, after she issued a Royal Charter to grant the borough royal status: the *Royal* Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (McDermott, 2012).

Today, the Borough remains dominated by wealthy aristocratic and royal owners. Ninety-three acres are owned by The Cadogan Estate, overseen by the Earl of Cadogan who is worth £6.5 billion (Shrubsole, 2017). The Crown Estate owns Kensington Palace Gardens (home of Kensington Palace): London’s most expensive street to own property and one of the most expensive in the world, guarded by armed police officers and security huts (Gentleman, 2014). Global plutocrats such as Roman Abramovich (Russian-Israeli billionaire, owner of Chelsea Football Club), Sir Leonard Blavatnik (Soviet-born owner of Access Industries, a multinational industrial group) and Lakshmi Mittal (Indian steel magnate) all own property on the street; it hosts a number of international embassies (including the Embassies of Nepal and Lebanon); and the average property value is £41 million, more than 165 times the UK average (ibid.). This kind of gated community fosters residential segregation to create ‘a seam of partition running spatially and temporally through cities’ (Atkinson and Flint, 2004: 877), whereby public areas are privatised and communities are fortified to control access. This social segregation extends vertically, with global cities increasingly populated by high-rise towers which act as ‘luxury cocoons’ for the super-rich while ‘the wider city is usually rendered as mere aesthetic, premium backdrop to be consumed from on high – at a safe distance from the poorer masses below’ (Graham, 2015: 620).

As Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy point out, while the enclavism of the rich is considered desirable, the ‘ghettoisation of the poor’ is considered problematic (2005: 180). ‘Cities in the sky’ were originally designed in the 1950s-70s to clear slums and establish housing equality (Hatherley, 2009: 61), but social housing estates and towers have since been stigmatised as concentrated sites of deprivation and crime in political and media discourses which produce spatial exclusion embedded in classist and racist rhetoric (Hanley, 2007; Slater, 2018). This is, as Tracey Shildrick (2018) argues, precisely why the safety concerns of Grenfell residents were ignored. Grenfell’s residents were not ‘looking down’ from the safety ‘cocoon’ of their tower, rather their segregation was central to their ‘othering’. Despite *Together’s* claim of cohesion, these are two distinct communities separated by the value attributed to their socioeconomic status.

Over in Kensington Palace, in 2018 work began to create a 160 foot, two-storey ‘mega basement’ beneath the Orangery costing £24 million, which will provide offices for the palace staff (Baker, 2018). This extends the symbolic hierarchy between staff and monarchy into a physical hierarchy, with the royals literally living ‘above’ those that serve them, from low-paid service workers to more influential senior and honorary staff (Clancy, forthcoming). In 2017, the government agreed to increase the Sovereign Grant (the monarchy’s annual payment) by 10 per cent each year (a total of £369 million) to fund the 10-year ‘Reservicing of Buckingham Palace’ project (Davies, 2016). ‘Reservicing Buckingham Palace’ is a repair project initiated after the building was found ‘unfit for purpose’ due to ageing electrical systems and boilers (Davies, 2016).

In the context of the multiple ignored complaints of the Grenfell Action Group about the lack of safety in Grenfell Tower, this appraisal of the palace is extremely

ironic. It raises key questions about whose lives are deemed 'disposable'. As Paul Watt argued, the Grenfell fire illustrates how particular bodies have come to inhabit 'disposable lives' (Watt, 2016); the 'inevitable' and 'justified' victims of a neoliberal regime that privileges capital over all else. Or, as Judith Butler writes, these are the lives that are 'ungrievable... less worthy of protection and sustenance' (2012: 148). Likewise, these debates reflect political and media discourses of the 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' benefactors of government funding. As Tracey Jensen and Imogen Tyler write, 'the welfare state was always a moral and disciplinary project... grounded in classificatory distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving"' (Jensen and Tyler, 2015: 471) and demarcated along lines of 'value'. Not only is the monarchy positioned as 'valuable' in this binary, it is almost entirely insulated from discourses of un/deserving, and indeed, the Sovereign Grant is not widely understood as welfare funding. Positioning the monarchy as 'deserving' only serves to reproduce negative, classed and racialised, stereotypes of the 'undeserving'.

In this context, then, the cookbook's claims of 'togetherness' can be read as an erasure of the classed inequalities and violences (both symbolic and physical) experienced by the Grenfell residents. Residents' voices were routinely silenced and ignored, while monarchy and aristocracy are engrained into the very geopolitical map of Kensington and Chelsea. Claims of community and unity are incongruous and, indeed, only deepen the injuries of the fire when the elites are culpable for the oppression of the lower classes. In the next section, I explore how this extends to racialised violences.

'A passport on a plate': racial inequalities and 'culinary cosmopolitanism' in 'post-racial' Britain

Markle's foreword to *Together* goes on to emphasise the diversity of the women and the food featured in the volume. She variously refers to 'a melting pot of cultures and personalities' (2018: 6); 'a kitchen filled with countless languages' (2018: 8); 'melding cultural identities under a shared roof' (ibid.) and 'dynamic women from all walks of life' (2018: 9), to create a narrative of multiculturalism and diversity. Markle proposes that this diversity can be accessed and enjoyed by others:

Within this kitchen's walls, there exists not only the communal bond of togetherness through sharing food, but also a cultural diversity that creates what I would describe as a passport on a plate: the power of a meal to take you to places you've never been, or transport you right back to where you came from (ibid.)

My analysis is certainly not to dismiss the importance of making global foods accessible, improving knowledge of global cultures, or of creating multicultural communities, all of which are vital in attempts to tackle racism and intolerance. However, what Markle describes in the above excerpt is a kind of 'post-racial' society, whereby race is no longer a factor in structures of dis/advantage (Goldberg, 2015; Boulila, 2019; Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Patel and Connelly, 2019). Given the racialised inequalities that were central to the conditions of the Grenfell fire, 'post-racialism' is under-evidenced in the experiences of those living in Kensington and Chelsea. Indeed, to describe the food as a 'passport on a plate' fundamentally misrepresents the structural racism involved in the *process of acquiring a passport* today, whereby global mobility is limited to those who are wealthy, privileged, and educated (Tyler, 2013).

Scholars have noted the distinction between notions of ‘diversity’ and notions of ‘difference’ (Fortier, 2008; Ahmed, 2012). ‘Diversity’ suggests a universality and a dilution of identity, where ‘we are all different’ and therefore ‘we are all the same in our difference’ (Fortier, 2008: 93). ‘Diversity’ is a ‘respectable’ and ‘more palatable’ way to mark identity because it refuses to engage with structural inequalities. A politics of ‘difference’, meanwhile, recognises structural inequalities and marks out points of disparity between groups, for example to speak out as a woman of colour in order to draw attention to the specific, embodied experiences of being part of this identity group. Vague references to ‘diversity’ can be used in order to offer a veneer of repairing racialised histories, because they suggest progress without actually attending to the structural inequalities arising from these histories (Ahmed, 2012).

As I argue elsewhere, Markle’s introduction to the royal family was initially invested in narratives of post-racial diversity (*not* difference) (Clancy, forthcoming). Prince Harry and Markle’s wedding in May 2018 was widely described at the time in the inter/national entertainment and news media as evidence of the British monarchy ‘modernising’, and the wedding was used as evidence of Britain (and the monarchy) being a post-racial, meritocratic utopia (Clancy and Yelin, 2018). For example, *The Sun*’s headline read ‘Kisstory: Harry and Meg’s historic change for monarchy’ (Andrews, 2018), American civil rights activist Al Sharpton claimed that it showed white supremacy ‘is on its last breath’ (Bitette and Alcorn, 2018), and *Spectator* columnist Douglas Murray argued that it proved racism in Britain is a ‘myth’ (Murray, 2018). Markle’s introduction into the monarchy is indeed a very important moment in the history of representation. Reactions to the wedding from Black female commentators in particular demonstrated a powerful sense of inclusion from those

usually erased in (royal) narratives of national identity (Haines Whack, 2017; Carroll et al., 2018).

However, this symbolic change does little to alter systemic racial inequalities, and ‘the “post-racial” illusion works to repudiate the structural conditions of race... and limits racism to “individual acts of bigotry”’ (Patel and Connelly, 2019: 971; Valluvan, 2016). The racist coverage of Markle by Britain’s right-wing news media since the wedding, and her and Prince Harry’s subsequent ‘resignation’ from the monarchy, demonstrates precisely why the post-racial is a myth (Clancy, forthcoming). Wider structural inequalities also reveal its limitations: poverty rates for the white British population are at about 20 per cent, compared to 50 per cent of people of African descent (Foster, 2017). Most children who live above the fourth floor of tower blocks in England are Black or Asian (including in Grenfell), despite most of the population as a whole being white (Dorling, 2011).

Critical race scholars have argued that in a ‘post-racial’ epoch, ‘new racisms’ emerge which ‘essentialise culture by ‘othering’ racially minoritised people’ (Patel and Connelly, 2019: 972), articulated perhaps most explicitly in anti-migrant rhetoric that draws upon ideas of race, citizenship, and national identity (Kundnani, 2001; Valluvan, 2016). ‘New racisms’ (particularly in the era of right-wing populism) are enacted through border controls, restricting global movement, and the construction of ‘migrants’ as an alien, deviant, criminal ‘other’ (Patel and Connelly, 2019; Valluvan, 2019) as part of the UK government’s ‘hostile environment’ policies (Tyler, 2019). This was viscerally illustrated in the Grenfell fire. The first Grenfell victim to be identified, Mohammed al-Haj Ali, was a Syrian refugee, who had survived the terror of ISIS ‘only to die three years later in a burning tower block in Central London’ (Danewid, 2019: 12). While the official death toll is 72, many have argued that it is

likely to be twice as high because a number of residents were undocumented migrants, and therefore unidentifiable or not legally recognised as missing (ibid.).

Meanwhile, four miles away in Kensington Palace Gardens, the transnational wealth elite of billionaire oligarchs are building their investment portfolios behind security gates. It is difficult to imagine billionaire Roman Abramovich, for example, perishing unidentified in his home due to his (im)migration status. Many scholars and commentators have argued that citizenship is essentially awarded along a classed and racialised hierarchy (Andersson, 2014; Back and Sinha, 2015) in terms of both immigration policy and incentive programmes. An immigration system designed around a points-based system privileges the wealthy and skilled. From 1994-2018 the UK ran a so-called 'golden visa' programme, whereby British visas were sold for a £2 million investment in UK bonds (Bullough, 2018). At the time of the royal wedding, commentators used Markle as an example of the ways in which mobile cosmopolitans from the Global North are granted access across borders (Brooks, 2018).

While the women of the Hubb Community Kitchen evidence multiculturalism, the co-option of the monarchy into this narrative belies the very different immigration status – both legal and symbolic – of the wealthy residents of Kensington and Chelsea. The Borough is not a 'melting pot of cultures', as Markle refers to it (The Hubb Community Kitchen, 2018: 6). Rather, it evidences how 'oligarchs are celebrated and migrants are exploited' in London, the UK, and around the world (Judah, 2014), despite all migration being a result of globalisation (Sassen, 2001). Different bodies have access to 'multiculturalism' on varying registers, dependent on intersectional factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and dis/ability (Fortier, 2008). *Together* might make claims about a multicultural Borough, it might *perform*

diversity, but it makes no structural or systemic changes to experiences of difference and/or inequality.

In *Together*, multiculturalism is articulated through food cultures, and the preparation and consumption of ‘multicultural food’. Ghassan Hage has referred to this as a kind of ‘culinary cosmo-multiculturalism’, whereby ethnicity is condensed into the food as a signifier of ‘an international touristic adventure’ (1997: 22) and ethnic cultures are reduced ‘to matters of food... and other ‘superficial’ cultural elements’ (1997: 1). The idea of a ‘passport on a plate’, in particular, refers to cultural geographies where flavours *come to the consumer* rather than having to travel, which is used as evidence of London’s multiculturalism because difference is ‘condens[ed]... in space and time’ (Hage, 1997: 26). ‘Culinary cosmo-multiculturalism’ can be mobilised as a kind of capital: ‘it is an experience specific to those who are cultured enough to know how to eat more than “just” to satisfy their hunger and their taste buds’ (Hage, 1997: 26 ; see also Chhabra et al., 2013). The format of *Together*, which describes the women’s backgrounds and attributes each dish to a particular place (e.g. ‘Munira Mahmud’s Egyptian lamb fattah’) is one example of this practice, where the reader ‘collects’ the cultures in the book as a way of asserting their own cosmopolitan culinary capital. Markle’s description of the recipes as part of her own ‘food journey’ travelling between Los Angeles, Chicago and Toronto in the introduction does similar work.

Of course, the original purpose of the Hubb Community Kitchen *was* “just” to satisfy’ hunger after the Grenfell fire. Deprivation is hence rearticulated as a ‘culinary cosmo-multiculturalism’ experience. It is a form of, to borrow bell hooks’s phrase, ‘eating the other’ (1992: 41): of consuming various cultures in a way that does not erase difference, rather reproduces it. As Fortier has argued, ‘in multiculturalist

Britain, conceptions of the universal formless citizen are in tension with the ascription of embodied and particularized 'otherness' to ethnic minorities, who must *stay in place as 'other'* in order to claim the *multi* of multiculturalism' (2008: 37).

'Eating the other' is further evidenced in the individual women's biographies, relating to what Fortier has called a 'multicultural intimacy', which relies on 'understanding the other... being able to describe her, to 'know' her, but where her identity is reduced to her lifestyle: her values, rituals, the food she eats' (in Tuori, 2007: 31). *Together* does not, for example, describe each woman's experience of the Grenfell fire. We do not discover how they escaped, what or who they lost that night, nor of their lives before the fire or their lives before living in Grenfell. Rather, they are reduced to essentialist notions of gender, ethnicity and the food passed down from their multicultural relatives: 'the circulation of "ethnicity" as a "taste" - gustative, visual, aesthetic - celebrates and consumes diversity alongside the devaluation of the physical and political presence of migrants' (Fortier, 2008: 93). This is a version of diversity which ignores the structural, systemic and political experiences of minoritised subjects and reduces them to 'culinary cosmo-multicultural' experiences to be consumed for pleasure. Or, as Fortier puts it, 'the migrant-as-ethnic is invited *on*, not *at*, the kitchen table' (ibid.).

'Empowering Communities': Philanthrocapitalism, individualism and a crisis of neoliberal social reproduction

As described above, prior to Harry and Meghan's 'resignation' from royal life, the profits from the sales of *Together* went to The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, for the benefit of The Hubb Community Kitchen. At the time, The Royal Foundation ran all of the two

couples' charitable projects (Clancy, forthcoming). These projects were grouped around six key themes: mental health, conservation, service, young people, early years and empowering communities, with *Together* under the umbrella of 'empowering communities' (The Royal Foundation, 2020).

'Empowerment' is, as Nick Bailey and Madeleine Pill argue (2015), a vague and ambiguous term with no clear definition. It articulates a neoliberal logic of individualisation (Ouellette and Hay, 2008), whereby responsibility for social problems is shifted from the state to the individual. This conceals structural or systemic inequalities continuing to impede individual progress. I have contended elsewhere that royal charity 'work' functions as part of this neoliberal logic: Prince Harry's work with Armed Forces veterans, for example, erases accountability for the state in caring for soldiers, despite rising suicide rates and rising veteran homelessness (Clancy, forthcoming). Likewise, Imogen Tyler and Tom Slater have argued how the mental health initiative Heads Together, fronted by Prince William and Kate Middleton (and previously Prince Harry and Meghan Markle), promotes a vague notion of 'shattering [the] stigma' of mental illness yet fails to address state failures to provide adequate mental health services, which remain critically underfunded (2018: 723). Jo Littler describes this as a form of 'philanthrocapitalism', which 'dismantle[s] the forms of collective provision fundamental to the welfare state' (Littler, 2015: 479) and instead tasks this responsibility with individuals and private charitable schemes.

To describe *Together* as 'empowering communities' does much the same work, where the cultivation of responsibilised neoliberal citizens is achieved through food cultures as a vehicle for change and healing (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). The process of recovery from Grenfell is tasked to individual victims, who are encouraged to come *together* as a community alongside those elites culpable for their oppression.

Depicting the Hubb Community Kitchen as a project of empowerment abdicates the state of responsibility for feeding Grenfell survivors and providing them with adequate food and shelter in the aftermath of the fire. This is especially pertinent considering the state has, indeed, failed in providing this support, not only by disregarding safety concerns prior to the fire, but also by failing to permanently rehouse residents afterwards, which has significantly impacted residents' mental health (Forrest, 2018).

The gendered dimensions of *Together* are particularly notable given lacking public provisions of care in Britain, which has led to a crisis of social reproduction (Hester, 2018). As socialist feminists such as Nancy Fraser have argued, 'externalising care work onto families and communities... has simultaneously diminished their capacity to perform it' (Fraser, 2016). Neoliberal capitalist ideas of dual-income families have left women with a double burden as part of the 'productive' labour force outside the home and 'reproductive' labour within it (ibid.). In *Together*, women adopt the state's role by providing social care for their families and communities, with little support other than being 'empowered' by charitable ventures. As I have described, feminist scholars have read women's community cookbooks as exemplifying how 'women's traditional lives are worth thinking about, worth writing about, worth reading' (Bower, 1997: 9; Nussel, 2006), particularly at the intersections of race and class (Zafar, 1999). The cookbook's specifically gendered form enacts a particular (and familiar) form of philanthropy vested in women's knowledge and experiences.

If cookbooks prompt questions of community (Ferguson, 2012), there are questions around who benefits from *Together's* publication. 'Philanthrocapitalism' describes the ways in which the philanthropist themselves benefit from helping

others, because the model ‘emulates the way business is done in the for-profit world’ (McGoey, 2015: 7). As Andrew Sayer writes, philanthropy by the rich differs from charity because ‘philanthropists generally want their name or company brand all over their gifts’ (2015: 287) as a way of ‘build[ing] the reputation of [the] brand... [and] add[ing] to their reputation as good corporate citizens’ (King, 2006: 9). That is, the philanthropist gains respectability and capital in return for their work, and the company they represent benefits from positive social influence. For *Together*, not only is the monarchy incorporated into narratives of tragedy and resilience as described above, the monarchy also appropriates this as part of its own attempts to produce consent for its power through philanthropy (Clancy, forthcoming), and erase its own culpability in systems of inequality. Frank Prochaska’s historical account of royal philanthropy describes a shift after the English Civil War, where monarchy no longer ruled by divine right but rather ‘privilege entailed responsibility to the less fortunate’ (1995: 8), and monarchs had to demonstrate ‘sensitiv[ity] to social needs’ (ibid.). He concludes that today, ‘the monarchy now needs the voluntary sector more than the voluntary sector needs the monarchy’ (1995: 275). *Together* represents the monarchy as socially responsible, caring for not only others in varying socioeconomic positions but those within the ‘local community’, into which monarchy is incorporated. In so doing, the inequalities of Kensington and Chelsea, to which the monarchy is central, are erased and legitimised.

Conclusion: God Save the Queen, God Save Grenfell?

In September 2019, former Housing Minister Gavin Barwell received a nomination in Theresa May’s Prime Minister’s Resignation Honours list, giving Barwell a peerage in the House of Lords. During his time as Housing Minister from 2016-2017, Barwell

ignored seven letters from MPs tasked with investigating fire safety rules, which explicitly warned Barwell about the risk of deadly fires in tower blocks (Apps, 2019). The seventh letter was sent 26 days before the Grenfell fire.

The British Honours system awards medals, decorations, and/or titles to individuals to recognise achievement or service, which are bestowed by the sovereign and/or senior members of the royal family at investiture ceremonies (Harper, 2015). The Honours system, and the politics of *who* is invested, has long been controversial (Clancy, forthcoming). For example, the knighting of right-wing Conservative strategist Sir Lynton Crosby, who pioneered ‘dog-whistle’ political strategies based on anti-immigration rhetoric, prompted accusations of political cronyism (The Independent, 2015). Moreover, the system still draws on symbols of British Empire and imperialist histories – OBE stands for Order of the British Empire (Muir, 2019). In the context of this research, however, Barwell’s investment raises questions about the monarchy’s relationship to Grenfell and its victims. As this paper has described, *Together* makes claims of community, unity and *togetherness*. If the monarchy is part of the Kensington and Chelsea community, its honouring of Barwell as a key figure *responsible* for the (lack of) policies that led to Grenfell is extremely ironic.

This kind of political cronyism draws attention to the inherent inequalities between the Grenfell victims, those in Britain like them, and the British monarchy. ‘New wealth’ and ‘old wealth’ continue to converge and intersect in Britain, with comparable goals of wealth accumulation and extraction that deepen inequalities. On a broader scale, the United Kingdom’s very sense of national identity is evoked through fantasies of protecting monarchy: the national anthem is ‘God Save the Queen’. But who was protecting the victims of Grenfell? Whose lives are being privileged and whose are expendable?

This paper has argued that the charity cookbook *Together* erases the realities of inequality in Kensington and Chelsea, and by association, in Britain as a whole. In being co-opted into a narrative of *togetherness*, the monarchy is distanced from the vulgar, corrupt and immoral ‘new elites’ widely understood to be the cause of the Grenfell disaster. Instead, they are seen to offer a patronising and paternal morality, and are hence legitimised in the public imaginary. Moreover, *Together* obscures the role of ‘the elites’ in underpinning and maintaining systems of inequality that cause social catastrophes experienced by citizens, incorporating them instead into ideas of ‘community’. This is *not* a story of togetherness. This is a story of how privilege reproduces itself in the face of disadvantage, and how inequalities are erased under discourses of individualism. This is a story of power.

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