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The Representation of External and Internal Borders and Their Interaction with National Identity in Ali Smith's 'Seasonal Quartet'

Borders play a constitutive role in the formation of national identity as they contribute to the construction of a nation as an 'imagined community' that is inherently limited.¹ Brexit can be understood as foregrounding such (external and internal) borders drawn in Britain – and this view is also taken by Smith's *Autumn*, which was hailed as "the first post-Brexit novel".² This paper will analyse how the four novels of her 'Seasonal Quartet' highlight the central role of borders and boundaries in the context of Brexit. As part of this analysis, constructions of British national identity and its larger ideological contexts as well as the economic and geophysical contexts addressed in the novels will be taken into consideration.

All four novels feature references to the exclusionary force of both national and European borders, e.g. in the context of migration. Whereas *Autumn* and *Winter* deal with the exclusion of migrants in Britain in a more indirect way, this is foregrounded in *Spring* and *Summer* as they are dealing with refugees being detained in an Immigration Removal Centre. This can be read as constituting a border drawn (spatially) *within* the nation, as it forms a world of its own, with a hedge around it. Indeed, the 'Quartet' also explicitly features the creation of new internal borders within the United Kingdom, e.g. through the leitmotif of fences that serve as a metaphor for divisive tendencies in contemporary British society. Moreover, *Summer*, the last novel in the series, already engages with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on border issues. I will use a combination of methods from cultural and literary studies in order to analyse the representation/critical reading of external and internal borders in the four novels.