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## Introduction

### **Where is Home?**

Simon Gikandi raises a crucial issue, in *Maps of Englishness*, when he questions: “how do you read black subjects and their experiences as important generative agents in the formation of a modern English culture when the most forceful ideas and ideals on English identity insist on the intrinsic and racial purity of Englishness?” (51) Indeed, the whole idea of Britain as a homogeneous and exclusively white nation has been increasingly challenged by a hybrid culture of diversified ethnic groups.

Focusing on the novels produced by the diasporic British writers of Caribbean or Asian origin and/or background, this dissertation attempts to provide an understanding of the notion of “Englishness” in the postwar diasporic British novels. In an examination of the textual representation of Englishness, the present work compares British diasporic “Windrush generation” novels, comprising of the novels of Sam Selvon (the *Moses Trilogy* and *The Housing Lark*), the two novels of Hanif Kureishi set in the 1970s and 1980s (*The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*) and the more contemporary millennium novel of Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*).

The comparison between these novels in this dissertation facilitates the analysis of the changes that have taken place in the notion of Englishness over the years since

the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Each of the novels selected for discussion here examines the diverse experiences of postwar immigrants with regard to “home” and “belonging,” how such notions of home and belonging are formed in relation to Englishness, and the way in which Englishness is negotiated by multiple heritages arising from the experiences of diaspora writers. The three novelists under discussion in this dissertation represent a lineage of postwar British diaspora writers, whose works bring to the fore what it actually means to be British.

Sam Selvon, who migrated from the West Indies to England as an adult following the end of the Second World War, is regarded as one of the “first-generation” of migrant writers, along with the likes of George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul (Dawson 18; Ranasinha, *South Asian* 40). His first encounter with London is characterized by fiercely prejudiced experiences of displacement; thus, his London novels deal essentially with this issue of displacement, as well as the disillusionment brought about by such early immigration experiences. Selvon’s novels therefore usually depict the shattering of erstwhile illusions of a sense of belonging, of coming home to England.

Whilst each of the immigrant characters in Selvon’s novels relate to experiences of being bullied and marginalized during their process of claiming some

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<sup>1</sup> The *Moses Trilogy* of Sam Selvon comprises of *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), throughout which Moses Aloetta is developed as the central character.

“positionality” in their “Motherland,” other “in between” experiences and perspectives are written into the novels of Kureishi and Smith, which are also centered on London. From the viewpoint of Peter Childs, these novelists are “aware of the changes needed to be wrought on traditional ideas of British identity in order to include the migrant’s experience and also recognize the new British ethnic mix brought about by the postwar diaspora” (*Contemporary* 21).

Kureishi and Smith share white and Asian/Caribbean cultural roots. Since they both have mixed parentage, and were born and raised in Britain, they were equally forced to deal with extremely problematic relationships concerning their identity, often having to stand astride two diverse cultures. Given their mixed racial identity and multiple cultural backgrounds, they invariably found themselves excluded from the notion of Englishness, with their sense of belonging being anchored in uncertainty. In other words, these writers epitomize the dilemma of “finding a home.”

In his interview with Caryl Phillips in 1996, George Lamming expressed a concern that second- or third-generation black British people would have even greater difficulty claiming their identity. According to Lamming, second- or third-generation black British writers would start to enquire into their “original roots,” but somehow this fascination with the remoteness from their roots, as well as their fussy noise about “not being of (England),” would remain an unresolved problem (“George Lamming

with Caryl Phillips” 196). The question therefore remains: where is home?

Inquiring into the notions of “home” and “belonging,” Selvon, Kureishi and Smith have each clearly demonstrated their fondness for the concept of the “nation,” as well as the constituent element of “belonging,” or indeed, “unbelonging.” They also closely observe the different responses by Britain to the progressive penetration into its society and traditions by heterogeneous cultures. Taking as an example the semi-autobiographical novel of Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi introduces as his mouthpiece, Karim Amir – a character born in a London suburb to an Indian father and an English mother – to convey his opinions on Englishness and the new breed of “Englishman.” The opening chapter of *The Buddha of Suburbia* has Karim introducing himself:

My name is Karim and I am Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. (3)

Karim identifies himself as “Englishman born and bred, almost”; such ambiguous self-identification resembles the notion of “almost the same, but not quite,” a turn of phrase which was later coined by Homi Bhabha to refer to the status of colonial subjects.<sup>2</sup> Although the adjective “almost” is clearly meant to signify the word

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<sup>2</sup> In his influential essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” Homi Bhabha refers to “colonial mimicry” as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘other,’ as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (*Location* 86).

“nearly” – whether in Kureishi’s novel or the essay by Bhabha – it also refers to the distance, the gap, the difference. In other words, the use of the word “almost” with reference to “identity” reveals the predicament of such identity.

The overall concept of home and belonging amongst the British diaspora writers provides an appropriate framework within which we are able to rethink and re-conceptualize Englishness, with migration in mind. Their writing introduces ways of encouraging the opening up of discussion beyond long-existing, rigid and fulfilled identity. Thus, the novels under discussion here are selected essentially on the basis that they exemplify the recognition of the contribution that postwar immigration has made to the transformation of British national identity, grounded in complex historical reality.

In *Diaspora and Hybridity*, Virinder Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk note that “diaspora privileges migration as the disruption that evokes the constructed nature of reality” (49). Stuart Hall has referred, in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” to his conceptualization of diaspora as being defined “by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity” with diaspora identities being seen as “those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235).

This viewpoint shows that diaspora identity, which thrives on differences and

transformation, seeks to negotiate with homogeneous identity. Hall's definition is therefore useful in helping to come to terms with the notion of "Englishness," with heterogeneity and transformation providing some contribution in terms of both resisting and reproducing the various forms of home and belonging.

The conceptualization of diaspora by Paul Gilroy offers an alternative way of contemplating the notion of Englishness. According to Gilroy, diaspora challenges the concept of the "nation-state" and the essential nature of race and ethnicity. From Gilroy's viewpoint, diaspora provides "an alternative to the sedentary poetics of either soil or blood" ("Diaspora" 317). His definition of "diaspora identity" is an important claim, essentially because it indicates that the concept of diaspora challenges the fixed notions of place, whilst disrupting normative units, such as nation and culture.

Diaspora theory provides the groundwork for the thinking upon which this dissertation is based, with particular focus on the ways in which the overall notion of Englishness is negotiated by immigrants. Prior to undertaking the analysis of the negotiation of Englishness, or indeed, making any attempt at the re-conceptualization of Englishness as depicted in the postwar novels of Selvon, Kureishi and Smith, it is seen as important to provide an overview, from a political perspective, of the decades following the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948.

Since the primary objective of this dissertation is to undertake an examination of

the impact of migration on British national identity in the postwar era, it is regarded as being of particular importance to discuss the historiography of certain issues. Such issues include the symbolic significance of the arrival of the *Windrush*, the dismantling of the Empire, stories relating to the 1958 race riots, the implementation of immigration policies in the years since 1948, “Powellism” and its impact on race relations in Britain, and last but not least, the “Thatcher dynasty.”

### **Politics and Postwar Coloured Migration into Britain**

20 June 2008 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush*, a ship which had carried a total of 492 passengers from Jamaica to the UK in 1948.<sup>3</sup> The Imperial War Museum hosted the exhibition “From War to *Windrush*” in June 2008, an event aimed at celebrating the arrival of *Windrush*, and underlining its legacy, with various commemorative events also being held in both London and Birmingham. The enormous significance of the *SS Empire Windrush* lies in the fact that it marked the beginning of the first large-scale immigration from the Commonwealth (or countries formerly colonized by Britain).<sup>4</sup>

Starting from the date of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, over the

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<sup>3</sup> In response to a 1948 advertisement in the Jamaican *Daily Gleaner* offering free passage to England, around 500 Jamaicans stepped on to the *SS Empire Windrush*, and eventually arrived in Tilbury Docks, just outside London, on 21 June 1948 (Paul, 1997; Spencer, 1997; Phillips and Phillips, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Within a decade of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, there had been a dramatic rise in the total number of immigrants. Around 24,000 West Indians arrived into the UK in 1954, with a further 26,000 arriving in the following year. The census figures in 1958 showed that some “210,000 people from the Commonwealth were living and working in Britain by 1958” (Winder 352, 362).



next fourteen years, up until 1962, approximately a quarter of a million people were to migrate from the Caribbean to Britain.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as Mike and Trevor Phillips point out, at the time of the series of celebrations conducted for the fiftieth anniversary in 1998, the *Empire Windrush* had become “a symbol of postwar immigration”.<sup>6</sup>

After the Second World War, in tandem with the country’s economic expansion, the postwar reconstruction programs in Britain gave rise to heavy demand for labour; thus, with the arrival of *Windrush*, significant numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth countries soon began to flood into the country. Avtar Brah suggests that “the migration of labour from the ex-colonies to the metropolis during the 1950s” was a quick way of resolving the severe labour shortage which Britain had to deal with during its postwar economic reconstruction and expansion (21).

The fact is that the heavy demand for labour in Britain coincided with the comparatively poor economic conditions that prevailed throughout the Commonwealth countries; thus, as a consequence of the country’s severe labour shortage and postwar boom in economic reconstruction, the British government took no immediate policy action to prevent any swift influx of immigrants from the Caribbean. Meanwhile, other

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<sup>5</sup> Caryl Phillips points out that one hundred and twenty-five thousand people came from the Caribbean to Britain between the years 1948 and 1958, with approximately one hundred and twenty-five thousand more arriving between 1959 and 1962 (“A Dream Deferred” 109).

<sup>6</sup> In *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain*, Mike and Trevor Phillips regard the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* as the beginning of multicultural Britain (2). A contradictory view is, however, discernible in *London Calling*, where Sandhu points out that black and Asian people had been continually migrating to Britain since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, long before the arrival of *Windrush* (113).

important factors influencing this sudden inflow of migrant workers were the decisions taken by the government with regard to immigration policy.

The British Nationality Act 1948 would subsequently prove to be a major contributory factor in the rapid increase in the number of immigrants. This Act, which recognized all citizens of British territories or self-governing member states of the Commonwealth as British subjects, was being passed at the very time of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*. Prior to the promulgation of this Act, Britain had never made any distinction “either between citizenship or nationality of the monarch’s subjects resident in different parts of the Empire, or between the monarch’s citizens and the monarch’s subjects” (Spencer 53). However, since it was clear that the British government had been stimulated by the citizenship laws passed by newly-independent Canada in 1946 and India in 1947, the decision was taken to define citizenship as including Britain, its colonies and all self-governing Commonwealth countries.

In other words, the British Nationality Act 1948, as Kathleen Paul observes, was based on a policy designed to “shore up the empire, rather than oversee its decline” (21); however, the consequence of this was that the Act represented an open-door policy to all people in Commonwealth countries. The postwar period (beginning with the arrival of *Windrush*) is what Ambalavaner Sivanandan refers to as the “laissez-faire period in British immigration policies,” with the arrival of large numbers of

immigrants and the concurrent enactment of the *British Nationality Act 1948* being accompanied by fear, hostility, and even deep-seated hatred.<sup>7</sup>

Given that the government had essentially “painted itself into a corner” with its policy on nationality, a policy which provided all British subjects with free entry into the United Kingdom, white British citizens became restless and beset with worries. The gravity of the concerns was such that on the day that the *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury, eleven Labour MPs wrote to the British prime minister, Clement Attlee, to express their concern over the entry into the country of countless numbers of coloured immigrants, who they believed would “impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life” (Alibhai-Brown 56). Although, in his careful reply to the MPs, Attlee said that he did not consider the Nationality Act 1948 a mistake, he nevertheless assured them that tough action would be taken if there proved to be any influx of “undesirable” immigrants, stating: “if our policy were to result in a great influx of undesirables, we might, however unwillingly, have to consider modifying it” (qtd. in Phillips and Phillips 70).

Kathleen Paul argues that such response indicates the deep-rooted reaction of the British state which “panicked when presented with what it assumed was to be a permanent ‘coloured’ addition to the population” (112). Such a panicky response to the

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<sup>7</sup> Procter notes that the term “laissez-faire period in British immigration policies” first appeared in Hall’s essay “Racism and Reaction” in *Five Views of Multi-racial Britain* (1978). For the views of Hall and Sivanandan on the postwar British period, see Procter, *Dwelling* 63.

issue of coloured immigration was in fact a reflection of the extent to which “race” had become a constituent part of British identity; however, with the growing concerns over the need to speed up the postwar economic boom, Atlee and the Cabinet decided not to pursue any measures aimed at restricting the entry of colonial subjects.

The ambivalence of the British government was to ultimately reveal that the country would often be found wanting when faced with the dilemma of having to consider both economic and political conditions. According to Dawson’s observations, the British government’s labour recruitment plans, along with the inclusive legal model of British citizenship, represented a direct contradiction to “the exclusionary definitions of national identity that had been developed during Britain’s colonial expansion and imperial rule” (10). When large-scale migration from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, West Africa and Hong Kong began to take place, the government was clearly under enormous pressure at every turn, as it found itself confronted by the persistent issue of migration.

Following the pursuit of such a laissez-faire immigration policy in the late 1940s, the fear of increasing numbers of coloured immigrants intensified, with such fear prompting considerable debate on the need for much stricter immigration policies. John Solomos argues that such debate was concerned not simply with “the supposed characteristics of black immigrants,” but rather with “the effect that black immigration

would have on both the ‘racial character of British people’ and the national identity”

(54). With racism prevailing in British society throughout the 1950s, Wendy Webster also observed that most white British were gripped by some supposed fear that immigrants were “tainting the race” (157). Webster explains the way in which black immigrants were perceived in the following passage:

By the mid-1950s, the Commonwealth was beginning to be associated with the alien, not only because it was the source of “dark strangers” arriving in Britain, but also because such migrants were seen as the cause of a “colour racial problem” that was otherwise alien to the metropolis. (160)

Given that any widespread perception of immigrants as the underlying cause of a racial “problem” will invariably prove to be a sufficient condition for the escalation in racial discrimination and a means of justifying subsequent controls on coloured immigration, such controls on immigration were soon introduced, grounded largely in racial undertones. Thus, the disorder brought to Nottingham and Notting Hill by the 1958 race riots provided the immigration-control lobby with a perfectly convincing appeal for “the exclusion, or even repatriation, of ‘undesirable immigrants’” (Solomos 55).

The promulgation of the Commonwealth Immigrant Act 1962 is considered to be an aftermath response to the 1958 white riots;<sup>8</sup> the Act, which is invariably regarded

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<sup>8</sup> More comprehensive details on British immigration controls and state racism are provided by Solomos, who argues that the white riots of the late 1950s clearly resulted in the racialisation of the immigration

as the one piece of legislation which effectively ended the British government's laissez-faire immigration policy in the postwar era, provided for much tighter controls on the entry of Commonwealth citizens. Under this Act, all Commonwealth and colonial citizens whose passports had not been issued by the British government would no longer be allowed unrestricted entry into the UK unless they had previously obtained "job vouchers" from the Ministry of Labour (Spencer 58). According to one interpretation of the Act, it had been clearly aimed at introducing "a distinction between the citizens of Britain and its colonies, and the citizens of independent Commonwealth countries" (Solomos 58).

The introduction of Commonwealth Immigrant Act 1962 was basically a response to racism. However, the making of immigration policy was not the sole domain of racism; indeed, it received its greatest response when Enoch Powell, a former Conservative Party Member of Parliament, made his infamous "rivers of blood" speech, delivered just one month after the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968.<sup>9</sup>

Powell began his speech with an alarming image of a white English woman, an ordinary landlady who had been labeled "racist" for her refusal to let her house to

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issue, which, he continues, contributed to the much stricter controls over black immigration that were subsequently adopted in the 1960s (Solomos 56).

<sup>9</sup> Spencer notes that the *Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968*, which was promulgated in March 1968, made all those who sought to enter the UK for settlement from British and Commonwealth ex-colonies subject to "the place of birth of the applicants, their parents or grandparents" (142).

immigrants:

She is becoming afraid to go out. Windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letter box. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies; they cannot speak English, but one word they know; “Racialist,” they chant. (qtd. in Baucom 15)

Armed with a portrait of this pathetic English woman under threat, Powell rained down criticism on the open-door policy on the entry of immigrants into the UK and the government’s generous immigration policy, which, he argued, had favored immigrants over its own native English people. “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Romans, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’” (qtd. in Alibhai-Brown 69).

Powell’s “rivers of blood” speech ultimately aimed at arousing the horror of his audience and increasing antagonism against the “flood” of immigrants; and indeed, it achieved such aims by immediately inciting intense racial hatred and fuelling powerful and widespread aversion to immigrants. Thus, Powell had succeeded in sending out a message, in quite a different way, that the peace and serenity of British life had been threatened by the entry of immigrants, and that, accordingly, Englishness would be destroyed.

Soon after his “rivers of blood” speech, came “the enemy within” speech, which Powell delivered in 1970, and which further portrayed immigrants as “the enemy within, the unarmed invasion, alien encampments, alien territory.” In Paul Gilroy’s

view, Powell's speech had been carefully constructed with symbolic words and his use of metaphors ultimately aimed at creating a new racism, the mechanism of "inclusion" and "exclusion" ("*There Ain't No Black*" 44). As far as Powell was concerned, the immigrants would always be strangers, invaders and enemies; however, the view of Stuart Hall was that such pronouncement of immigrants as "the enemy within" represented more than just responses to immigration, race relations and the disorder in British society.<sup>10</sup> As Hall points out:

Race is the prism which the British people are called upon to live through, then to understand, and then to deal with the growing crisis. The "Enemy" is within the gates. He is nameless: he is protean: he is everywhere. He may even, we're told at one point, be inside the Foreign Office, cooking the immigration figures. But someone will name him. He is "the Other," he is the stranger in the midst, he is the cuckoo in the nest, he is the excrement in the letterbox. He is – "the blacks." ("*Racism and Reaction*" 30)

From Hall's perspective, not only did Powell's reference to "the enemy within" imply a more insidious crisis resulting from strained race relations, but indeed, it effectively reduced these immigrants to "blacks," "strangers" or "cuckoos," always occupying a marginal position in British society as a pervasive, threatening power. In this sense, Hall considers that Powell's ultimate intention was to make immigrants "the Other," not the same as British people.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Hall's observations, the prejudiced views of Powell on race relations in the UK during the 1970s, along with his contemptuous attacks on immigrants, defined such pronouncements on race as "Powellism," which, for Hall, signified the formation of an "official" racist policy at the heart of British political culture ("*Racism and Reaction*" 30).



Reflecting on Powell's speeches, Phillips and Phillips similarly assert that he "had been instrumental in clearing the ground for a new and developing definition of what it meant to be a citizen of the British Isles." It therefore becomes quite clear that Powell's ideas of Englishness had been constructed upon what he regarded as the firm foundation of shared history, kinship and culture, to the exclusion of all blacks and other ethnic minorities (254).<sup>11</sup>

In another controversial speech, delivered at Eastbourne on 16 November 1968, Powell proposed an alternative argument on the separation of the alien culture (brought in by the immigrants) from that of the British national identity, by stating: "the West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still" (qtd. in Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black* 46). Thus, the image of national unity which Powell attempted to create was exclusively "white Englishness," once again to the exclusion of blacks and other ethnic minorities; nevertheless, he was clearly not the only British politician to contribute to the explicit racialisation of political discourse; indeed, the racist words used by Powell were soon to be reworked. In a TV interview given in 1978, Margaret Thatcher delivered her own racist statement portraying an image of blacks as a threat to British national identity:

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<sup>11</sup> Powell's controversial strategy aimed to determine a new British identity, but as Krishan Kumar notes, this "could only be found in the past, in the old England that remained unaltered" (267).

Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers.<sup>12</sup>

Thatcher's statement was remarkable, not only for the way that she demanded stricter immigration control, but also for the way that she was prepared to openly use words like "swamp" in the context of immigration. By using such a negative metaphor as "swamp," Thatcher succeeded in characterizing these black immigrants as a large body of threatening water, a sea that could soon overwhelm British culture and society. Furthermore, given that the immigrant population had risen to 4 per cent of the total British population at that time, her statement clearly gave added impetus to the ongoing debate on race and immigration (Winder 400).

Similar to the situation that had prevailed throughout the 1950s, where the pro-British lobby had succeeded in associating the presence of black immigrants with a taint on British culture, Thatcher's words also demonstrated that she could be very astute in her approach to the issue of immigration. Her use of the term "swamp" was clearly intended to invoke images that would suggest an association between black immigrants and various negative characteristics.

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Thatcher delivered her infamous speech on the issue of immigration in a Granada television interview on 27 January 1978.

The powerful metaphor implied by the word “swamp” brought immediate, but diversified, responses. Observing Thatcher’s “swamping” speech, Alibhai-Brown points out that “many saw her as a heroine, an honest politician unafraid to articulate what the ordinary white population was feeling” (78). Like Enoch Powell, Thatcher held rigid anti-immigration views, and by choosing to adopt the issue of immigration as their target for political discussion, both Powell and Thatcher used forecasts of the horrible racial conflict that would ultimately be brought by black immigrants.

From his analysis of Powellism and Thatcherism, Gilroy points out the similarity in the political pronouncements of both politicians, which involve “making race and nation the framework for a rhetoric order through which modern conservatism could voice populist protest against Britain’s post-imperial plight, and marshal its historical bloc” (“*There Ain’t No Black*” 46). Thatcher’s statement does, however, appear to be the more powerful, since it points directly to the fears of white people with regard to immigrant numbers.

Although Thatcher’s “swamping” statement focused on the black immigrants who were already settled in the UK, whom she saw as the harbingers of danger to British society and culture, the political language used in her statement was ultimately aimed at gaining tighter control over immigration, particularly with regard to those coming in from the Caribbean. Clearly, therefore, her racist statement was aimed at advocating

the adjustment of British policy on race and immigration; thus, it was under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government that the *British National Act 1981* was passed.

The Act defined a British citizen with "automatic right of abode in Britain" by dividing the Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth into three categories: "British Citizens," "British Dependent Territories" and "British Overseas Citizens" (Solomos 65). Under this Act, although all three categories of citizen would be permitted to travel on a British passport and claim British consular protection, only those in the first category of citizenry would be given the opportunity to legally acquire the right of abode in Britain (Paul 183).

In his analysis of the making of British immigration policy, Ian Spencer views the British Nationality Act 1981 as the introduction of "a simplified definition of citizenship, which created a new narrower definition of British citizenship for those with close (parental and grandparental) ties to the United Kingdom who would have right of entry and the right of abode" (148). By defining such new British citizenship, the Act had the effect of halting the entrance of dependants of British citizens; in other words, it stopped any further "flood" of immigration. In this sense, it would appear that "the intention behind the British Nationality Act 1981 was to bring nationality and immigration legislation into line" (148).

Following the promulgation of the British Nationality Act 1981, although racist

views were no longer quite so explicit in official policy, the Macpherson report on the death of Stephen Lawrence found that such views were still implicit in inner-city policing, and indeed, the report used the very damning term “institutional racism” in its criticism of the Metropolitan police force.<sup>13</sup> Publishing his report on the inquiry in 1999, Sir William Macpherson pointed to the incompetence of the Metropolitan police force in their handling of the murder inquiry, which included his reference to “institutionalized racism.” The inquiry had uncovered racist assumptions amongst the investigating police officers who preferred to treat the murder as a street fight, as opposed to a racist attack.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the report suggested that the very fact that the victim was black led directly to the presupposed conclusion adopted by the police, who then chose to discontinue any further searches or inquiries. The significance of the Macpherson Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence becomes apparent, not merely in the conclusion of the report, with its reference to the gross incompetence of the police based upon “institutionalized racism,” but also in the persistent racism which had become prevalent in British society. Indeed, the racist attacks did not simply

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, was widely known to have been murdered by a white gang in South London in 1993; however, no one was ever found guilty of his murder, and indeed, the crime was never properly investigated. Following the inquiry into his death, the Macpherson report concluded by saying that the incompetence of the police could simply be interpreted as “pernicious and persistent institutional racism” (qtd. in Hall “From Scarman” 187).

<sup>14</sup> In his retelling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, Hall relates back to the evening of 22 April 1993; as Stephen Lawrence and Dwayne Brooks were waiting for a bus in South London, five white youths provoked them, chanting: “what, what, nigger?”, with the end result that Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death while his friend Brooks narrowly escaped with his life. Disregarding the testimony of the witness, the investigating police brought to the fore their belief that there must have been a fight involving the two black boys (“From Scarman” 187).

stop after the enactment of the British Nationality Act 1981 by the Thatcher government, nor did the police bring their racially-infected practices of policing to an end in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence case.

Connecting the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999 with the “Windrush” celebration one year earlier (marking the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Docks), Hall very astutely identified what he referred to as the “paradigmatic of the state of play as to race in Britain today,” referring to these two events as “signifying its unresolved contradictions.” Hall considers that the *Windrush* celebration attempts to convey the reality of the increasing visible presence of black and Asian people in all aspects of British social life as a natural and inevitable part of the “scene”; on the other hand, however, he points to the “repetitive persistence” of banal racism (“From Scarman” 188). What Hall attempts to provide is an understanding of the unresolved contradictions that have long existed in British society; and indeed, such contradictions are perfectly mirrored, not only in race relations versus the increasing presence of black immigrants, but also in the changes in British immigration policies and practices that have taken place since the early days of the *Windrush* landing.

Despite the introduction of prejudiced immigration policy or the recognition of institutionalized racism at the highest levels, increasing numbers of unwanted immigrants

continued to flood into the UK. The setting of immigration policy, the decline of the British Empire and the dramatic changes in the global structure had all triggered a spectacular increase in the ethnic minority population in the decades that followed the Second World War. Census figures indicate that in 1951, there were approximately 15,000 people born in the West Indies, but living in Britain, representing only a minuscule share of the total population; however, by 1958, the total number of people from the Commonwealth living and working in Britain had already risen to 210,000. The 1991 census showed that three million (5.5 per cent) of the total population of 55 million people in Britain belonged to ethnic minorities. The subsequent census in 2001 revealed that almost 8 per cent of the UK population identified themselves as members of minority groups, as compared to 6 per cent in 1991, with this minority population having increased from 3 million in 1991 to 4.6 million in 2001 (Taylor and Field 65).<sup>15</sup>

Although the results of this most recent census did not provide any direct confirmation of Margaret Thatcher's fear that the UK would be swamped by this ethnic minority population, they did, nevertheless, confirm what Hall had referred to as "creeping multiculturalism" ("From Scarman" 188). Clearly, the gradually developing movement of such "creeping multiculturalism" had been fuelled by strife and conflict throughout the period of almost fifty years of migration, bringing diversity and

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<sup>15</sup> For further details on the ethnic minority population censuses carried out over the years, see Phillips and Phillips 96; Winder 411; Paul 238.

heterogeneity into British culture and society.

### **Postwar Englishness in British Cultural Studies**

Andrea Levy, the British-born daughter of Jamaican parents and winner of the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction, once famously revealed how she saw her identity as a black British person, when she announced that “if Englishness doesn’t define me, then redefine Englishness”.<sup>16</sup> Since the word “Englishness” immediately invokes complicated senses of belonging and unbelonging, inclusion and exclusion, wantedness and unwantedness, such a strong challenge to Englishness by Levy has subsequently led to the arousal of critical reaction whenever any discussion takes place on the notion of Englishness. A clear example of this is discernible in *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, where Mark Stein keenly observes “a strong and clear element of rejection in Levy’s statement – the rejection of a traditional, exclusive, unattainable Englishness – but also one of attachment, however tenuous and circumspect” (17).

Any sense of belonging in Britain is determined for Levy as much by social exclusion as by inclusion; it therefore becomes clear that in making such a comment, she is ultimately attempting to reject the traditional view that Englishness is established as an exclusive identity to which she is denied any access, which therefore

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<sup>16</sup> Jaggi relates the story of an interview on the way Andrea Levy felt about being English in racialized Britain, to which she requested a redefinition of “Englishness” (qtd in Stein 17).



explains why she makes her demand for the redefinition of Englishness.

Levy is not, however, the only novelist to confront the issue of redefining Englishness; ever since the end of the Second World War and the decline of the British Empire, there has been continuing renewal of interest in British national identity. The redefinition of Englishness, alongside the issues of race, ethnicity, gender, nation and empire has thus become an increasingly rich vein of study. In *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Catherine Hall examines the specific historical relationship between “whiteness” and particular forms of male, middle-class Englishness, defining Englishness

not as a fixed identity, but a series of contesting identities, a terrain of struggles as to what it means to be English. Different groups competed for the domination of this space and the political and cultural power which followed from such domination. Englishness is defined through an imagined community: who is “one of us” [. . .] is quite as important in the definition as who is excluded. (26)

Catherine Hall is just one amongst many critics who argue for the cultural imperative of imagining Britain. There are those within the discussion of Englishness who approach the whole notion of Englishness from a perspective of the theoretical analysis of British history, focusing mainly on the amalgamation of imperial and national identity, whereas others focus on the analysis of totally different concepts of the relationship between Englishness and Britishness, by defining each of the constituent elements. The first approach is apparent in Simon Gikandi’s *Maps of*

*Englishness, Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (1996), Ian Baucom's *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Location of Culture* (1999) and Krishan Kumar's *The Making of English National Identity* (2003), whilst the second is manifest in Paul Gilroy's *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture* (1993) and *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report* (2000).

In *Maps of Englishness*, Gikandi asserts that he does not see Englishness emerging from "a body of stable values and shared experiences" but rather, from the "continuous conflict between the center and its Celtic and colonial peripheries" (xvii). Gikandi alludes to an Englishness that is the product of factors intrinsic to the incessant conflict between Britain (as the center) and its colonies (as the peripheries). On the other hand, he defines "Britishness" as an invented identity shared by a colonial "other." The colonial periphery (and its inhabitants) which formed the Empire became the "other" against which British identity was able to define itself. Thus, Gikandi sees this "other" as a constituent of the invention of "Britishness."

Focusing on place, with the idea of *ius soli*, Baucom presents an alternative conception of Englishness and Britishness, distinguishing the "slippage" between the two; from his observations on the total transformation within the legislation governing postwar immigration, Baucom concludes:

In the context of the discourses on imperialism, Appadurai's arguments suggest exactly what I will be arguing throughout the book: that

Englishness has been identified with Britishness which, in its turn, has been identified as coterminous with, and proceeding from, the sovereign territory of the empire; and that Englishness has also defined itself against the British Empire, first by retaining a spatial theory of collective identity but privileging the English soil of the “sceptered isle.” (12)

Taken together, Gikandi and Baucom seem to suggest that British national identity is in conflict with “the empire,” but that such opposition between them is what mutually strengthens and shapes them. Whereas both of these writers view Englishness as the coming together of imperial and national identity, Krishan Kumar takes an alternative view of Englishness, as the product of imperialism. Following Linda Colley’s historical perspective on English national identity,<sup>17</sup> Kumar considers that the making of English identity cannot be examined in isolation, but rather, that it can only be studied through its relationship with its neighbors and other countries. According to Kumar, English identity is constructed by

not exclusion and opposition, but inclusion and expansion, not inwardness but outwardness, mark the English way of conceiving themselves. They found their identity as constructors of Great Britain, creators of the British Empire, pioneers of the world’s first industrial civilization. (ix)

It is quite clear that Kumar’s argument on Englishness is essentially that it is

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<sup>17</sup> The study of defining Englishness has mainly grown out of Linda Colley’s 1992 essay “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” which analyses British national identity from historical perspectives. Colley argues that the constitution of Britishness should be viewed from its relations to the broader context of external empire instead of emergence as a blending of all the different cultures within the British Isles. Although Colley’s analysis focuses on Britishness, her historical speculation has had an important impact on the revival of interest in Englishness, notably Simon Gikandi’s *Maps of Englishness* (1996), Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* (1999) and Krishan Kumar’s *The Making of English National Identity* (2003).

made up of a notion of “missionary” or “imperial” nationalism, with the English being seen as an imperial people with control, not only over the British Isles, but also a worldwide empire. Kumar passionately asserts that the missionary activity aims to pursue the nation’s “religious, cultural or political nationalism,” with such an approach accordingly committing him to a stricter distinction between Englishness and Britishness, the former as “ethnic or cultural nationalism,” and the latter which he sees as “civic” rather than “ethnic” nationalism (34, 238).

Kumar refers to this as a “moment of Englishness” – the period around 1900 – in which he perceives English nationalism emerging from a crisis of beliefs in the imperial mission. According to Kumar, the Englishness identified in the nineteenth century has continued incessantly, extending into the postwar era. As he observes, Englishness retained its meanings “when the Britons wound up their empire in the 1950s and 1960s,” for “it was common to remark how little difference it seemed to make to the ordinary people of the country” (194).

Whilst certain critics, such as Gikandi, Baucom and Kumar, undertake their analyses of the construction of Englishness through the relationship between imperialism and colonialism, Gilroy’s analysis makes it clear that he sees “xenophobia and paranoia” as the main characteristics of Englishness.<sup>18</sup> In *“There Ain’t No Black in*

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<sup>18</sup> Analyzing the conception of Englishness, and elaborating the national particularities of metropolises, Laura Chrisman explicitly argues that Gilroy’s conception is one of xenophobia and paranoia (11).

*the Union Jack*,” Gilroy places race at the centre of the British cultural framework, and acknowledges the significance of race in the making of Englishness. He approaches the concept of Englishness through the issues of race and ethnicity, and in *Small Acts*, defines, quite succinctly, the exclusiveness inscribed in the very idea of Englishness:

Nationalism and racism become so closely identified that to speak of nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms. Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities (27).

For Gilroy, the lines of exclusiveness and inclusiveness are clearly drawn, in terms of either blackness or Englishness, and he further explains the concept of Englishness through his analysis of the continuing debate over Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*. Through his observations on the series of struggles associated with this novel, Gilroy comes to recognize the emergence of a “new” racism which arises from ethnically absolute and cultural racism, discovering a new trend for close racial alignment based upon the idea that national belonging generates a new racism in which “blackness and Englishness appear suddenly to be mutually exclusive attributes” (*Small Acts* 10).

Webster also asserts that, in tandem with the exclusive nature of the Englishness articulated by Gilroy, Englishness is being “increasingly invoked as an intimate, private, exclusive identity, that is white” (Webster 8). Clearly, both Gilroy and Webster

firmly believe that race is an important marker which essentially defines English identity; however, if whiteness is indeed an identity formation, as the “core” of Englishness, the question then arises as to whether such ideological Englishness and/or whiteness is central to multiculturalism. Indeed, the 2001 census clearly reveals the fact that England has become a multi-ethnic and multicultural society.

In January 1998, a Commission set up by the Runnymede Trust published a 400-page report entitled *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (also known as the *Parekh Report*); this report compiles the views of several conspicuous writers, many from ethnic minorities, under the chairmanship of the scholar Bhikhu Parekh.<sup>19</sup> Although controversial, the report nevertheless stands out as one of the most popular multicultural discourses within the ongoing critical debate on the multi-ethnic identity of Britishness. The overall aim of the report was to redefine British citizenship as being inherently multi-ethnic, whilst simultaneously discarding the equating of Englishness with whiteness in a celebration of difference.

Published in the same year as Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, with a clear and open acknowledgement and celebration of “hybridity,” the report concludes by suggesting ways of “making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity” (Runnymede Trust viii). Based upon its ultimate aim of moving towards

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<sup>19</sup> The Commission also involved some of the most prominent black and Asian scholars, such as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Stuart Hall, Trevor Phillips and Tariq Modood.

greater inclusiveness by regarding Britain as a “community of communities,” the report proposes a new way of breaking up the “us and them” binary:

To say that Britain should be pictured as a community of communities is to refer, first and foremost, to relationships between its three constituent parts, England, Scotland and Wales. But it is also to maintain that each of the constituent parts is in itself a community of communities, not a monolithic whole. Each contains many identities and affiliations; each is in a process of development, with its own internal tensions, arguments and contradictions; each overlaps with several others. Everyone belongs to more than one community; every community influences and has an impact on, and in turn is influenced by, others. None is self-sufficient, entire of itself. “Britain” is the name of the space they all share. (Runnymede Trust 105)

Although no attempt is made in the *Parekh Report* to provide any specific, prescriptive definition of “communities,” it does, nevertheless, seek to create a conceptual structure for Britain, by referring to a community comprising of a series of communities, each of which possesses its own identity and relationship. In such a way, the Commission appears to propose cultural pluralism with liberal values; thus, the report is apparently directed towards multiple, hybrid and fluid ways in which these “visible” communities can identify themselves as British, along with a variety of connections through which they can construct a sense of belonging to Britain – a “community of communities.”

Yet, the report is not without its critics, some of whom focus mainly on the issue of cultural pluralism. Robert Hewison, for instance, criticizes the fact that cultural pluralism is expressed as a concept of “community of communities ... where identities are fluid, and we can link ourselves to whatever group we choose” (42). Meanwhile, in

*The Politics of Englishness*, Arthur Aughey analyzes the ways in which the *Parekh Report* attempts to promote cultural diversity and acknowledge England as a multicultural society, arguing that such a contention is a “political preference” rather than a “logical conclusion,” with the ultimate consequence of this political preference being to “thin” Englishness into fluid abstraction and “thicken” ethnicities into rigid communal blocks (116).

It becomes clear that the critique aroused by the *Parekh Report* is mainly concerned with the report’s over-optimism on the issue of cultural diversity; however, the concerns of most of these critics tend to neglect the attempts by the report to clearly define the characteristics of the dominant national culture, to explain the ways in which they differ from those of ethnic minorities, and most importantly, to unhook the complex political and social issues surrounding identity, citizenship, difference, equality and cohesion. In other words, the focus on these issues essentially aims to re-examine the construction of British national identity; however, it is exactly this focus upon which some other critics centre their argument relating to the issue of re-imagining Britishness.<sup>20</sup>

Although the *Parekh Report* suggests that Britain is a multicultural society which needs to respect its multicultural heritage, it argues that “unless these deep-rooted

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, Rieko Karatani argues that “Britishness” has never been an exclusive term, and rejects the assertive argument of the *Parekh Report* (194).



antagonisms to racial and cultural difference can be defeated in practice, as well as symbolically written out of the national story, the idea of a multicultural postwar nation remains an empty promise” (Runnymede Trust 38). Thus, the report sends out a clear appeal for the uprooting of all of the hostility against cultural and racial difference from the constitution of British national identity, which, as the Report asserts, contains racial connotations. Prior to this, the report comments that

Britishness as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. Whiteness features nowhere as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore the extension of Britishness is racially coded; “There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack,” it is said. Race is deeply entwined with political culture, with the idea of nation, and underpinned by a distinctively British kind of reticence. (Runnymede Trust 38)

By referring to Gilroy’s illustrious title, “There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack,” the report sees racism as a constituent part of Britishness or Englishness; thus, it argues for a more inclusive Britishness to ensure a truly multicultural Britain of the future. This does, however, leave a number of key issues unresolved, such as the way in which respect for differences can be retained whilst achieving satisfactory cohesion and delivering genuine equality to all members of Britain. Furthermore, a major question remains, which is: Who do the British think they are?<sup>21</sup>

Salman Rushdie provides the watchword for studies of Englishness in the

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<sup>21</sup> This phraseology is borrowed from the title of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s work *Who Do We Think We Are?: Imagining the New Britain*, a prominent book reviewing modern-day race relations in Britain.

twentieth century through his stuttering character in the *The Satanic Verses*, who notes that “the trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don’t know what it means” (343). Through the stammering words of Whisky Sisodia in the novel, Rushdie seems to re-conceptualize Englishness and to subvert its insular manifestations. Rushdie’s words immediately prompt an examination of English identity in terms of its overseas history and diasporic immigration to Britain. Such a vision of Englishness seems to demand a re-examination of the country’s prior history, which is not confined merely to Britain’s past imperial greatness, but also to its colonized countries overseas.

Like Gilroy, Stuart Hall also identifies the exclusivity in the conception of Englishness; however, Hall points out the urgency required, particularly with regard to deconstructing this exclusivity of Englishness from Britain’s past; indeed, from history.<sup>22</sup> It is Margaret Thatcher’s nostalgia for the glory of the empire and the ideology of exclusive Englishness against which Hall takes his stance.

Opposing Thatcher’s “narrow, national definition of Englishness, of cultural identity,” which he regards as being grounded in bias, Hall considers that the construction of Englishness should not exclude the political practices of ethnic minorities; indeed, Englishness should be “negotiated against difference” and have to

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall, a Jamaican theorist, had earlier revealed that a “closed and exclusive definition of English” would function as “the coded language of colour” (“Mongrel” 6).

absorb “all the differences of class, of region, of gender, in order to present itself as a homogeneous unity” (“The Local” 22).<sup>23</sup> For Hall, “Englishness,” as a form of cultural politics, “engages rather than suppresses difference” (“New Ethnicities” 446). Such emphasis can be traced back to his 1978 essay, *Racism and Reaction*, which, in the following extract, metaphorically compares the importance of colonial workers in the construction of Englishness with the making of a “British cuppa”:

If the blood of the colonial workers has not mingled extensively with the English, then their labour-power has long entered the economic bloodstream of British society. It is in the sugar you stir; it is in the sinews of the famous British “sweet tooth”: it is in the tea-leaves at the bottom of the next “British cuppa.” (25)

In another essay entitled *Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*, in which Hall recalls his own experience of being an ex-colonized migrant to England, he again uses the symbolism of the English cup of tea to argue that there is no English history without “other” history: “I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantation that rotted generations of English children’s teeth”.<sup>24</sup> By employing this, the most fundamental signifier of English culinary taste and culture, Hall is attempting not only to conjure up images of the history of empire-building, of invasion and colonization, but also to draw attention to the fact, as

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<sup>23</sup> Hall went to study at Oxford University in 1951 and has lived in Britain ever since. Procter notes that since Hall was from a lower middle-class family, his experience as a migrant from Britain’s ex-colony “placed him at an angle to the fading imperial center of postwar Britain” (*Stuart* 5).

<sup>24</sup> For more details on Hall’s idea of “English cuppa” and his own experiences as a migrant, see Hall, “Old and New Identities” 48.

noted by Procter, that “the empire brought Britain and its black communities together long before the introduction of the British Nationality Act 1948, by prompting mass migration from its colonies and former colonies” (*Dwelling* 5). Hall’s words tend to echo the slogan of New Commonwealth immigrants in postwar Britain: “We were here after all because they, you, were there” (qtd. in Alibhai-Brown 6).

Hall goes on to argue that racism in postwar Britain works through “a profound historical forgetfulness” referring to this as “a kind of historical amnesia” which denies that its history was created overseas; thus, he concludes that the presence of Asian or Caribbean migrants has contributed to the constitution of Englishness (“Racism and Reaction” 25). What Hall identifies as “historical amnesia” with regard to Britain’s imperial past is reflected in Margaret Thatcher’s nostalgia for the glory of the British Empire and the practice of racism as a means of reviving the exclusivity of Englishness.

However, based upon the results of the 2001 census, revealing that 4.6 million people in Britain saw themselves as ethnic minorities, the question remains as to the ways in which, in the context of this “historical amnesia,” these minorities can establish or recover a cultural identity in which they are regarded as being naturally included. If racism in postwar Britain has consistently assumed total denial of the existence of black immigrants, excluding them from their constituent role in the

construction of Englishness, it is unclear as to exactly how they will be able to construct such an identity. How, we might ask, can they negotiate Englishness, and indeed, how can they negotiate their identity against Englishness, when Englishness is inherently and exclusively white?

In the postwar era, a time when migration has become the norm, the concept of diaspora, which mediates between difference and multiple belongings, is clearly of use as a means of rethinking the whole notion of Englishness. Furthermore, the foregoing discussion gives rise to emotive questions on the issues of cultural difference, identity and politics, all of which are issues that are central to diaspora theory.

### **Englishness through Diasporic Formations**

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah proclaims her vision of England as a “diaspora space,” a conceptual category, which is inhabited not only by immigrants and their descendants, but equally, by those whom she also constructs as indigenous. Brah argues:

In the diaspora space called “England,” for example, African-Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as the entity constructed as “Englishness,” thoroughly re-inscribing it in the process. Englishness has been formed in the crucible of the internal colonial encounter with Ireland, Scotland and Wales; imperial rivalries with other European countries; and imperial conquests abroad. In the postwar period, this Englishness is continually reconstituted via a multitude of border crossings in and through other diasporic formations. (209)

What Brah appears to be suggesting is that England, as the “diaspora space,” is both multiple and inhabited in different ways; based upon her argument that this concept of “diaspora space” marks “the intersectionality of contemporary conditions of transmigration of people, capital, commodities and culture.” Thus, she uses the term “diaspora space” to embrace the “entanglement of the genealogies of dispersal with those of staying out,” decentralizing the subject position of “migrant,” “indigenous” or “insider/outsider” (242). The concept of Englishness, from the perspective of Brah, is therefore continually negotiated and reconstituted through border crossings.

Anne-Marie Fortier further extends Brah’s use of the term “diaspora space” in *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space and Identity*, where she argues that this “diaspora space” inserts itself between localism and transnationalism, intertwining new webs of belonging. In other words, both Brah and Fortier argue that transnational identities arise from the border crossings of the diaspora, leading to the emergence and development of a form of politics which is simultaneously global and local. The question relating to the ways in which both the “local” and the “global” figure within this overall formation of transnationality ultimately challenges the traditional view of Englishness; meanwhile, such question also challenges the “minoritising and peripheralising impulses of the cultures of dominance” (Brah 210).

Brah’s diaspora relies mainly upon the economic, political and cultural effects of

the crossing or “transgressing” of different borders; indeed, she notes that it is in the border-crossing experience “where contemporary forms of trans-cultural identities are constituted” (238). Meanwhile, from the standpoint of James Clifford, diaspora is seen as a transit point from which people move simultaneously from “routes” and “roots”; in this case, diaspora is “a signifier not simply of transnationality of movement, but also of political struggle to define the local, as a distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (308). To some extent, the transnational movement and experiences of displacement, which all diasporas inevitably have to come to terms with, can be seen in the “politics of identity” as a strategy to be undertaken by diasporas themselves as a way of helping them to deal with differences and “otherness,” in order to negotiate their “positionality” in the adopted or host country.<sup>25</sup>

Such diasporic experience can, however, also be perceived in a very positive light. Indeed, as Edward Said argues, whilst “most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home, exiles are aware of at least two, with this plurality of vision giving rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is ‘contrapuntal’” (*Reflections* 186). This “contrapuntal”

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<sup>25</sup> In the first edition of *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies*, William Safran defines a diaspora based upon shared or imagined experiences of dispersion from a homeland, but this rigid definition applies only to Jewish experiences of migration or other cases similar to the traditional Jewish model. Clifford, however, considers Safran’s definition of diaspora to be too narrow; he therefore redefines it, extending it through the conception of diaspora around the metaphor of travel (252). In this dissertation, the discussion of diaspora is not based upon Safran’s definition which concerns about a belief in a return to homeland or about the construction of homeland after people’s dispersion from their homeland; instead, the focus of this dissertation will concern about Clifford’s notion of “routes” and “roots.”

conception effectively conveys the simultaneous dimensions of diasporic identities, with such emphasis on heterogeneity in his contrapuntal conception requiring an analysis of national identity which is capable of moving beyond the homogeneous, fixed conception of one nation, one culture and one ethnicity. According to Said, the “contrapuntal” consciousness attempts to draw out the silenced or forgotten part of one’s *other* history in order to demonstrate that “there was *always* some form of active resistance” (*Culture* xii).

In his observations on Said, Clifford notes that his “contrapuntal” conception characterizes one of the positive aspects of the conditions of exile, arguing that the concepts of diaspora and hybridization allow people to view contemporary life as “a contrapuntal modernity” (256). Clifford extends the “contrapuntal criticism” of Said from reflections on exile, to diasporic experiences. For Clifford, both the experiences of exile and the experiences of diasporas share the conditions of multiple visions, since their identities and experiences involve the awareness of more than two cultures; however, as he points out, the only difference between them is that the former includes “the more individualist, existential focus” whilst the latter involves “networks of community, collective practices of displaced dwelling” (365).

In addition to his use of the term “contrapuntal” to characterize his conception of the conditions of exile, Said also uses the term to read the cultural archives, by



introducing, in *Culture and Imperialism*, the way in which the music idea (the *contrapuntal* structure in music), can be applied to our reading of the literature or to what he refers to as “contrapuntal reading.” According to Said,

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to re-read it not univocally, but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together, with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one . . . [I]n the same way, I believe we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternatives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities. (*Culture* 51)

Further explaining the way that Said conceives this contrapuntal reading, Childs notes that “by turning the narrative inside out, temporarily centralizing its margins, [although] Said aims to interpret the setting of the English novel in the historical context of colonialism in his reference to the contrapuntal reading of the novel, the simultaneous awareness of multiple histories which he attempts to evoke through his contrapuntal reading seems to me, a crucial approach to see how Englishness is negotiated by immigrants”.<sup>26</sup> If Englishness has long been constituted as whiteness, to the exclusion of all else, and England has thus come to be perceived as “one culture, one setting, one

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<sup>26</sup> Responding to Said’s reference to “contrapuntal” reading, Childs notes that “such emphasis on borders, heterogeneity, and reading against the grain, require analyses of national identity which move away from the binaries of domestic and foreign, native, immigrant, belonging and alienation, and instead consider the people, cultures and discourses that cross or collapse these categories”; see Childs, “Where Do You Belong?” 51.

home,” the immigrants and their children in a diaspora space, like England, will be aware of both their multiplicity, which is brought about as a result of their border-crossing or their transnational, trans-cultural experience, and also by the simultaneity of their multiple histories.

Thus, if immigrants and their children are simultaneously aware of the multiple histories inscribed in English national identity, then the question arises as to the ways in which such awareness is conducted and the extent to which Englishness is at stake. This is the main issue to be discussed in the remainder of this dissertation with reference to the postwar diasporic British novels and their challenges to the fixed notion of Englishness, along with explicit issues of immigration and race.

### **Readings on Englishness in Diasporic British Fiction**

The “contemporary” movement in British fiction is regarded as including the emergence of several new literary categories, including “ethnic,” “postcolonial” and “Black British” fiction.<sup>27</sup> In the majority of the prior works providing the overview and literary criticism on contemporary British fiction, the novels of Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips are placed into a separate category, a category which is invariably referred to as “cultural hybridity” or “postcolonialism.” It is not generally

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<sup>27</sup> In *British Fiction of the 1990s*, although Nick Bentley defines “contemporary” fiction as that which reflects “contemporary” issues, he does not indicate exactly what constitutes these “contemporary” issues. In contrast, James English provides some degree of exactness, with regard to when the “contemporary” era began, with his contention that “contemporary” British fiction is synonymous with all fiction produced in the entire postwar period (1).

regarded as being appropriate to include these writers in the section discussing the likes of Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis or A.S. Byatt.<sup>28</sup> The novels produced by other writers of African, Asian or Caribbean origin are usually grouped together and included within the category of “Black British” writing, with the book by David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagore, *Reader’s Guide to West Indian And Black British Literature* (2001), representing a concerted attempt at defining exactly what constitutes “Black British” literature by outlining both its history and its development.

*Write Black, Write British*, edited by Kadjia Sesay, focuses primarily on the theme of “Black British,” as opposed to “postcolonial,” using these terms as the means of categorizing the tenet of black British literature; however, what is somewhat unique about Sesay’s work is his recognition that it is simply wrong to categorize those writers born in Britain, such as Kureishi or Levy, as “postcolonial” writers. Sesay notes that “they are reminded constantly that they are ‘not of here’ even though they believe and feel that they are” (16).

In the various other analyses that have been undertaken on black British writing, although the term “black” is invariably found to have political and cultural implications, the critical assessment of black British literature contributes to an

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<sup>28</sup> The bibliographies and essays provided by Lane, Mengham and Tew (2003) are regarded as constituting the category of “cultural hybridity.” In *Contemporary British Novels Since 1980*, James Acheson and Sarah Ross categorize all discussion on Hanif Kureishi, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith under the heading of “Postcolonialism and other –isms.” Refer to English (2006) and Bentley (2008) for essays included within the category of “new ethnicities.”

examination of the way in which Britain is portrayed from a specific British perspective, albeit inscribed in “black”.<sup>29</sup> It is, nevertheless, clear that the term “black British” is fraught with a number of difficulties, given that the term is used as the means of referring to all people in Britain with African, (South) Asian or Caribbean cultural backgrounds. It therefore tends to have a “looseness” which serves to homogenize all diverse groups.

Yet the use of the term “black,” as inscribed in “black British,” has strong political implications, with such usage being traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, it is within the racially-hostile context associated with that period that the term “black” was initially coined as a term representative of the power of alliance with regard to the building up of resistance to racism (Brah 97). Indeed, the term “Black” in the 1970s and early 1980s was “typically defined in opposition to a white, Anglo-Saxon Britishness that existed outside it” (*Dwelling* 6).

Strongly influenced by the “Black Power” movement in the USA in the 1960s, the black community in Britain began to exude a confident expression of a collective

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<sup>29</sup> In *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (2002), Procter attempts to bring together a range of African Caribbean and South Asian writings within the broader political and social context of postwar black British history, whilst in *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (2003), Sandhu attempts to uncover, or expose, the variety of works by those authors whose roots lay in British former colonies, with the main focus being on the ways in which these authors imagined London. A more recent critique of “Black British writing” is *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004) in which Mark Stein attempts to connect contemporary Black British novels with the genre of bildungsroman, arguing that the novels under discussion portray the transformation of post-imperial Britain. In his influential essay, “New Ethnicities,” Hall argues that the term “Black” is “essentially a politically and culturally constructed category” (443); he also argues elsewhere that “Black was created as a political category in a certain historical moment . . . as a consequence of certain symbolic and ideological struggles” (“Old and New Identities” 54).

identity with the term “black,” which thereby fostered resistance against all forms of colour-based racism. Yet the perception of a “Black British” category as a generic term signifying a “political blackness” has faded somewhat since the 1990s. Although Hall clearly emphasizes the emergence of “political blackness” in his essay “New Ethnicities,” his emphasis later shifted, in his essay “Frontiers and Backyards: The Terms of Change,” towards the need to recognize the border-crossing and hybrid characteristics of contemporary ethnic identities. According to Hall:

One of the key differences is that, had I been speaking to you a decade ago, I would not have centered this caveat. Afro-Caribbeans and Asians were treated by the dominant society as so much alike that they could be subsumed and mobilized under a single political category. But today, that is no longer the case. Today we have to recognize the complex internal cultural segmentation, the internal frontlines which cut through what most called black British identity. (“Frontiers” 127)

What Hall clearly points to, with regard to the changing nature in the use of the term “Black British,” is the diversity of cultures that have emerged in Britain, thereby drawing upon his recognition of the need to emphasize the intertwining of cultures and ethnicities. Clearly, under such circumstances, we are unlikely to succeed in moving beyond the confines of “political blackness,” particularly if we continue to use the term “Black British literature” as the means of referring to the studies of Selvon, Kureishi, Smith, and the like. Perhaps, therefore, it might be more appropriate if any analysis of their novels were to be undertaken within a terminological framework of

“diasporic British literature” which, under Brah’s conception of diaspora, “addresses the realm where the economic, cultural and political effects of crossing, or transgressing, different borders are experienced” (238).

Adopting a diasporic framework for the study of the textual representation of Englishness in the London novels of Sam Selvon, Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith, the argument pursued in this dissertation is that the linking of “diasporic” identity with British national identity is a way of reflecting the politics of “positionality” which the immigrant characters in these novels acknowledge in response to their relationship with Britain.<sup>30</sup> Each of the chapters that follow is built around an introduction to the trends of politics, or historical contexts, followed by an introduction to a range of novels, all of which reflect “changing Britain” as well as negotiations on the notion of Englishness.

In order to chart a more complete development of diasporic postwar British novels, particularly those that have contributed to the development of Englishness in the decades that followed the Second World War, the works of the “Windrush generation” novelists of the 1950s clearly deserve much attention. Through their experiences of immigration and subsequent experiences as diaspora, the “Windrush

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<sup>30</sup> Hall’s notion of “identity as positionality” is taken here as an approach to the examination of the way in which diasporic immigrants positioned themselves with regard to their relationship with British society. Hall asserts that “identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (“Cultural Identity” 225).

generation” novelists interrogate their positionality in their so-called “Mother country” through the representation of the joy and difficulty, loneliness and racism experienced by West Indian immigrants. It is for this reason, more than any other, that the London novels of Sam Selvon are included within this dissertation.

Chapter One analyzes the quintessentially English stereotypes represented in the London novels, pointing out Selvon’s preoccupation in these novels with the central themes of “belonging” and “negotiation” by the immigrants of “ideas of England” and “Englishness” through their satirical take on quintessential Englishness. Indeed, notions of Englishness loom large in Selvon’s London novels. Through the inclusion of his less discussed *The Housing Lark*, the analysis in this dissertation aims to determine the ways in which first-generation postwar immigrants responded to their “Mother country,” and how they constructed their own identity by way of revisiting the notion of “Englishness,” something which they had been encouraged to familiarize themselves with ever since their childhood days in the West Indies.

If Selvon reflects the discord and conflicts between the cultures of the immigrants and their “Motherland,” then Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* both demonstrate the tension and conflict, not only between different cultures, but between generations, and also within communities. These novels concentrate on the “hybridity” of second-generation immigrants, the dual

consciousness of where their diasporic parents came from, and the way in which their diasporic experiences should have enabled them to claim their identity in England. The novels of both Selvon and Kureishi under discussion here are about “identity politics”; however, where Selvon’s London novels aim to convey the metropolitan experiences of immigrants, as well as their “homing desire” to put down some roots, albeit in a hostile and racially discriminating London, the two novels by Kureishi focus on the “homing desire” of young British Asians along with their desire to redefine Englishness.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Chapter Two provides an analysis of Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, examining their focus on 1970s and 1980s contexts, two decades that witnessed ethnic diversity weighing heavily on intensifying race relations in Britain, and which were also to witness growing demand amongst ethnic minorities for a redefinition of “belonging” and the “ownership” of Britain. The fixed concept of the exclusivity of Englishness is arguably directly challenged by the “cultural hybridity” prominent in Kureishi’s London novels. Through Kureishi’s satirical portrait of the identities of these immigrants and their children, these two novels attempt to depict political diasporic hybridity, which is ultimately set to destabilize the exclusionary model of Englishness.

In Chapter Three, the focus shifts to a series of metaphors which Zadie Smith

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<sup>31</sup> The analysis of Kureishi’s novels in this dissertation does not include his other novels, *Intimacy* (1998), *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001) and *Something to Tell You* (2008), essentially because neither race nor Englishness is at the forefront of these novels.

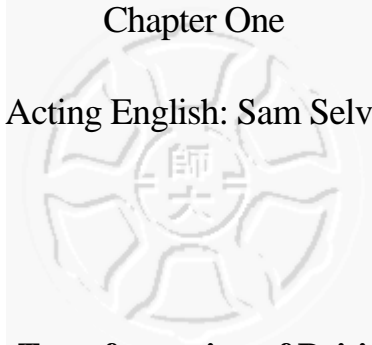


uses to represent contemporary heterogeneity in her debut novel, *White Teeth*. Like Selvon and Kureishi, Smith deals with the thorny issues of identity, the negotiation of Englishness by immigrants and the relationships between races in a satirical way; her treatment of these issues is, however, much more farcical. It is argued here that through the comically satirical modes and tones in Smith's representation of the multicultural social landscape of England, she attempts to deal with the raptures and ruptures of the multi-ethnic and multicultural state.

This dissertation sets out with the aim of charting the development of Englishness by relating the issue of Englishness to the postwar British novels and by suggesting links to the concept of diaspora. As for the transformation of England, the dissertation concludes by comparing George Orwell's 1940 essay *England, Your England* to Kureishi's 1989 essay of the same title. Through its focus on fifty years of change and transformation, thereby making it possible to mark these changes, this dissertation ends with an analysis of the ways in which Englishness is captured and recaptured in different historical contexts.

## Chapter One

### Imagining English, Acting English: Sam Selvon's London Novels



#### ***Empire Windrush* and the Transformation of British National Identity**

The arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* at Tilbury in 1948 has ultimately been accredited with significant symbolism in modern British history. Although it was by no means the first ship to bring Caribbean migrants to Britain, the enthusiastic reports of its arrival within the media, and the impassioned political debate that was to ensue, gave rise to fervent anti-alien emotions that were to ultimately influence the making of policy for decades thereafter (Winder 348). Although some writers and commentators viewed its arrival in quite a positive light, the white racists soon began to articulate the event as “a strange coloured trickle of immigration that became a black flood of undesirability into British cities” (Hesse 98).

Analyzing the development of British national identity in the twentieth century, Mike and Trevor Phillips refer to the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* as “a crucial element in a network of events which altered major aspects of life in Britain today” (5). David Dabydeen, a black British critic and writer, acknowledged the significance of the fiftieth anniversary of *Windrush* with his insightful observation of its symbolism as a modern condition, when he said “We are here to stay, but we are also here to move on if

necessary, and emigrate and go back to the Caribbean and go anywhere else, with our British passports” (232).

Barnor Hesse would ultimately be the one to voice some of the more positive implications of the event, proclaiming that “*Windrush* can now be seen to redefine these developments as critical aspects of the postwar reconstruction of British public identity” (98). However, there were also those who were clearly prepared to acknowledge the *Empire Windrush* as the opening up of a new chapter of “coloured immigration” into Britain; indeed, this would ultimately lead to considerable debate on appropriate ways of dealing with the attendant issues, such as whether such immigrations were to be seen as “desirable” or whether extensive legal restrictions on the entry of these immigrants would need to be put in place.

It is quite clear that Britain’s contradictory responses to immigration had existed long before the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush*. The end of the empire along with the strained economic climate in the aftermath of the Second World War would ultimately lead to substantial inflows of immigrants into Britain. Nevertheless, whilst the use of immigration was seen as an appropriate, accelerated means of providing the much-needed manpower for Britain’s urgent drive for economic recovery, the issue which would ultimately give rise to protracted debate amongst the various government departments was exactly who the targets for recruitment should be. Although the

Colonial Office proposed the possibility of recruiting British subjects from the Commonwealth/Empire to help to alleviate the labour shortage, the Ministry of Labour considered that if specific skills were to be taken into consideration, then such workers from the Indian sub-continent, the Caribbean or West Africa were hardly suitable. It had been proposed that instead, displaced persons from Europe were clearly a much better choice, essentially because they were more skilled and because it was expected that they would return home once the job was done (Spencer 39).

Given the urgent call for the acceleration of postwar reconstruction, such debate was, however, brought to an abrupt end, with the decision by the government to adopt the extensive use of “coloured” workers as the means of alleviating the country’s labour shortage. In contrast to expectations of accelerated economic growth in Britain following the end of the war, people in the Commonwealth countries were troubled by the fear of rising unemployment; thus, for the nearly five hundred Jamaicans in *Windrush* who had escaped the high unemployment of their homeland to seek jobs elsewhere, the prospect of a well-paid job in Britain appeared to be the answer to their dreams.

In an interview reflecting on the fiftieth anniversary of *Windrush*, Euston Christian, an ex-RAF serviceman who had returned to Jamaica in 1947, and who subsequently boarded the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, considered himself and other

Jamaican ex-servicemen to be no foreigners to Britain, but instead, British subjects; he therefore saw his embarkation on the *Windrush* and a job in Britain as a great opportunity.<sup>1</sup> For Christian and other migrants from Jamaica or other British colonized West Indian countries, the journey to Britain was to be a homecoming, “a chance to renew or realize connections with the imperial ‘Motherland’” (Paul 114).

The reflections on *Windrush* by Euston Christian represent what many of these war servicemen thought of their relationship with England, evoking images of home, the notion of identifying with England, their “Motherland.” This sense of identification is also clearly evident in the composition of Lord Kitchener, a well-known Trinidadian calypsonian, who composed “London is the Place for Me” for the special occasion of the arrival of *SS Empire Windrush*, on which he was also a passenger.

London is the place for me  
London, this lovely city  
You can go to France or America  
India, Asia or Australia  
But you must come back to London City  
  
Well believe me, I am speaking broad-mindedly  
I am glad to know my mother country  
I’ve been travelling to countries years ago  
But this is the place I wanted to know  
London, that’s the place for me.<sup>2</sup>

The passage to London had been optimistically romanticized by these early

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<sup>1</sup> Further interviews with former Caribbean servicemen are provided in Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain*.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion on Kitchener’s calypso music, see Dawson 1-3.

immigrants as a journey to their welcoming home, but was Britain actually their home?

As Euston Christian admitted in his interview, although finding a job was not a problem to them, housing and accommodation was another issue entirely. Whilst Christian had always regarded himself as a British subject, he was identified by his white landlord as “the coloured,” “unsuitable immigrant” or “alien.”

The imagery of the diverse manifestations of the conflicts and struggles of these immigrants since their arrival on the *Empire Windrush* seems far too complex to be summarized in mere words; nevertheless, the London novels of Sam Selvon do seem to effectively convey the overall experience of immigration whilst also documenting the complicated senses of wonder, fear and optimism felt by most of the immigrants. In his novels *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and *The Housing Lark* (1965), Selvon vividly chronicles the diverse immigrant conditions and identities of the multiple characters of “the boys” striving for improvements in their inferior lives in London, whilst in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, Selvon provides an update to both the situation and the fortunes of the immigrants through the single persona of Moses, whose social status has been raised to that of the landlord of a ramshackle “terrace” in Shepherd’s Bush.

As Sushila Nasta observes, through his depiction of the immigrant experiences in Britain based upon the characterization of Moses in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), Selvon provides “satiric

observations on the plight of black Londoners” (“Setting Up” 78). The chronological movement through the four novels documents not only the changes in immigrant life, but also the social changes in Britain between the 1950s and the 1980s. Selvon’s novels therefore attempt to express the reconfiguration of Britain, with his “boys” and his prototypical hero, Moses, striving to establish their “positionality” whilst yearning to put down some firm roots in their “Motherland.”

It is in light of such fictional representation of the reconfiguration of Britain that the London novels of Sam Selvon are read in this dissertation. Following on from the Introduction, this chapter focuses initially on the concept of “diaspora,” taking a particularly close look at the idea of “home.” It is argued here that Sam Selvon’s novels represent the diaspora situation quite well, displaying what Brah refers to as a “homing desire” which would be called upon to ponder through the issues of “home” and “belonging.” The resentful complaint expressed by Moses to Galahad in *The Lonely Londoners* typifies the conflicting emotions towards his “Motherland”:

And you know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have that restaurant, he ain’t have no more right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this country, and enjoy what this country have, because is we who bleed to make this country prosperous. (40)

What Moses is doing here is claiming a sense of belonging – he is not an immigrant, a foreigner, but a British subject; however, his self-assertion violates the white’s

racialised imagination. Moses sees himself as being “of Britain”; nevertheless, in truth, he can only ever be “in Britain”.<sup>3</sup>

In the conflicting search for home and belonging in Selvon’s novels, the concept of “diaspora,” as proposed by Brah, is useful, since it “places the discourse of home and dispersion in creating tension, inscribing a homing desire whilst simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins.” According to Brah, this “homing desire” is quite distinct from “a desire for a homeland”; home is not only “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” but “the lived experience of locality.” Brah assertively speaks of the “homing desire” that may, or may not necessarily inscribe desire for a wish to return to one’s homeland. Seeing the concept of diaspora as a critique against the discourse of fixed origins, Brah emphasises that home in the diasporic imagination is constructed through multiple processes of inclusion and exclusion whereas identity “is always plural, and in process” (192, 197). In terms of Brah’s viewpoint, the “homing desire” in the diaspora context is not associated with nostalgia for the homeland; rather, it is more about the lived experience that one localizes his present experience by dwelling and staying.

Further extending Brah’s concept of “homing desire,” Anne-Marie Fortier explains that home is “constituted by the desire for a home, rather than surfacing from an already

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to the “racialised imagination,” Brah explains that “the former colonial natives and their descendants who settled in Britain,” typified by Moses, “cannot exactly be British because they can only be in Britain, but not of Britain” (191).



constituted home, ‘there’ or ‘here.’” Fortier goes on to explain that home is produced through the movement of desire; and indeed, Selvon’s London novels uncover the desire of such immigrants to make England their home.<sup>4</sup> According to Selvon’s depiction of the time, England was seen by these colonial immigrants as the “Motherland,” the culture, history and literature of which had been passed on to them since their childhood. They therefore felt more naturally entitled and empowered to make a home in England and to assert their sense of belonging. Selvon has indicated the importance of homing desire among his immigrant characters.

Nevertheless, the passage of time would inevitably show that their identification with England would always be troubled by a system of inclusion and exclusion, since they found it necessary to make the best of their home in a racially-hostile country. With its focus on the notion of “home,” this chapter goes on to analyze the way in which Selvon attempts to deal with the ambivalence and confusion which ensues in the relationship between his immigrant character, Moses, and British society as a whole.

## **Critical Reception**

Sam Selvon, a Trinidad-born writer, boarded the same ship to London as George Lamming in 1950. Although he did not arrive on the *SS Empire Windrush*, he is

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<sup>4</sup> Although Fortier’s exposition of Brah’s idea of “homing desire” is provided through her analysis of the narratives of queer migration, her re-reading of the relationship between migration and belonging sheds much light on the concept of “home.” Fortier sees homing desires as being constituted not merely through migration, but by movement towards finding a home (“Making Home” 129).

nevertheless regarded as one of the “Windrush generation of writers”,<sup>5</sup> a small group of writers that was to ultimately emerge from the initial wave of migrants in the 1950s. Following the completion of his first novel, *A Bright Sun*, published in 1952, Selvon subsequently went on to publish a further nine novels, some short stories, poems and plays. Amongst the more notable of his works – that is to say, those which have received the most critical attention – are the *Tiger* and *Moses* books.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the existing criticism on contemporary “black British” literature, or indeed contemporary British literature, *per se*, seems to ignore, or conveniently overlook, the particular contribution made by Selvon to the overall tenet of black British writing. Possible explanatory reasons for this are that the plots in Selvon’s novels always seemed to have insufficient complexity and that his main characters were always found to be too stereotyped. Indeed, *The Lonely Londoners*, possibly the most frequently discussed of all Selvon’s works, has tended to be a regular target for direct criticism or general comments of an unfavorable nature.

Selvon comes under severe criticism, for example, in the reading of his characters

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<sup>5</sup> Tracing back the history of Black British writing to 1950, Mark Stein defines the “Windrush generation of writers” as a small group of writers who migrated from the West Indies to Britain after 1948, with this group comprising of V.S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Beryl Gilroy, Wilson Harris and George Lamming (Stein 4). However, prior to this particular analysis of the Windrush generation writers, in her essay published in the 1998 issue of *Kunapipi*, Sarah Lawson Welsh regards this generation of writers as including only Sam Selvon, George Lamming and Andrew Salkey.

<sup>6</sup> References to the *Tiger* books relate to two works, *A Bright Sun* (1952) and *Turn Again Tiger* (1958), focusing on the quest for selfhood by a young Trinidadian, whilst references to the *Moses* books relate to the *Moses Trilogy*, comprising of *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, each of which features Moses as the central character.

by V.S. Naipaul, who comments “there were the same black characters, it seemed, and variations on the same joke . . . black people knocking hopelessly on white doors in London” (30). A further sad commentary on Selvon’s particular narrative style of writing is that he organizes *The Lonely Londoners* with personal episodes told in the third person; thus, it is grounded in a structure built upon episodic chronicles, which nevertheless invites some dissent. Further criticism comes from Sukhdev Sandhu, who considers *The Lonely Londoners* to be a novel with no plot, arguing that it is “a series of loosely-related sketches of metropolitan life” (167), whilst Sushieela Nasta considers Selvon’s adoption of this episodic style to be “apparently unstructured” (*Critical* 76). It is, nevertheless, clear that the major assessments of *The Lonely Londoners* tend to focus on Selvon’s use of language; Clement Wyke, for example, asserts that *The Lonely Londoners* is written in “the juxtaposition of dialect and standard forms of English” (36).

Reading the writing style of *The Lonely Londoners* as being “calypso” in nature, Michael Fabre observes that Selvon manages the language in a specific way in which dialect and standard English are interwoven. Taking a particularly close look at the language within *The Lonely Londoners*, with his reading of the book clearly taking into consideration Bakhtinian carnival theory, John Thieme considers the work to be a central Carnival text, which is parodic, egalitarian and subversive in nature, arguing

that it combines the oral culture of West Indian tradition with the subversive Bakhtinian carnival style.<sup>7</sup> However, Selvon himself confesses that standard English, street English and dialect are mingled in *The Lonely Londoners* so that readers will read them without being aware of the dialect mingled therein. Selvon's usage of language serves to present a realistic London, and indeed, he tries to make it clear that he wishes to act like "any English writer" (Fabre 67); this does, however, give rise to the question of what it actually means to "act like any English writer."

If we look back today at *The Lonely Londoners*, it is difficult not to notice how Selvon's work succeeded in capturing the London of the 1950s – a city through which black migrants strode and where people could no longer hear the dulcet tones of standard English; nevertheless, it is also difficult to avoid both laughing and shedding a tear over the sketches of the survival stories of many of these Caribbean immigrants. The analysis in this dissertation therefore follows the way in which Selvon portrays the stereotypes of black migrants, and the narrative which Selvon uses to portray the lives of Caribbean immigrants with regard to coming to terms with British society.

In each of these immigrants' stories, every episode contains both tragic and comic dimensions, with such tragic-comic narrative reflecting Selvon's unique perception of his early immigrant experiences; in other words, he recognizes that the immigrants'

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<sup>7</sup> For further references to an approach to Selvon's novels with carnival theory, see Thieme and Dotti (2003).

hardships mingle with their optimistic attitude towards life in general. However, what lies behind these tragic and comic dimensions is clearly an act of subversion, a direct challenge to the whole notion of Englishness. Thus, the overall aim here is to demonstrate the literary artfulness of Selvon in the intended play on “Englishness” which is appropriated by his immigrant characters. Selvon’s black immigrants arguably play out a reversal of the stereotypical idea of Englishness, and indeed, it is in their reversed role-play that the whole idea of English national identity is both questioned and challenged.

A further line of reasoning followed in this chapter is the pursuit of a connected line from the *Moses Trilogy* to *The Housing Lark* as a focus on the central theme of negotiating Englishness. If the *Moses Trilogy* tells of the process of development of Moses in London, then we can argue that *The Housing Lark*, which also depicts a grey and hostile London where West Indian immigrants must desperately strive for survival, is essentially a sequel to the *Moses Trilogy*.

As in the *Moses Trilogy*, Selvon also sets up the process of acculturation amongst the immigrants in *The Housing Lark*, although, despite having always been the central characters throughout the former novels, neither Moses nor Galahad features in the latter work. There is, nevertheless, an obvious continuing thread between the story of their struggles in *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark*; the only real

difference is that Selvon does not actually refer to these characters by name in the latter work. Nevertheless, some of their more defining traits are still reflected in *The Housing Lark*.

Finally, the theme of traveling is explored in all four novels, with the personal experiences of Selvon closely resembling those which his famous character, Moses, has to endure – migrating to Britain in adulthood and departing from Britain after a sojourn lasting approximately twenty years. The only significant difference is that Selvon left London for Canada in 1978, whereas Moses returns to Trinidad. Selvon was always committed to his journeys, from/back to Trinidad and to/from London; thus, the theme of migration and settlement dominates both the *Moses Trilogy* and *The Housing Lark*. However, as destiny would have it, Selvon's visit to Trinidad in 1994 would result in his final days being spent in his homeland.

In terms of their narrative structure, each of Selvon's London novels begins with physical movement, with the prologue of each novel revealing Selvon's primary concern with the overall setting. *The Lonely Londoners* opens up with Moses, unwillingly hopping on a bus to Waterloo station to pick up "a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train," a young man who was known as Henry Oliver on his arrival, but who later became known as Sir Galahad after his settlement in London; this character is second only to Moses throughout the *Moses Trilogy* (23).

Similar to the opening of *The Lonely Londoners* is the reluctant welcome scene at the start of *The Housing Lark*, in which Battersby, a migrant from Trinidad, is unwilling to share his room with newcomer, Harry Banjo, a Jamaican calypsonian who decides to migrate to London to try his luck. Right from the start of *Moses Ascending*, Moses is portrayed as a changed man who has secured a dilapidated house in Shepherd's Bush where he begins by moving from the rented basement to his own penthouse and renting the rest of the rooms to other tenants. However, in contrast to the opening scenes in the previous three novels, telling of physical movement which is confined only to London city, *Moses Migrating* begins with Moses' reverse journey, from London to Trinidad.

With such beginnings to his London novels, Selvon makes effective use of the journey metaphor to show the restlessness and "rootlessness" of diasporic immigrants constantly on the move. Indeed, in addition to traveling from country to country, or from house to house, we find that Selvon's immigrant characters never stop moving – on the way to a date with white "pussies," going to someone's basement for a talk or a drink, or looking for a job or a house through the city. Such continuous mobility brings them into direct conflict and confrontation with ubiquitous and continuous racial discrimination; they are, as John McLeod notes, "travelers." Building on Gilroy's concept of Black Atlantic, McLeod further notes:

Black peoples in history have been travelers: brought from Africa to America and the Caribbean on the slave-ships across the “Middle Passage” of the Atlantic Ocean; migrating to Britain after the 1950s due to the shortage in British labour; throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries making journeys between the Americas, Britain and Africa. These crossings created myriad ways of thinking which drew from and contributed to the prevailing ideas in each of these places. (“Laughing” 229)

This theme of moving has been widely recognised as the defining characteristic of Selvon’s London novels; indeed, it is clear that, drawing on Gilroy’s concept of “crossing,” his depiction of the movement of immigrants, both in their journeys to and from London and in their wanderings throughout the city, can be read in terms of routes. Hence, through such travels, as opposed to homogenized constructions, such as “Englishness” or the existential idea of “black,” more fluid identity constructions come under quite a strong challenge.

### **The Art of Playing “Englishness” in *The Lonely Londoners***

*The Lonely Londoners*, which was first published in 1956, is a classic postwar black British novel that was to ultimately set up as the first volume of Selvon’s *Moses Trilogy*; this first novel would also prove to attract much scholarly interest and critique.<sup>8</sup> Set in the 1950s, *The Lonely Londoners* tells the story of the ways in which a group of Caribbean immigrants struggle for survival in London. This is a pioneering work, within which Selvon presents the City of London as a place in which Caribbean

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<sup>8</sup> *The Lonely Londoners*, the first volume of the Moses Trilogy, was published in 1956, *Moses Ascending* was completed in 1975, and the last, *Moses Migrating*, was published in 1983.



migrants began to dwell, and in which they also demonstrated their intention to put down some firm roots. The novel revolves not only around the theme of arriving in London, but also around the theme of claiming London as their “home.” With the opening paragraph of the novel, Selvon encourages the reader to view their familiar London through a brand new lens:

One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if it is not London at all about some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train. (*Lonely* 23)

As Sandhu observes, Selvon has made London his city, just as “Baudelaire did Paris, and Joyce, Dublin” (166). The city which Selvon’s novel portrays appears to be unreal and somewhat estranged to Moses and the other boys; however, their face-to-face encounters with the city would soon reveal the cruel reality of existence in London. Questions of what it means to be English and what “Englishness” involves are reflected in *The Lonely Londoners* in the perspectives of these West Indian immigrants, particularly those of Galahad and Moses.

The story line continues with Selvon’s depiction of the way in which Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s established their “positionality” in London, a city which would turn out to be a very alien place to the Caribbean immigrants whom Moses, the protagonist of the novel, goes to meet someone from his homeland at Waterloo station,

where these Caribbean migrants are also welcomed by the cold weather. Their disorientation is best depicted in the character of Henry Oliver (who subsequently changes his name in the latter part of the novel to Sir Galahad). When Henry first steps off the train in a light summer suit, he appears surprised by Moses' question, asking him if he isn't cold. Moses shouts to Henry: "What happened to you, you sick or something?" (*Lonely* 33). As it turns out, in the latter part of novel, Henry (or Sir Galahad) feels cold only in summer, but hot in winter. By depicting Henry, and the "boys", in such ways, Selvon immediately presents the "otherness" of these immigrants, showing how their position is always established in relation to Britain, with Britain constantly at the centre.

A more significant element of the irony which continually comes into play around the issue of "Englishness" is in the way in which Galahad, as a newcomer, tries to settle in London. Galahad is presented throughout the novel as an enthusiastic immigrant eager to acquire romance and brimming with a quest for the life of luxury in the city. Following his arrival in London and the receipt of his first salary payment, the first thing that Galahad does is to buy nice new clothes:

Galahad feel like a king living in London. The first thing he take a craft out, he dress up good, for one of the first things he do after he get a work was to stock up with clothes like stupidness, as if to make up for all the hard times when he didn't have nice things to wear. (85)

Although dressing up nicely for a date would appear, for Galahad, to define the

typical English way of life, the irony over Galahad's search for well-established settlement is that immediately after achieving such feelings of delight, these feelings are just as quickly shattered. Walking happily through the streets of London in his newly-made clothes, with his mind wandering around thoughts of the pleasant date that he has just had with a young girl, Galahad feels pretty content with his new life in London, until he receives a child's stare upon him:

“Mummy, look at the black man!” A little child, holding on to the mother hand, look up at Sir Galahad.

“You mustn't say that, dear!” The mother chide the child.

But Galahad skin like rubber at this stage, he bend down and pat the child cheek, and the child cower and shrink and begin to cry.

“What a sweet child!” Galahad say, putting on the old English accent,

“What's your name?”

But the child mother uneasy as they stand up there on the pavement with so many white people around. (*Lonely* 87-88)

Galahad is left feeling uneasy by the way in which the white mother and her child react to his blackness; it also comes as something of a disturbing discovery for him to find that he is failing to gain the acceptance of his “fellow” Englishmen through his mimicry of the standard “proper English” accent and social politeness. Galahad ponders over the status of blacks bitterly, noting that, “Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world” (88).

By focusing on this single episode experienced by Galahad one evening, Selvon

discloses to the reader the everyday duality of happiness and distress in the British lives of these Caribbean immigrants; thus, whilst readers may find this episode of Galahad walking on the pavement amusing and comical, they are ultimately left with feelings of sorrow once they realize how ashamed Galahad feels over the colour of his skin. This rapid transformation which Selvon depicts, from happiness to sorrow, seems, to readers, to represent two sides of the same coin. Although this arrangement, in terms of the representation of Galahad's life, is so blatantly contradictory that it appears to totally undermine the efforts of the immigrants to fit into British society, such representation is, nevertheless, a recurring theme throughout the novel.

Another obvious example is in Galahad's date with a white woman named Daisy. Galahad tries to make himself as decent as possible, getting dressed up, choosing Piccadilly Circus as the meeting place, going to the theatre in the West End and ordering a fine French wine in the restaurant. However, whilst readers may be amused by Galahad's efforts to show his genteel, refined and sophisticated manners, they find the next scene of Galahad's behavior contradictorily improper. Having enjoyed their wonderful night together in the West End, Galahad brings Daisy back to his shabby basement with the intention of making love to her; however, when Daisy sees how Galahad makes tea, her good feeling for the whole evening starts to wither away:

When the water was boiling he went to the cupboard and take out a packet of tea, and he shake some down in the pot.

Daisy look at him as if he mad.

“Is that how you make tea?” she ask.

“Yes,” Galahad say, “...no foolishness about it. Tea is tea – you just drop some in the kettle. If you want it strong, you drop plenty. If you want it weak, you drop little bit. And so you make a lovely cuppa.” (*Lonely* 93)

If tea is the symbol of Englishness, then Galahad’s approach to making tea seems to undermine the ways in which he has been trying to hold on firmly to a style of living which is “quintessentially English.” By seizing upon a symbol of Englishness such as drinking tea, a daily practice within English culture, such act represents the appropriation of Englishness by this particular immigrant. Thus, in such a way, Selvon appears to suggest that Englishness is not the exclusive right of white English, but instead, a verified definition of English national identity.

It is, therefore, in Galahad’s attempts to assimilate himself into English society by imitating English cultural behavior that the more comic elements of Selvon’s writing are invariably found; but somehow Galahad’s “English” way of living turns out to be a farcical gesture which ultimately gives the reader the impression that his ways are so ludicrously out of place that his very existence in London appears to be sadly doomed. One way of viewing Galahad’s gesture of appropriating Englishness is therefore as a “parody” of Englishness, with such parody replete with subversive intentions. Homi Bhabha defines this as “mimicry.” Bhabha asserts:

Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask . . . The menace of mimicry is its double vision which, in disclosing the ambivalence of

colonial discourse, also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition [that] rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence. ("Culture's" 88)

Bhabha's notion of mimicry is of particular relevance to Selvon's depiction of the way in which Galahad and the other immigrants develop their relationship with their Motherland. Whereas Bhabha proposes colonial and postcolonial contexts in which the mimicry of the colonized poses a threat and menace to the essence of the colonial structure, Selvon presents a subversive play on Englishness which is destabilized by the immigrants' attempts at copying English manners, values and cultural practices. Mimicry, as Bhabha asserts, reminds the dominant power that there is always an "other," "that is almost the same, but not quite" (*Location* 381). Thus, in *The Lonely Londoners*, the practices pursued by the immigrants in their attempts to assimilate themselves into English culture represent a process of "almost the same, but not quite." It is in such partial representation that Selvon attempts to subvert the defined Englishness which is the exclusive domain of the white English.

Apart from their attempts at the cultural appropriation of Englishness, the black immigrants' deprived self-image and feelings of inferiority are also intensified by the subtle racial discrimination and prejudice which they encounter in London, with the protagonist, Moses, having become most sensitized to such experiences. Thus, although London gives a newcomer, like Sir Galahad, the impression that he will be

provided with significant opportunities, it nevertheless remains bleak to a veteran migrant like Moses. Moses therefore plays a constant role of mentor or “soother” to the other boys, and to Galahad in particular.

Another quite pathetic, but nevertheless amusing, incident involving Moses and Galahad once again reflects the way in which Selvon relates the dismal stories of these desperate immigrants. One day, being so destitute and hungry, we find Sir Galahad snatching at pigeons in Kensington Gardens. Upon seeing him grab a pigeon, a white woman in the park shouts angrily: “Oh you cruel, cruel beast!” (*Lonely* 124). Feeling quite guilty and upset by his pigeon-snatching antics, Galahad takes the pigeon to Moses and relates the incident to him. Although chastising Galahad, and reminding him that pigeons in London are for beauty, not for eating, Moses nevertheless orders Galahad to boil the fat pigeon.

As this incident illustrates, Galahad’s behavior matches the fixed ideas of the black migrant amongst Britons; he is barbarian, vulgar and cruel. Indeed, such ideas eventually come to reflect a negative stereotype of black culture and behavior. Nevertheless, the way in which Selvon presents Galahad’s guilty and wretched feelings over his conduct appears to contradict the stereotypical black person. Whilst Selvon depicts Galahad’s pigeon-snatching antics as comical, what lies behind this comic scene somehow reflects a pathetic part of his immigrant life; and indeed, such

comic and tragic episodes are woven throughout the plot of *The Lonely Londoners*.

In structuring the novel to present the image of a Caribbean worker migrating to Britain in the 1950s in such a comic and tragic way, Selvon invites readers, including white Britons, to identify with these black figures. As opposed to relating a story about how Caribbean immigrants came to claim British citizenship or to appropriate the jobs of British citizens, as their true Caribbean values come to the fore, Selvon presents his migrant characters as both humble and laughable.

In an interview with Peter Nazareth, Selvon reflects on the use of comedy throughout his novels, describing such cheerful nature as a fundamental characteristic of these Caribbean immigrants. According to Selvon, “The comedy element has always been there among black people from the Caribbean. It is their means of defense against the sufferings and tribulations that they have to undergo”; thus, Selvon considers laughter to be a great gift for Caribbean people. Such element of his work is often neglected by critics: “It seems to me that if [we have] this gift for laughter, or being able to laugh at everything and people, how is it possible to write about them without due emphasis on this particular trait?” (Nazareth 81)

Selvon’s depiction of the English identity which these immigrants continually strive to achieve is, therefore, merely something to be aligned with their basic needs. As the interview continues, Selvon notes that acquiring tangible things, such as a house, an



apartment, a bed or other things, plays a very significant role in his immigrant stories, observing that the most desperate issues for a Caribbean immigrant in cold London were the acquisition of an apartment to live in, with a roof, and a bed to sleep on. Thus, revealing his frustration with the bleakness of living in London, Galahad cries out:

Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and them find it so hard to give? A little work, a little place to sleep. We not asking for the sun, or the moon. We only want to get by, we don't even want to get on. (*Lonely* 88)

By depicting the whole process of his characters' acquisition of material things firstly in a comic way, and thereafter in a much more wretched light, Selvon shows that the major issue with which these immigrants have to struggle is, in fact, merely their right to survive in the unwelcoming conditions of their "Mother country." As opposed to openly fighting for their citizenship in public, the immigrant characters in *The Lonely Londoners* simply wish to find an appropriate way of dealing with the harsh weather and the hostile people. Thus, the way that Selvon attempts to assert their living right is by trying to make them fit into British society and "play English" as much as they can. In the final page, when readers find Moses standing beside the River Thames, Selvon ends Moses' prophetic existence by announcing that "the boys" living in these deprived conditions will continue to have their own English ways:

As if, on the surface, things don't look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening – what? He don't know the right word, but he have the right feeling in his heart. As

if the boys laughing, but they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity – like how he here now, the thoughts so heavy like he unable to move his body. (*Lonely* 142)

### ***The Housing Lark: Here to Stay!***

Almost a decade after the publication of *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Selvon again returns to the story of his West Indian immigrants' struggle for survival in London. Selvon's extensive exploration of the pressing need for a home amongst these immigrants reemerges in *The Housing Lark*. However, given that this novel was written in the aftermath of the notorious Notting Hill and Nottingham riots of 1958, *The Housing Lark* refers to some things that are left unsaid in *The Lonely Londoners*, such as the increasing number of immigrants and growing racial tension.

Based upon a report produced by the Home Office, approximately 210,000 people from the Commonwealth countries were reported to be living and working in Britain in 1958 (Winder 362). Therefore, as Phillips and Phillips (1998) point out, although the riots in 1958 were not exactly unpredictable, they were more or less inevitable, since “race was the trigger which set them off and kept the passions burning”;<sup>9</sup> they do not, however, provide any lengthy explanation of the causes of the riots, since they consider them to be too complex.

On the other hand, however, Stuart Hall proposes three possible constituent

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<sup>9</sup> The race riots, which erupted in August and September 1958 in Nottingham and the London borough of Notting Hill, led to several days of disturbance and aggression against black West Indians by white British people. For more information on the race riots, see Phillips and Phillips 159.

elements. According to Hall, the most important factor leading to the riots was “the structure of antagonism between ‘colony’ blacks and sections of the indigenous white working class and petty-bourgeoisie of this decaying ‘Royal’ suburb” (“Racism and Reaction” 27). What Hall keenly observes is a rivalry within the changed British class structure, in which the white working class found itself leveled with the blacks from the ex-colonized countries. In the decaying London borough of Notting Hill, for instance, the houses were affordable to both white working class and black immigrants. Hall accordingly concludes that this is what led to the emergence of racism in Britain. The riots have, accordingly, been regarded as “an important watershed in the development of racialised politics in Britain” (Solomos 54).

The major significance of the 1958 riots has, however, been much more far-reaching, since they would ultimately arouse the attention of both the media and the public to the race question and the immigration problem. From her analysis of the way in which the riots, and their subsequent impacts, were represented in certain films, Wendy Webster finds that they present an imagery of Englishness under threat:

In the 1950s, much social exploration of the “colour problem” produced similar siege narratives and, like colonial war imagery, portrayed immigration as a threat to an Englishness symbolized by the idea of home. Colonial war imagery showed the violation of English domestic sanctuaries in the Empire, elaborating domestic detail to signify Englishness. Social exploration of immigration in the 1950s and 1960s also made home a symbol of embattled Englishness, mobilizing imagery of “little England” to signify that the nation was threatened. (166)

According to Webster, the sequential riots of 1958 created images throughout the media of English streets filled with white violence, with such racially-motivated riots having resulted from the fear that immigration would threaten the very idea of home that was firmly embodied in the symbol of Englishness. The riotous scenes evoked concerns amongst ordinary white people that their ideal home, England, had come under threat from their black neighbors; it is, therefore, hardly surprising that a consequence of the 1958 racial conflict was increasing pressure to end coloured immigration (Phillips and Phillips 165).

Clearly, a connection had instantly been made within British society between the race riots and the urgent call for immigration control; indeed, Peter Fryer recognised that race had been turned into an important public issue leading, step-by-step, to racism becoming “institutionalized, legitimized and nationalized.” Thus, in the aftermath of the riots, the setting of immigration policy was considered to be a political issue involving discriminatory legislation (*Black People* 381).

The Commonwealth Immigrant Act of 1962 was therefore seen as “a piece of discriminatory legislation with the obvious intention of reducing the total annual inflow of black people into Britain” (Fryer, *Black People* 382). The Act, which was surely a reaction to the impact of the Notting Hill riots in 1958, imposed a distinction

between citizens of Britain and those of independent Commonwealth countries.<sup>10</sup>

Fryer argues that the aim of such discriminatory legislation was clearly to decide a fixed British race relationship, illustrating that “blackness was officially equated as second-class citizenship, with the status of undesirable immigrant”; thus, it was obvious that the legislation endorsed racism (*Black People* 381).

The racist and discriminatory climate in which British society found itself immersed in the 1960s led to questions as to the ways in which the black immigrants would react towards everything around them in England – authority, politics, work, their neighbors and even their everyday lives – and how they would subsequently feel about the value of their lives in England with their newfound sense of being “unwanted,” “undesirable.”

In *The Housing Lark*, published three years after the enactment of the 1962 Act, Selvon continues the story of the struggle by West Indian immigrants for a living in London, dealing with themes similar to those covered in *The Lonely Londoners*. Where *The Lonely Londoners* had depicted the everyday experiences of these West Indian “boys” during the 1950s, *The Housing Lark* could be read as its sequel, with Selvon continuing to relate the stories of the hardship that the boys had to endure in the early-1960s, a decade or so after their arrival in their “Motherland.” In one

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<sup>10</sup> The 1962 Act restricted entry from the Commonwealth and its colonies to those issued with job vouchers. For more details on the Commonwealth Immigrant Act 1962, see Spencer 129-134.

interview, Selvon relates his thoughts and feeling towards the writing of *The Housing Lark*, admitting that this novel “follow[s] swiftly on the heels of *The Lonely Londoners* [and describes] in even greater detail than *The Lonely Londoners*, something of the hardships that the Caribbean people [endured], particularly with housing and jobs and things like that” (Thieme and Dotti 122).

Both *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* probe into the plight of these immigrants caught up in poverty, having to deal with bitter racism and limited accommodation, in degrading areas. Selvon’s “boys” in *The Housing Lark* continue to encounter accommodation problems; Battersby has been threatened, as usual, by his rent collector; Nobby has to pretend to be an animal lover so as to please his white English landlady; and Sylvester, an Afro-West Indian, is so desperate to find accommodation that he has to lie to a landlord who only takes in “real” Indians as his tenants.

However, if *The Lonely Londoners* is replete with the boys’ idle talk or complaints, it is in *The Housing Lark* where the action begins. Getting tired of searching for accommodation and feeling insecure for their status, Selvon’s “boys” begin to yearn for a proper house of their own and begin to pool money in order to purchase such a house for themselves. Indeed, it is in *The Housing Lark* that these black Londoners stop searching for shelter, and begin focusing directly on settlement. As Gallows ponders in *The Housing Lark*, “If a man have a house he establish his right

to live” (49). Indeed, this is a clear demonstration of the “homing desire” that continually drove them on (Brah 192).

The evolving sense of belonging is very much apparent in *The Housing Lark*. Even before Selvon’s immigrant characters begin to stake out their claim for a place in London by actualizing their plan to purchase a house, they all experience a process involving the recognition of the many ways that they are marginalized and excluded, accordingly being driven by the homing desire to strive for their home, and eventually making sense of their relationship within British society.

Following the constant white racist bullying which they had continually encountered during their attempts at finding decent accommodation, these immigrant characters began to probe into the possibility of making their own home within a racially-hostile and discriminatory British society. In Dominic Head’s observations on the theme of dealing with a quest for a settlement in postwar British fiction, their idea of purchasing a house represents “an attempt to come to terms with the implications of permanent settlement” (*Cambridge* 170).

Gallows’ ballad of finding his place in London is a typical story of an immigrant who goes through the process of belonging, searching for a permanent settlement in gloomy London. Throughout *The Housing Lark*, Selvon portrays Gallows as the type of immigrant who comes to England essentially by accident, and thereafter leads an

aimless life in London, usually having to “attach himself to other men” (*Housing* 49).

Thus, there is much hope in the sense that Gallows’ life becomes more meaningful when he gets involved in the scheme to purchase the house with the other boys:

The loss of the fiver was a good thing in a way, as he had something to do looking for it. But the biggest thing that ever happen to Gallows, bigger even than God, was this idea that the boys come up with to buy a house. To Gallows, if a man have a house he establish his right to live, and he didn’t mind even if he had a tenth of a share, or a twentieth for that matter, he would still feel he is the sole owner. (49)

Gallows’ sense of affiliation with London becomes abundantly clear in the way in which he becomes involved in the scheme, carefully watching the boys pool their money to purchase the house. Instead of following the other boys and fooling around together, Gallows goes to the market where the boys usually congregate in order to see if any participant of the housing scheme is squandering money on smoking or drinking. Although he is not the central character in the novel, his role serves as an important device within the sequence of the plot. Where Galahad is portrayed as a foil to Moses in the *Moses Trilogy*, Gallows takes on the role of a foil to Battersby and the other boys.

In his analysis of the relationship between Moses and Galahad in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, Victor Ramraj considers that Selvon’s creation of these two characters suggests “the classical dichotomy of the writer’s psyche: the sedentary observer and the active participant” (78); and indeed, the dichotomy of Selvon’s psyche does reappear in *The Housing Lark*. Yet Gallows is depicted as a



fervent commentator, energetic observer and lively dreamer, whereas Battersby, the protagonist, enthusiastically commits himself either to squandering money or to ways of making more of it.

Gallows plays the role of daydreamer who walks along Bayswater Road “wondering if in truth the streets of London pave with gold” (*Housing* 67). He is, however, also portrayed as an observant bystander who comments on the absurdity of his West Indian companions when he finds them spending money on smoking instead of saving money for the house. Gallows is the only one in the whole group who takes the plan seriously whilst the other boys are “looking on the whole scheme as a lark” and have “no intention of stopping smoking or drinking to save money for no house”; thus he remarks, “That is why we can’t get on! That is why black people could never strive in this world, I tell you!” (52, 57)

As the title of the novel suggests, the whole plan of pooling money to purchase a house is something of a mischievous act, in which all of these West Indian immigrants cheerfully take part (apart from Gallows and the girls). It does, however, become clear that Gallows is not the only foil character in the novel serving as a commentator on the boys’ fun-loving behavior. In contrast to the cheerful nature of the boys, whose days are spent mainly on drinking, smoking or chasing women (with the one exception of Gallows) Selvon’s female characters in *The Housing Lark* strive hard to improve their

lives. Selvon is particularly keen to make Teena a foil character of great power, given her aggressive ways.

In his analysis of Selvon's novels, Mark Looker notes that *The Housing Lark* includes "females as voices and presences rather than simply objects," and as such, differs from Selvon's other novels in which the women are usually depicted as objects of desire (120). It is through Teena's provocative act that Selvon deliberately shows the nature of the personality of West Indian immigrants. Teena chastises Battersby and the other boys when she finds that he will not give her all of the money that was supposedly saved for the housing pool:

Shame, shame and sorrow, is what scalliwags and scoundrels like the set of you bring on the heads of OUR PEOPLE. Everything is a skylark and a fete and a bacchanal. None of you ever serious ... You all can't even get serious about a thing like housing. You know the distresses we have to go through, you know the arse black people see to get a roof over their heads in this country, and yet, the way you all behave is as if you haven't worry in the world. No ambition, no push. Just full your belly with rum and food. (*Housing* 145).

In such a way, Selvon has Teena serving as the rational voice reminding the others of the reasons why they came to Britain: "That is what you come to Brit'n to do? Fellars like you muddy the waters for West Indians who trying to live decent in the country" (145). Reacting to Teena's emotional and sentimental appeal, Battersby gives up both his money and his rum in resignation; thus, through Teena's melodramatic speech and Battersby's reluctant resignation, the reader immediately begins to see that their plan to

purchase a house and establish their settlement will be actualized.

Like Selvon's other London works, *The Housing Lark* is essentially a comical novel which features not only the humorous portrayal of lively immigrant characters, but also amusing interactions and dialogues between the characters. Selvon adds to the plot of *The Housing Lark* with an amusing subversion of the symbolism of English history, an episode the likes of which is not written into his other novels. One of the most memorable scenes in *The Housing Lark* takes place at Hampton Court Palace, a historical spot where Battersby and his West Indian friends take a clamorous excursion.<sup>11</sup> Selvon presents a subversive irony in the way that the immigrants erroneously pronounce Hampton Court as "Hamdon Court"; he also portrays the trip to Hampton Court as a performance of "colonizing London".<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is in Hampton Court, a hugely symbolic monument of British imperial power, that these immigrants engage in subverting its symbolic significance. As soon as they arrive in this popular tourist destination, they make themselves at home, exhilaratingly drinking, eating and shouting to their kids:

[A]nd hear Fitz, high with rum: "Don't teach the children no wicked things! Henry Eight was a evil character living with ten-twelve women!"  
"It don't say so in this book," Teena say, waving a brochure.

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<sup>11</sup> The boys in *The Housing Lark* refer to it as "Hamdon Court" as opposed to Hampton Court. For instance, the character Battersby in the novel considers "planning to buy a house is one thing . . . planning to go an excursion to Hamdon Court is another" (*Housing* 103).

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Mark Looker's usage. Closely examining Selvon's depiction of the West Indian immigrants' excursion to Hampton Court, Looker notes that from the moment they arrive in the Court, they determine to make themselves at home (128).

“Never mind the book,” Fitz say, “he uses to behead them one after the other in the Tower.” (*Housing* 118)

Whilst Teena grasps at the chance of visiting Hampton Court to educate her children, her drunken husband Fitz shouts to her, telling her that the history provided in the National Trust brochure is less than reliable. Thus, Fitz declines to be colonized under the grandeur of past British imperialism, and instead colonizes the historical monument in London through his own gestures.

As Looker observes, in his London novels, Selvon’s immigrant characters have claimed their right of “being” in London by giving names to certain parts of London, for instance, Piccadilly Circus, Bayswater Road or one-eye Nelson with his column in Trafalgar Square. However, Looker considers that it is in *The Housing Lark* that Selvon makes his characters show their determination “to colonize rather than be colonized” (128). Therefore, when the novel concludes with Battersby putting a swatch of his Aladdin wallpaper in his pocket just before he and his friends move to their new house, this becomes a significant gesture clearly indicating their intentions in Britain, that they are here to stay.

### **The Subversion of “Englishness” in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating***

In terms of characterization, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* have come to be regarded as two divergent sequels to *The Lonely Londoners*, with Roydon Salick,

for example, asserting that he sees no resemblance between the Moses of *The Lonely Londoners* and the Moses of the two sequels, despite admitting that “there are no laws governing the structure of a trilogy” (157). Connecting Selvon’s own twenty-eight years of experience of living in London with his fictional writing of the *Moses Trilogy*, Salick concludes that Selvon deliberately makes the Moses of the two sequels “a far more highly individualized character” than the characterization of Moses in *The Lonely Londoners* (160).

Further remarking on the development of the personality of Moses, Kenneth Ramchand asserts that the character is “less introspective and questioning” in the last two novels and “less of a believer in the idea of fulfillment than some of his words might have led [readers] to expect” (88). Concentrating more on the reasons why the characterization of Moses differs so much in the three Moses books, Looker observes that differences in the narrative style result in perceived inconsistency in the characterization in various ways. In *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, as opposed to the third-person narrative style, there is a switch to the first-person, which sees Moses assuming the role of narrator “in constant colloquy with his material, with the reader, and by extension, with society at large” (168).

Looker appears to be very keenly interested here in the way in which Selvon deliberately uses Moses as the narrator throughout the last two novels; he therefore

asserts that Moses the narrator would “critique a set of values” and meanwhile “question the basis of that value” (168). Nevertheless, neither Looker nor any of the other critics point out that Moses’ inability to mark out his position in England results in the inconsistency of his characterization.

Commenting on the experiences of West Indian writers exiled to England, in *The Pleasure of Exile*, George Lamming observes that these writers of “colonial orientation” were caught up in the tension between their wish “to win the approval of Headquarters” (England) and their obligation to their own people (72).<sup>13</sup> In *Moses Ascending*, the “new” Moses, a memoir writer, is totally immersed in his new role, sticking to English literary tradition whilst being constantly disturbed by his guilt for providing less and less support to his fellows. The image of Moses striving for the approval of England, for instance, is best depicted in his first-person narrative voice which occasionally addresses the reader, saying “Dear R,” in the fashion of the eighteenth century British novel. In an interview with Michel Fabre, Selvon admits that such allusion to “great English tradition” is directly aimed at creating irony.<sup>14</sup> Selvon has already been quite conscious that Moses’ appropriation of English literary

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<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of Lamming, if these West Indian writers had chosen to exile themselves to America, their development as writers would have been very different; in England, however, there was no need for them to try to understand an Englishman because their relationship with England was already established through their prior knowledge of England; in other words, he considers that they were still subject to the colonizing power of England (*Exile* 24).

<sup>14</sup> For further insights into the reasons why, in *Moses Ascending*, Selvon chooses to make Moses a writer, see Michel Fabre 72.

tradition will serve to achieve ironic effects. As Selvon confesses, he likes to “make allusions and play with words or expression” (Fabre 72). Thus, by depicting Moses as a writer imitating English literary tradition in an ironic manner, Selvon creates a funny, but pathetic, black immigrant figure who continually assumes the role of an Englishman.

In addition to the role of memoir writer in *Moses Ascending*, Moses becomes a slum landlord and “homecoming exile, stereotypical English tourist, fatuous colonizer” (Looker 190). In the various roles enacted by Moses, his performance of Englishness invariably seems to be inextricably bound to subversive effects; however, through such role playing in the last two volumes of the *Moses Trilogy*, one wonders whether Moses is attempting to strive for the approval of England, to interrogate Englishness, or to merely show that he is a “quaint-essential Englishman”!

As in both *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark*, the last two volumes of the *Moses Trilogy* reflect the transformation of England, relating the involvement of Selvon’s characters in political events connected to the status of black immigrants. Whilst *Moses Ascending* presents the increasing racial hostility and the rising consciousness within the West Indian community of what it meant to be “black” in Britain between the late-1960s and the 1970s, Selvon witnesses the remarkable phenomenon of a mass exodus and return to the West Indies by many of the

immigrants in the 1980s. He therefore includes this within the plot of *Moses Migrating* as a means of inquiring into the rights of “belonging” and British citizenship.

Thus, in these last two novels, we are introduced to a Moses who is eagerly attempting to draw away from all of the indignities of poverty, although his efforts towards constructing a fully-realized English identity for himself are ultimately destined to end in failure. What clearly lies behind Moses’ futile efforts to ascend the social ladder is Selvon’s critique of the changes in the social and political climate of the 1970s and 1980s, a world where oppressive immigration laws and institutionalized racism not only influenced the entry and departure of black immigrants, but also gave rise to extensive black political activism.

A series of Immigration Acts were introduced soon after the Notting Hill riots of 1958, with the specific aim of reducing the influx of black immigrants. Furthermore, the inexorable rise in racial intolerance which had become obvious during the 1960s had reached its pinnacle in the anti-immigration speeches which Enoch Powell delivered in the late 1960s.<sup>15</sup> By appealing to the middle ground viewpoints of all middle- and working-class people, Powell’s racist remarks were clearly aimed at confronting the immigration question in Britain head-on, and urging immediate action to effectively prevent the continuing influx of non-white immigrants.

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<sup>15</sup> The making of immigration policy, from the early 1960s to 1971, included The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 and The Immigration Act 1971.



In his overtly racist depiction of Britain's future, exemplified in his infamous "rivers of blood" speech, Powell's overall objective was clearly to demonstrate a supposed connection between social disorder and black immigration: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Romans, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood" (qtd. in Alibhai-Brown 69). Powell's subsequent speeches and statements, replete with anti-immigration and racist rhetoric and sentiment, were set to receive immediate responses.

In his observations on Powell's biased pronouncements on immigration and race relations during the 1970s, Hall dubbed such speeches on race as "Powellism," stating:

"Powellism" is formed in this moment, in this crucible. By "Powellism," I mean something larger and more significant than the enunciation of a specifically defiant policy about race and the black population by a single person. I mean the formation of an "official racist" policy at the heart of British political culture. ("Racism and Reaction" 29)

Obviously for Hall, "Powellism" is not simply about racism, since he detects from Powell's speeches the construction of a black image as a threatening force; thus, he goes on to describe it as "the conspiracy of radical and alien forces threatening society" ("Racism and Reaction" 30). Although Powellism and the continuing and increasingly violent race riots in the streets would continue to unsettle the lives of black immigrants and their children, these factors would ultimately be responsible for stimulating the "Black British" and welding black communities together "into a single

black community by the heat of the political passions [Powell] ignited” (Phillips and Phillips 254). Thus, for black British people, the 1970s and 1980s would come to be seen as the decades of resistance and rebellion.

In his analysis of the history of black British people, Fryer summarizes the aftermath effects of the Notting Hill riots and the subsequent racist attitude against black immigrants/settlers with the following statement:

Right through the 1970s, Britain’s black communities had been under attack from fascists and police. They had been forced to defend themselves, since nobody else could or would defend them. The rebellion of black youth in the inner cities was the logical and, as is now clear, inevitable response to racist attacks. It was the culmination of years of harassment. Its message was simple: “We have had enough.” (Fryer, *Black People* 395)

Despite the differences between the various ethnic communities in Britain, racism and Powellism had led to the arousal of a collective black consciousness. As Kobena Mercer explains, a “black” identity had been cast upon various people of Asian, African and Caribbean descent based upon their “political and not biological similarities.” Mercer goes on to assert that, with the depiction of the term “black” as a political signifier, “connotations of the term ‘black’ were disarticulated out of the dominant codes of racial discourse, and rearticulated as signs of alliance and solidarity among dispersed groups of people sharing common historical experiences of British racism” (291). These “signs of alliance” had their political significance in the 1970s,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brah views Mercer’s reference to “black” in a different way. According to Brah, Mercer’s argument

with the popular slogan of the 1970s, “Black is beautiful,” ultimately becoming a positive assertion of racial difference (Procter, *Dwelling* 71).

The Black Power movement in Britain in the late 1960s and the 1970s, which had been strongly influenced by the same movement in the USA, was constituted as a political force inscribed with resistance against both coloured racism and exclusionary racist practices in British politics. It was therefore recognized that after 1968, the Black Power movement revealed a “consensus among black people” relating to their awareness that they were “in Britain to stay” (Phillips and Phillips 254). Yet, in the wake of Powellism and the Black Power movement, in both *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, the protagonist comes across as being politically indifferent, or indeed, even politically naïve, particularly in *Moses Ascending*.

As compared to the active involvement in the Black Power movement by Galahad, any participation by Moses seems to be merely passive or coincidental. For Moses, as opposed to something with which he might be able to sympathize, the struggle of his black compatriots meant no more to him than an interesting topic for inclusion in his memoirs; thus, he preferred to think about whether he should write about “Black power” or “the new breed of English what are taking over the country” (*Ascending* 45).

Moses’ reaction to Enoch Powell further indicates his political naiveté; for example,

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on the political signifier “black” aims to indicate the sign “black” was mobilized as a displacement for the categories “immigrant” and “ethnic minority” (98).

*Moses Migrating* opens with a letter from Moses to Enoch Powell:

Dear Mr Powell, though Black I am writing you to express my support for your campaigns to keep Brit'n White, as I have been living here for more than twenty years and I have more black enemies than white and I have always tried to integrate successfully in spite of discriminations and prejudices according to race. (*Ascending* 1)

Moses' letter to Powell shows how foolish and self-centered he could be at times, with his obvious sentimentality over the state of Britain and his obsessive concern over his personal livelihood. Such responses to the political issues of his time unquestionably established the total transformation of the Moses of *The Lonely Londoners* to the characterization of Moses which was to feature in the last two novels. Such difference is also recognized by Head, who identifies the new Moses as "a self-conscious narrator, an older-immigrant, who wants, in effect, 'to disengage from the new generation of Black Britons'" (*Cambridge* 166).

Also detecting these different representations of Moses throughout the trilogy, Salick argues that the new position, the one which the "new" Moses now takes up, "becomes a weapon of sorts, distancing him from his fellow blacks"; but what is clearly seen as being of greater importance is his consideration that Selvon "deliberately manipulates his naïve hero into situations and contexts only to reveal his moral insufficiency" (133).

What Head and Salick see from the "new" Moses is his total transformation, from

an unwelcome tenant to the successful landlord of a desirable tenement in Shepherd's Bush, from fooling around together with the boys to isolating himself in the penthouse of his newly-acquired house. In other words, these critics point to the transformation of the social situation in which Moses now finds himself; however, these critical assessments on new Moses seem to neglect a critical stance on the changes in Moses' role-playing. Selvon's treatment of Moses in these sequels to *The Lonely Londoners* aims to establish Moses not merely as a central character, but also as a function serving to re-examine the position of black immigrants in Britain.

It is regarded as essential here not to overlook the deliberate gestures which Moses undertakes in *Moses Ascending*, in both his memoir-writing project and his role-playing as a landlord, as well as in playing the role of Britannia which determines the structure of *Moses Migrating*. As regards form and structure, Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, which sees Moses engaging in regular performances of the idea of Englishness, is perhaps the most complex of the three novels. In the second book of the *Moses Trilogy*, the enactment of Englishness by Moses is best shown in his mimicry of Englishness. If "acting English" was to have comforted the anxieties of Sir Galahad in *The Lonely Londoners*, then, "being English" would enable Moses to further his goal of settling in Britain in *Moses Ascending*.

Here, in this second book of the *Moses Trilogy*, Moses sees himself less as an

immigrant, than a part of Britain, and more as an ordinary Londoner than a “lonely Londoner.” It also becomes clear that his homing desire to settle in Britain has intensified still further. Right at the very start of this novel, Moses reveals his dream of becoming a landlord in order to move himself higher up the social ladder:

After all these years paying rent, I had the ambition to own my own property in London, no matter how ruinous or dilapidated it was. If you are a tenant, you catch your arse forever, but if you are a landlord, it is a horse of a different colour . . . I would naturally of preferred a mansion in Belgravia or a penthouse in Mayfair, without too many black people around, but I had the feeling that if I didn’t make the move now, I would be doomed to the basement brigade for the rest of my life. (*Ascending 2*)

As Ulrike Erichsen observes, it is somewhat problematic for a remark such as “too many black people around” to be made by Moses, with the worry expressed by Moses over the presence of black people being seen as serving two functions within this fictional context: “On the one hand, it reflects his experience as a black immigrant with white landlords; on the other hand, it also signifies his identification with a certain social class as well as his aspiration to be recognised by this class as their equal” (37).

Thus, in this second novel, we see a new “changed” Moses who is actively placing effort into leaving the bleak days of survival behind, and indeed, by turning his back on his own black people, is aspiring to the dizzy heights of upper-middle class white English citizens. Moses is now trying to construct a new identity, using his plan

to appropriate those aspects of Englishness which he finds useful as the means of cultivating himself; that is, to take on a new role, playing the part of an Englishman.

For Moses, his ultimate fantasy is to belong to England and to become part of the landscape of London:

I have weathered many a storm in Brit'n, and men will tell you that in my own way I am as much part of the London landscape as little Eros with his bow and arrow in Piccadilly, or one-eye Nelson with his column in Trafalgar Square, not counting colour. I have been mentor and mediator, antagonist and protagonist, father and mother too, a man for all seas and reasons. (*Ascending* 44)

Whereas the black immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners* simply mime the English way of living during their process of assimilation, Moses, in *Moses Ascending*, does everything he can to live up to the English way of life – to live and think like a white Englishman, to accommodate the role of white prejudiced English landlord and to write his memoirs in the “Queen’s English.” Moses’ desire to fit into English society is best represented in his exaggerated adoption of certain English cultures which he considers to be appropriate to his position, such as purchasing a drinks cupboard, having a white servant and getting into the daily habit of reading a newspaper. Furthermore, his assumption of a new role as an English landlord begins with the acquisition of a slum house in Shepherd’s Bush: “I record with pride that I wasn’t one of them prejudiced landlord what put ‘No Kolors’ on their notices. Come one, come all, first come, first served, was my motto” (*Ascending* 4).

Although Moses the landlord claims to have no prejudices, he still prefers to let his rooms to white people rather than to his black friend Galahad or to any of the other immigrants from Africa or the West Indies. During a discussion when Moses inquires of his white servant, Bob, where his tenants came from, he complains: “It looks like you clutter up the houses with a lot of foreigners. Have we no genuine English stock?” (32) Furthermore, it is clear that the hostility and prejudice which Moses takes on against his Pakistani tenants are exactly the sort of things that he and his Caribbean friends had experienced when they first came to Britain.

As Moses himself confesses, he had been “victimized and harassed and hounded,” but he just could not afford to lose his prized possession if any assistance offered to illegal Pakistani immigrants or his people in the Black Movement endangered it. In Erichsen’s observations on Moses’ role-playing, she argues that his attitude towards the Pakistani community “mirrors the mixture of apprehension and condescension that he himself experienced at the hands of the white population with whom he now identifies” (37).<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, therefore, Moses would rather take sides with the white Englishmen when he suggests that the influx of illegal Asian immigrants “would become an added burden on the innocent British taxpayer” (*Ascending* 117). However, this complete

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<sup>17</sup> Erichsen focuses on Moses’ interaction with the illegal Pakistani immigrants and points to Selvon’s depiction of Moses as a victimizing landlord, having once been victimized himself by the white landlord.



reversal of the situation, from being victimized to victimizing, is not the only characteristic assumed by Moses in his role-playing, as there is another reversal of roles which takes place in Moses' relationship with his white servant, Bob. Whilst black Moses gets on with playing the roles of superior master and refined gentleman reading a daily newspaper, white Bob usually adopts the roles of servant, savage and illiterate bore, who only reads comic books.

Such a reversal of roles is often regarded by critics as "the ironic revisioning of Robinson Crusoe".<sup>18</sup> By hiring the financially inferior and illiterate Bob as his servant, Moses has himself taken on a colonizing mentality: "All these arrangements were attended to by my man Friday, a white immigrant name Bob from somewhere in the Midlands. My blood take him because he was a good worker. . . . He was a willing worker, eager to learn the ways of the Black man" (*Ascending* 4). Just as Crusoe attempts to civilize Friday with the doctrines of the Bible, in Selvon's work, Moses also attempts to convert Bob to Christianity, to lead him from "the evils of God" and to eventually "teach him with the Bible" (5). Moses also attempts to further elevate his superior position by teaching the illiterate Bob to read.

Although Selvon does not simply re-create a model of Crusoe and Friday in the postcolonial context of the novel, this reversal of the relationship between the two

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example Forbes 96; King, *Oxford* 44; Joseph 98; Zehnder 159.

nevertheless suggests what Louise Bennett refers to as “colonisation in reverse”.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the relationship between Moses and Bob is not simply a straightforward reversal of roles, but instead, is rather subversive in its own way, as their competition over a woman ultimately results in a switch in their power relationship.

Despite the fact that throughout the novel, Moses attempts to present himself as a refined black Englishman, his efforts towards self-restraint fail as a result of his desire for Bob’s new bride, Jeannie. One day when Bob comes home unexpectedly and finds Moses poised to seduce his wife, the superior status of Moses is metaphorically and instantaneously reversed. Moses offers Bob his penthouse as compensation, taking the basement for himself, whilst Bob insists that Moses henceforth calls him “Robert”:

The first night I wake up screaming from claustrophobia. Small consolation, too, that Messrs Robert and Jeannie were paying rent for the house – it was one of his cunning moves to secure tenancy, for these days, with them new rent laws, you have to wonder who is the potter, pray, and who the pot. I was reduced to living as a tenant in my own house, with Robert holding the reins and cracking the whip. (*Ascending* 134)

Accordingly, the role-playing of master and servant has now been reversed, and despite the fact that he still retained the ownership of the house, Moses had been relegated to his basement life by the now literate Bob, whose tools of reasoning and arguing had, ironically, been taught to him by Moses himself. Such depiction of ironic

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<sup>19</sup> From her observations of the influx of West Indians to Britain after the Second World War, Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett refers to this process of mass migration with quite a precise description, in her poem “Colonisation in Reverse,” the first stanza of which begins: “What a joyful news, Miss Mattie / Ah feel like me heart gwine burs / Jamaica people colonizing / Englan in reverse” (16).

reversals creates not only richly comic effects, but also serves to subvert the fixed hierarchical binaries which Selvon persistently establishes, colonizer and colonized, master and slave, landlord and tenant. These subverted binaries destabilize the power relationship between Moses and Bob, and challenge the image of the Englishman to which Moses has always aspired. Looker argues that “in parodying the Crusoe-Friday relationship, Selvon not only invests the hierarchies of colonialism, but also subverts the canonical literary tradition, inscribing his own work onto English culture in a parodic claiming of place” (178). Thus, the physical movements of Moses are portrayed in *Moses Ascending*, from the basement room to the penthouse, from the attic to the basement, and having realized that he has failed to make himself a landscape of London, Moses decides to sell his house and return to Trinidad.

Whilst the first book of the *Moses Trilogy* opens with the scene of his arrival in London’s Waterloo Station, the last book opens with the scene of his departure from London. As Salick observes, *Moses Migrating* can be considered “a fulfillment of Moses’ early dream in *The Lonely Londoners*, the natural longing of a displaced individual to return to comfort and security” (145). *Moses Migrating* is the only book where the main setting is not in London, although the third book to write about transatlantic crossings.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the theme of negotiating Englishness still

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<sup>20</sup> The opening passage of *The Lonely Londoners*, a scenario of meeting new immigrants from Trinidad, is the first book of the *Moses Trilogy* to discuss transatlantic crossings (Salick 159).

prevails in this novel. Selvon continues to adopt the same strategy of writing about Moses' identification with Englishness in relation to his "positionality" in England through a focus on how much he now knows about the political situation in England.

Moses is once again found to be naïve, both with regard to his situation in English society and the country's politics. Through the mouthpiece of Galahad, Selvon seems to imply that the awareness of Moses of the changes in English society in some ways resemble the long deep sleep of Rip Van Winkle. After hearing of Moses' inquiry as to where he should send his application to Enoch Powell for funds, Galahad sneers at Moses' failure to keep abreast of political developments: "Do you not know that like most of Enoch's brainwaves, that one got the thumbs-down from Parliament? You remind me of that fellar who went to sleep for years and get up, Rip Van Winkle!" (*Migrating* 2).

The start of *Moses Migrating* is unified in its dimensions by the allusion to the story of Rip Van Winkle which most readers would have immediately recognised. By comparing Moses to Rip Van Winkle, Selvon asks a key question concerning Moses' process of immigration. What will happen to Moses when he returns "home" after his long deep sleep? Thus, the narrative of *Moses Migrating* traces his plan to return home, a plan which he considers will provide him with an excellent opportunity to play the role of Britannia, as an "anglicized colonial," so he can demonstrate to his people in

Trinidad what it feels like to be authentically British.

If the “new” Moses in *Moses Ascending* has endeavored to take on the role-playing of a refined Englishman in order to make himself fit into a more elevated social class of English society, the alternative Moses in *Moses Migrating* presents himself as a representative of Britannia, carrying out a mission of promoting the glory of the British empire. Thus, from the very outset of this final volume, Moses’ homeward journey is not to be seen as any indication of his intention to resettle in his homeland, Trinidad; given that Moses is unwillingly leaving London, he points out to an immigration officer that “I don’t really want to go” (*Migrating* 24). Indeed, he continues to identify himself as a British citizen when an immigrant officer asks him if he has enjoyed his visit to London.

When Moses subsequently finds that quite a substantial number of his people are also passengers on the same ship – albeit with the overall intention of returning home, not for the purpose of visiting, but for permanent resettlement – Moses reacts by once again assuming the role of the Englishman, and considering the difference between him and “them.” He ponders: “How would the country survive with all these blacks returning to the islands?” (*Migrating* 25)

Moses is therefore once again depicted as a black immigrant who thinks and acts like a white Englishman. According to Salick’s reference to the words of Derek

Walcott, under Selvon's depiction, Moses lives out "that wrestling contradiction of being white in mind and black in body".<sup>21</sup> According to a reporter in Trinidad, the way that Moses always said "we" was quite interesting, as if Moses really was "an Englishman" (*Migrating* 72). Hence, if Moses' reference to himself as a Trinidadian is beset with contradictions, so too is his intention to play the role of Britannia.

Traveling together with Bob and Jeannie, Moses returns back home as a visitor, staying at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel, but refraining from making any visits to his old friends, or even to Tanty Flora, who had brought him up, until he comes upon her on the corner of the street across from the hotel. After being encouraged by the Carnival atmosphere and also being attracted by Doris, a beautiful Trinidadian woman who lived together with Tanty, Moses hits upon the idea of wearing a Carnival mask and playing Britannia: "I am going to play Britannia for Carnival" (113).

Moses' idea of playing Britannia is inspired by Jeannie's old penny, with "King George the Fifth head on one side, and on the other, Britannia sitting down in her helmet and gown, balancing an ornamental shield with one hand and holding one of them forks with three prong in it" (*Ascending* 109). Thinking over this idea excitedly, Moses further inflates the idea by involving Bob and Jeannie into his plan, casting them as his white servants in a demonstration of British racial tolerance: "this whole

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<sup>21</sup> Referring to Walcott's essay "What the Twilight Says: An Overture from Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays," Salick compares Moses' schizoid personality to the way in which Walcott sees the West Indies, as a colonial space under the effects of over 400 years of colonial rule (153).

thing might even strike a blow for race relations at the same time, with a black man as Britannia, and two white people as his servants!” (137)

For Moses, there was a three-fold purpose to playing out this masquerade in the Carnival:

The way I saw it, I was killing a few birds with one stone. Firstly, there was the satisfaction of expounding my theme and aiding Brit’n. Secondly, I would get my photo in the papers and don’t let Doris down. And thirdly, which should be really be firstly, I would get Doris to make my Britannia costume and we would work together and to make it a success. I had a deep sense of joy and gladness as I realize I was fulfilling my two most important desires at one time. Britannia on one side, Doris on the other, and yours truly in the centre. We three was not a crowd! (*Ascending* 115)

The theme of Englishness is once again fashioned into Selvon’s humorous and ironic depiction of the parody of role-playing by Moses, with Moses here constructing his version of Englishness through his image of imperial glory, and thereby fulfilling his wish to demonstrate that Great Britain was still great. In playing the role of Britannia, Moses’ underlying intention was to fulfill his purpose of returning home, which was to become an unofficial ambassador of Britain “to show the outlanders in the Caribbean that Brit’n was not only still on her feet, but also still the onlyest country in the world where good breeding and culture come before ill-gotten gains or calls of the flesh” (30).

Although Moses clearly has a desire to promote the solidarity of Britain, his self-appointed mission becomes quite ironic, in terms of his design of this masquerade,

portraying himself as Britain. The irony in Moses' masquerade is in the subversive reversal of the role-playing – a black dressed up as Britannia, white Jeannie fanning Britannia, and white Bob pulling the float. There is an irony in that Moses, rather than Bob and Jeannie, is carrying out this civilizing mission, which is to tell his countrymen that despite the decline in the value of the British pound, Britannia still “rule the waves.”

There is also further irony in Moses' viewpoint of history, which differs from that of others; for instance, Doris, a native Trinidadian notes that such a version of the story was far different from the version that she had heard. For Doris, the true version should be Jeannie playing Britannia with Moses pulling the float. Although such a masquerade is purely pretence, it is apparent that Moses does not think so. Everyone knows that Carnival time is not true, everyone that is, except Moses. As Doris says in her farewell to Moses, “Tanty don't want to see you, she say Carnival time everybody dress up as somebody else, that it's not real. I think so too” (178).

Further irony is apparent when Moses goes on to enact this masquerade before the Carnival judges and the audience, all of whom see Moses' performance as subversive, “a counter-colonial inversion of the historical hierarchy”.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore through Moses' own perception of his representing Britannia that Selvon uses irony to

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<sup>22</sup> In Helen Tiffin's analysis, Moses' performance is considered by the Carnival audience to be a “reminder of the ironies of British educational practice where West Indian children were obliged to learn by heart and sing on school parade grounds the anthem ‘Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves’” (138).



obfuscate reality and to reveal that Moses is habitually out of place. At the end of his masquerade, there stands Moses deluding himself, as he reflects on his accomplishment of the civilizing mission in his playing of Britannia:

Perhaps some of my loyal spirit must of infected the cheerers, for after all, Brit'n was once the head of a great Empire, Mother of the Commonwealth . . . as we left the platform I thank God from the bottom of my heart for my short-lived glory, and for giving me this opportunity to qualify for some distinction of recognition from the British Government. The least they could do, was to inform the Immigration Authorities at Heathrow Airport that I should be welcomed back, without let or hindrance, should I decide to return. (171)

Selvon's use of irony is as its most magnificent in the above scene. So intent is Moses in his indulgence in this delusion that the critic Salick comments: "Moses is a victim of a massive self-delusion which does not permit him to fulfill the potential of human love," with such self-delusion resulting in Moses himself becoming the main pillar upon which the whole ironic structure rests (149). Moses has always tended to insulate himself from the opinions of others, and sometimes even from reality.

Although Moses is totally self-indulged in his role of impersonating Britannia, Brenda ridicules this in her sneering voice: "You know Moses – always trying to be different from others, but not quite making it" (*Migrating* 159). Even when Galahad warns him about "the social conditions which worsen daily for black people" (174), Moses is so self-deluded in his ambassadorship on Britain's behalf that he cannot see

the cruel truth, and indeed, he still insists that he will return to London.<sup>23</sup>

The final scene in *Moses Migrating* ends with Moses at Heathrow Airport being detained by Immigration officers whilst clutching onto his silver trophy as if it were his holy grail. Again, Moses is depicted as resembling Rip Van Winkle, insofar as it appears that he has just woken up from his long deep sleep, and he surely does not know that the British government of the 1980s has begun tightening the entry rules for West Indian immigrants.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Selvon brings to an abrupt end almost thirty years of migration to London by Moses, with the image of his retention outside the entrance to Heathrow, to London, to his “Mother country.” By providing such an ending, with a helpless Moses waiting nervously outside the barrier at Heathrow, Selvon seems to suggest that his true home is now neither in Trinidad nor in England. Moses’ homing desire has faltered, ending up as an unaccomplished quest; he is neither able to resettle in his homeland, nor is he accepted where he wants to belong, England. Thus, Moses resembles what Selvon refers to as “the whitewashed Black man torn apart by the circumstances of living in a

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<sup>23</sup> According to Salick, Moses is manipulated by Selvon into “situations that reveal the depth of his delusion”; Moses is deluded “by the validity and authority of his affected manners,” by “his desire for Doris” and by “his obsessive desire to be an ambassador of Her Majesty and to play Britannia on stage” (149).

<sup>24</sup> The British government further tightened the rules on immigration by passing the British Nationality Act 1981 and the Immigration Act 1988. The former – which introduced a simplified definition of British citizenship stating that “those with close (parental and grandparental) ties to the United Kingdom would have right of entry and the right of abode” – gave no right of abode to many black people already in Britain. The *Immigration Act 1988* introduced “changes designed to limit the right of entry of dependants of Commonwealth citizens who settled before 1973 and to make it easier for the authorities to deal with overstayers and illegal immigrants” (Spencer 148).

white society”.<sup>25</sup> The ending also suggests that his negotiation with Englishness as an attempt to establish his “positionality” in England was always doomed to failure.

If Moses’ final destiny was to be left standing at the entrance gate to Heathrow Airport, to be admitted or banished holding up his cup as if he was still “playing charades,” Selvon seems to suggest that Moses’ migration (either from Trinidad to England, or from England to Trinidad) has never been, and never will be resolved, and that his destined home will, therefore, never be defined.

## **Conclusion**

Selvon’s keen observations on the nature of West Indian identity are clearly revealed in the concluding paragraph of *The Lonely Londoners*, which is where his subversive and ironic narrative are also established, telling of the experience of immigrants in London:

Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white, strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered hopeless. (*Lonely* 141)

What exactly “under the kiff-kiff laughter” refers to has intrigued many critics and fellow writers. In an article commemorating the work of Selvon, George Lamming

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<sup>25</sup> Sam Selvon wrote “A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.” for the publication of an American edition of *Moses Migrating* (1992 Reprint: xii); this essay is also included in Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford’s work, *Tiger’s Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon* (1995).

reveals his detection of “a very deep and very persistent melancholy beneath the surface of Selvon’s representation of ‘kiff-kiff laughter’”.<sup>26</sup> Caryl Phillips further points to the mixed feeling reflected in Selvon’s depiction of Caribbean migrants, which involves “a sense of being both inside and outside Britain at the same time,” with such mingling of Caribbean experience within British political and cultural contexts creating a new kind of English reading (*New World Order* 235). However, to a more contemporary writer like Hari Kunzru, Selvon’s novels are “full of mockery and dirty jokes, shot through with disappointment and undiluted anger”.<sup>27</sup>

As Selvon himself claims in “A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.,” it is necessary to write about the experiences of first-generation West Indian immigrants in England in a humorous way: “The humour and entertainment that Moses provides sometimes tend to overwhelm the serious side of his nature. It is a knack that all black people acquire to survive. In my own years in London, any hardcore material I wrote about Blacks had to have ha-ha” (*Migrating* xiii). The tone in both the *Moses Trilogy* and *The Housing Lark* is essentially comic and entertaining, particularly in the perception of the ironies of immigrant life in England. Selvon’s comic and ironic depiction gives form and content to the dislocated world surrounding the West Indian

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<sup>26</sup> In “The Coldest Spring in Fifty Years: Thoughts on Sam Selvon and London,” Lamming recalls his acquaintance with Selvon traveling on the same ship when migrating to London in 1950. The essay also includes the depiction of their sojourn in London during the 1950s and 1960s (10).

<sup>27</sup> Kunzru, named by *Granta* magazine as one of the twenty “Best of British Young Novelists” in 2003, provides the Introduction to the 2008 Penguin edition of *Moses Ascending*. See Kunzru (viii).

immigrants, a world of alienation, but which, nevertheless, goes to the centre of their homing desire. Playing the role of Englishman as a way of negotiating Englishness is an enduring theme in Selvon's London novels, and he makes readers constantly aware of this in the "kiff-kiff laughter" of his characters, which, to its powerful effect, challenges the extent to which they have "become" English, and also to which English has become them.

This comic and ironic representation of Englishness would ultimately reappear in the novels of Sam Selvon's fellow, younger Black British writer, Hanif Kureishi, where questions relating to what it means to be English would once again be challenged; however, the protagonists in Kureishi's writing, particularly in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, constantly contest the question of "belonging" through their recognition of the emergence of new ethnicities in Britain.

## Chapter Two

### A New Breed of Englishman:

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*

#### **Englishmen Born and Bred**

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. [W]e will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 10)

The suicide bombings which sent shock waves across London and the whole of the UK on 7 July 2005 led to the sudden realization amongst British people of the cruel fact that there were “enemies within.” The three bombers were reportedly young, British-born Muslim men of Pakistani origin who had been living in Yorkshire. Colin MacCabe subsequently posed a crucial question, when he asked: “What turned Kureishi’s fanatics into murderers?”<sup>1</sup> Two years after the bombings, in voicing his

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<sup>1</sup> The 2006 issue of *Critical Quarterly* invited writers Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie, academics Paul Gilroy and Colin MacCabe, and teachers Natasha Serret and Sandra Young to take part in “Multiculturalism after 7/7: A CQ Seminar” to discuss the possible reasons for the proximate cause of this tragedy and the problems in multicultural Britain. At the very start of the discussion, MacCabe pointed out that Kureishi had given direct prophetic warnings in his short story, “My Son the Fanatic,” which is concerned with an ultra-fundamentalist ethos amongst second-generation British Muslims; however, Kureishi’s warnings had been ignored. MacCabe noted that, “If one ever wished for proof of the uncanny prescience of the literary imagination, it came on 7 July 2005 in London when four young men, very similar to Kureishi’s ‘son,’ blew themselves and fifty-two others to death on London’s public transport” (“Multiculturalism” 2).

assessment of the events, Sir Ken Knight, the head of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, warned that: “These were born-and-bred UK citizens. They were born, bred and educated in the UK. It’s not a matter of border patrol. We need to find out how to re-engage those people who are so disengaged”.<sup>2</sup>

Over and above the public response of shock and fear which prevailed, besieging British citizens in their own homeland, the specific cause which drove these young, British born-and-bred Muslims to commit such atrocities puzzled both critics and the public alike. In 2005, however, long before the bombings, Hanif Kureishi had written about such a Muslim fanatic in his short story “My Son the Fanatic”; thus, prior to the public’s bewilderment at martyrdom-seeking young extremists in their own backyard, Kureishi had developed his own observations on the problem of identity amongst young, second-generation Asian people who had been home-grown in Britain.

Much of Kureishi’s early work is grounded primarily in such conflict, racial and cultural conflict, the conflict between British mainstream culture and ethnic minority communities, the conflict between the cultural claims that the first-generation immigrants were prone to clinging onto and the sense of belonging which their children aspired to develop in mainstream British society. To the children of immigrants, particularly the offspring of those who had migrated from British Commonwealth or ex-colonized

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<sup>2</sup> See Knight (2007), “Safety Workers told how London Battled New Terrorism.”

countries after the Second World War, any reflection on Britain, or their parents' homeland, in terms of "home" may differ significantly from that perceived by their parents.

As a writer born and bred in Britain of a Pakistani father and an English mother, Kureishi reflects upon his own identity in a different way, affirming in an interview his own sense of identity by seeing himself as British: "Critics have written that I'm caught between two cultures. I'm not. I'm British; I've made it in England. It's my father who's caught. He can't make it" (Pally 53). Elsewhere he proclaims his British identity in a similar way:

I'm British, as I wrote in *The Rainbow Sign*. Just like Karim in the *Buddha*. But being British is a new thing now. It involves people with names like Kureishi or Ishiguro or Rushdie, where it didn't before. And we're all British too. (Kaleta 8)

Kureishi differs from the first-generation immigrant writers such as George Lamming and Sam Selvon in very distinct ways, particularly in his perspectives on his protagonists, showing how they perceive their positionality in England. In Kureishi's case, his protagonists no longer feel exiled; for example, in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the story opens up with a statement by Karim Amir on his hybrid identity:

My name is Karim and I am Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. (*Suburbia* 3)

Karim therefore serves as the spokesman for the novelist, negotiating with both Englishness and cultural identity, in a sense of "hybridity," during the process of



searching for his identity. Commenting on Kureishi's focus on the theme of hybridity, Kenneth Kaleta argues that he attains such hybridity from his own experiences; thus, Kaleta defines Kureishi as a "hyphenated Anglo-Asian author" (7).

For Kureishi, and his protagonists, notably in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, the notion of hybridity, of ethnically mixing, has been through some considerable negotiation of Englishness; thus, a hybrid identity challenges the "fixed" notion of Englishness, which has, in the past, been defined simply in terms of race and blood. As Robert Young puts it, hybridity is "a key term, in that, wherever it emerges, it suggests the impossibility of essentialism" (27). According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity also opens up an "in-between" space:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically critical, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjective, and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestations, in the act of defining the new idea of society itself (*Location* 1-2).

Commenting on Bhabha's notions of "hybridity" and "in-between" space, John McLeod notes that such concepts are very useful for diaspora people as "a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity" (*Beginning* 219).

The "hybridity" theme is prevalent throughout Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

and *The Black Album*, in which the very tensions of hybridity versus Englishness are staged, with hybrid protagonists struggling to define their positionality, somewhere in between the South Asian culture of their parents and their own English upbringing. Whereas issues of place and hybridity dominate the narrative of *The Buddha of Suburbia* – which, in many ways, concerns Karim Amir’s struggle between divergent cultures – in *The Black Album*, given his in-between identity, Shahid Hassan is confronted with diverse choices, in terms of new ethnicities, religion and multiple identities. It is, thus, regarded here as essential to examine the race riots of the 1970s and 1980s, since both novels explore the themes of racial tension, youth, class and sex, albeit with Kureishi presenting them in a satirical manner by interrogating a hybrid British-Asian society.

### **“Here to Stay and Here to Fight”: The Race riots of the 1970s and 1980s<sup>3</sup>**

Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* respectively span the 1970s and 1980s, with the former beginning with Karim Amir at high school, and ending on the eve of the 1979 General Election which brought Margaret Thatcher to power, whilst the latter writes about London in 1989, the year of the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The political setting of each of these novels is integral to their narratives, with the identities of Asian British youths being central to the story.

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “Here to stay, here to fight” is borrowed from the subtitle of an essay written by Mike and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: the Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain*, where they discuss the political atmosphere of 1970s Britain, revealing the rising self-consciousness, amongst young black people, of their identities; see Phillips and Phillips 269.

One particular perspective on 1970s Britain is that the racial conflicts experienced at high school by Karim Amir show “a shift towards an insular, isolationist Britain” (Phillips and Phillips 270); and indeed, for second-generation immigrants, the seventies were to emerge as a time for negotiating relationships with Britain in ways which differed from those adopted by their parents. As Paul Gilroy puts it:

It's the younger generation that take the front line in the seventies, and they are a deeply troubled generation, because they've never seen the Caribbean, nothing to do with it. They called themselves African for a long time, but of course they'd never been to Africa either. They are saved, spiritually and culturally, by the advent of Rastafarianism and by Reggae (Phillips and Phillips 296)

In Gilroy's view, the rhythms of reggae and military ideology of Rastafarianism had become central elements in an increasingly unique black youth culture of the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> It was relatively important for second-generation British people of Caribbean and Asian origin to develop their own black youth culture, as some very significant issues were arising. Most significant of these was the increasing size of the black teenage population, since it was the 1970s that witnessed the coming of age of the children of the migrants who had come to Britain from the Caribbean or Asia in the 1950s.

British-born black youths were ready to fight racial discrimination and ethnic stereotyping much more aggressively than their parents. In the seventies, these youths

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<sup>4</sup> The most notable features of Rastafarianism in 1970s Britain included “a distinctive social outlook, language and lifestyle,” and more particularly, “the wearing of clothes mark red, gold and green,” “the popularisation of reggae music,” “the adoption of dreadlocks and head covering and incorporation of specific words into the vocabulary.” For more details on Rastafarianism, see Kalbir Shukra 36.

were seen as “living in a world in which all their experiences were racialised” and were therefore “conscious at every stage that their race determined how they were seen and their chances in life” (Phillips and Phillips 295). It was the colour of their skin that led to them getting into more trouble with the police or having a reduced chance of finding a job after leaving school, so they began to adopt different ways of negotiating their relationships with English society. A powerful example of this is found in the assertion by Linton Kwesi Johnson, an acknowledged poet of the seventies generation of black British youths. In an interview, Johnson told of his experience with negotiating his identity:

The problem was racism. . . . [W]e were the generation who changed things, because we didn't have the kind of constraints that your parents had. . . . I think that having our own independent cultural institutions made it possible for us to cope with the alienation that we felt from British society, because of the racism, the racial oppression, institutionalised, and otherwise. These things gave us a sense of our own identity, made us feel that we had something going for ourselves that made us proud and strong and independent. (qtd. in Phillips and Phillips 298)

Embracing one's own culture in order to change British society, as advocated by Johnson, presents his identity politics in terms of empowering, assertive, positive aspects. In other words, he fervently believed that young black people in 1970s Britain should have been striving for an individuality that was unique to their experiences. Fryer observes: “This generation strove to make sense of the situation they found themselves born into” (*Staying* 386).

The 1970s also saw racism as a much more pervasive, institutionalized characteristic of British culture, with British minority communities being attacked or bullied throughout this era by white racists and police. According to Fryer, approximately 31 black people in Britain had reportedly been murdered by white racists between the years 1976 and 1981, although “in almost every case, in the teeth of the evidence, the police denied there had been, that there could have been, any racist motive” (*Staying* 395). Thus, since it had become clear to them that no one was prepared to help them, these black British youths were ultimately compelled to defend themselves.

The rebellion by black British youths within the inner cities was logical enough; John Solomos points to the tension and conflicts between young blacks and the police, noting that together with the rebellious protests of the 1970s, they had succeeded in laying the foundations for “the severe breakdown of relations between young blacks and the police in the 1980s” (137). The most significant outbreak of race riots in the early eighties took place in Brixton, south London, when, on 10 April 1981, approximately one hundred young blacks rioted against the local Brixton police, apparently as a result of being provoked by police harassment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Solomos, there were three major examples of urban unrest during the early 1980s, with the first outbreaks of race riots occurring in the St Paul’s district of Bristol in April 1980, the second being the race riots of 1981 in Brixton, and the third involving the violent confrontations which broke out in the Toxteth area of Liverpool in July 1981. For further details on the race riots of the 1980s, see Solomos 143.

Commenting on this event, Gilroy suggested that the police harassment and the resultant confrontations with the young blacks resembled “a sort of revenge swamping,” clearly echoing the “swamping” statement that had been made in the seventies by Margaret Thatcher when she said, “People are really rather frightened they might be swamped by those of a different culture”.<sup>6</sup> The action of “revenge swamping,” as Gilroy further argues, is that “they wanted to swamp the streets of Brixton; they wanted to target young men in particular” (Phillips and Phillips 358).

The Brixton riots of April 1981, and the subsequent nationwide riots which broke out in July 1981, aroused passionate media attention in which “race, racial discrimination and black youth were given a central place, either implicitly or explicitly” (Solomos 146). However, the race riots of 1981 had triggered a series of investigations. The Scarman Inquiry, an investigation undertaken at the request of the Margaret Thatcher government, considered that the riots were caused by the alienation and powerlessness which were suffered by young blacks living in poor districts of cities.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Lord Scarman presented the following policy proposal indicating: “I recommend that local communities must be fully and effectively involved in planning, in the provision of local services, and in the management and financing of specific

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<sup>6</sup> For further commentary and details on Gilroy’s overall views of the 1981 race riots, see Phillips and Phillips 358-359.

<sup>7</sup> Lord Scarman’s 1983 Report represented the response by the Thatcher government to the race riots of 1981. By referring to the racial disadvantages among black British communities, the report prescribed much-needed “race-training awareness for police, community liaison, and both community and joint efforts to reduce the social and economical dimensions or racial disadvantages” (Malik 18).

projects” (qtd. in Solomos 152).

Whereas the 1970s saw the increasing alienation of young blacks from British society and growing tension between the police and black communities, the 1980s was to witness highly volatile unrest and disorder in urban cities. Although equal opportunity programs had been introduced following a series of race riots in the early 1980s, racial discrimination and racism still prevailed, and, as a result, an appeal for “unified” power was aroused amongst the black British. As Kobena Mercer argues, “black” had become more of a political, rather than radical, category:

Throughout the seventies and eighties, the re-articulation of this term as an inclusive political identity based on alliances among Asian, African and Caribbean peoples, brought together in shared struggles against racism in Britain, has helped to challenge and displace common sense assumptions about “blackness” as a fixed or essential identity. (*Jungle* 81)

The label “black” has been used by British citizens of African and Asian descent as an alliance against the racial discrimination and racism, being a term of “inclusiveness” which “carried a meaning that was concerned with the politics of solidarity across different racialized categories of people of colour” (L. Young, “Hybridity’s” 155). Although the inclusive feature of the term “black” had, in the 1970s and 1980s, provided a way of suppressing differences amongst coloured communities, the hybridization of the term “black British” distinguishes itself from other (white) British subjects.

In “New Ethnicities,” Hall suggests that the first moment of black British cultural

politics was that in which

the term “black” was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. (441)

This was the moment of engaging, rather than suppressing, differences; a moment in which Hall recognizes the term “black” as a product of political struggle and challenge against the mainstream culture. Yet, the second moment of black British cultural politics, according to Hall, shifts from the struggles of representation to a new politics of representation which

has to do with an awareness of the black experience as a diaspora experience, and the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and “cut-and-mix” – in short, the process of cultural diaspora-ization (to coin an ugly term) which it implies. (447)

In this second moment, black subjects and black experiences are not determined by nature, but constructed by history, culture and politics; thus, Hall refers to this as “ethnicities.” In Hall’s view, the new politics of ethnicities are based on difference and diversity, operated by connecting “the relation of these cultural practices to the past” and “complexly mediated and transformed by memory, fantasy and desire” (447). In his very precise explanation of Hall’s notion of “new ethnicities,” James Procter comments that such notion “foregrounds the positionality and contextuality of diaspora identities rather than a ‘free-floating’ subject” and is “an alternative to the nation-centered ‘hegemonic



concept of Englishness” (Stuart 131).

The race riots of the early and mid 1980s not only witnessed the emergence of hybridized black British identity, but actually contested the whole notion of Englishness. Equally significant was the 1989 Rushdie Affair, which succeeded in obscuring the dynamics of Englishness. In response to Salman Rushdie’s publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, the Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed a “fatwa” on Rushdie, and British Muslims called for blasphemy against Rushdie’s book. A book-burning was generated by a group of impassioned British Muslims in 1989; however, the event indicated disparate responses amongst black British communities.<sup>8</sup>

As Tariq Modood points out:

It generated an impassioned Muslim activism and mobilization that no previous campaign against racism had been remotely able to stir. Many “lapsed” or “passive” Muslims (especially non-religious Muslims, for whom hitherto their Muslim background was not particularly important) (re)discovered a new sense of community solidarity. What was striking was that when the public rage against Muslims was at its most intense, Muslims neither sought nor were offered any special solidarity by any non-white minority. It was in fact some white liberal Anglicans that tried to moderate the hostility against the angry Muslims. (“British Muslims” 42)

The issues at stake in the Rushdie affair seemed to be concerned not only with whether the black British community was homogeneous, but also why it was that these young

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<sup>8</sup> By depicting the fallibility of the Koran in his book, *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie also allegedly defiled the honour of Muhammad’s wives; however, such depictions take place only in the dreams of Rushdie’s protagonist Gabriel Farishta. Although Rushdie defensively points out that the book is “just as critical of British racism as it is of Islamism,” it was attacked by both Islamic fundamentalists and many progressive critics. For more details on the critique of Rushdie’s controversial novel, see Dawson 124.

British-born Muslims were unable to find some common alliance with other non-white non-Muslim people in Britain who had shared the same experiences of being socially deprived and racially discriminated against. It was soon after this, in the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair of 1989 and the Gulf War of 1991, that “British Muslim” identities began to emerge.<sup>9</sup> As Modood argues elsewhere, racial prejudice cannot decline whilst any non-white British minority community suffers further racial discrimination and prejudice. Since British Muslims, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, continued to be racialised and discriminated against due to their “distinctive and cohesive value system which can be perceived as an alternative, and possible challenge, to the norm,” accordingly, a more hybridized culture emerges. As Modood puts it:

In my view, it is quite possible that we shall witness in the next decades an increasing de-racialisation of, say, culturally assimilated Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, along with, simultaneously, a racialisation of other culturally “different” Asians, Arabs and non-white Muslims. (“Difference” 164)

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the transformation of British national and cultural identity, thereby reflecting the pluralism that continued to exist in Britain; that is, the rise of black British identity, the emergence of “new ethnicities” and more hybridized cultures. Thus, prior to the hybrid multiculturalism of the 1990s and 2000, black British writers, notably Hanif Kureishi, were already beginning to comment on British

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<sup>9</sup> According to Ruvani Ranasingha, “In the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair (1989) and the Gulf War (1991), the 1990s ushered in an era of religious revivalism, and the emergence and racialisation of ‘British Muslim’ identities, that prefigured the more intense scrutiny of Muslim identity as a result of 9/11 and the London bombings of 7 July 2005” (*South Asian* 64).

politics and social events from their own perspectives and positionality, once again challenging and contesting the notion of Englishness.

## Critical Reception

Kureishi has been one of the most prolific contemporary British writers. Ever since his first play was staged in 1976,<sup>10</sup> he has written extensively as a prominent essayist, playwright, screenwriter and novelist. His first screenplay *My Beautiful Launderette* (1984) was nominated for Oscar and made Kureishi known internationally. Kureishi's two early novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, receive more critical attention. These novels are chiefly interesting in terms of portraying autobiographical protagonists, who, resembling Kureishi, are particularly keen of the social currents while being aware of their personal identity problems. As Moore-Gilbert has observed, Kureishi usually manages "to connect 'personal' sphere to the public domain" (163).

Kureishi's exploration of the relationship between personal and public modes of identity has received a good deal of critical assessment. Some scholarly attention is devoted to his employment of London as the realm of the public. John Clement Ball's study of Kureishi's representation of city and suburb provides readers a detailed overview of suburbia in relation to Kureishi's depiction of London. Approaching Kureishi's London

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<sup>10</sup> Kureishi's first play, *Soaking the Heat* was written in 1976 and staged in 1979 at the Royal Court Theatre. The following year, his first full-lengthy play, *The King and Me*, was performed at the Soho Poly Theatre.

novels in terms of “spatial strategies,” Jung Su considers that Kureishi’s aspects of space add heterogeneous elements to the original center, hybridizing it and further approving that London contains dynamics of heterogeneity (97-98).<sup>11</sup>

Several critics explore questions of belonging and hybridity which pervade in Kureishi’s writing. Berthold Schoene, for example, sees Kureishi as a “herald of hybridity”. Mainly referring to Bhabha's notion of deconstructive Third Space of a cultural in-between, Schoene argues that the “hybrid” characters under Kureishi’s portrayal are “a radically deconstructive presence in a world obsessed with clear cut definitions of . . . identity” (117). Schoene is very optimistic about the hybrid status, so he positively asserts that what Kureishi has presented is “the contrived nature of concepts of ethnicity which accentuate difference while eradicating all traces of potential sameness” (121). However, Bart Moore-Gilbert holds a different view from Schoene’s.

For Moore-Gilbert, Kureishi might have included the accounts of “hybridity” into the theme of his works, but his writing “does not consistently instantiate all of these positive accounts of ‘hybridity’” (200). By comparing Kureishi with Rushdie or Derek Walcott, Moore-Gilbert argues that Kureishi does not juxtapose or mix western and non-western cultures. Towards the end of his critical overview, Moore-Gilbert has accordingly given

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<sup>11</sup> Su argues that the literary cityscape under Kureishi’s portrayal can be considered a strategy of “Empire Writes Back,” a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Su accordingly indicates her viewpoints of the movement which Kureishi’s protagonists have made in London; for Su’s further analysis on the movement, see Su 99-100.

his critique against the possible meaning of “hybridity” given by Kureishi in his works; indeed, he concludes that Kureishi is “always scrupulous to presenting Asian Britain as a patchwork of peoples from diverse parts of the subcontinent, with different language, religions and value” (201).

Thus, in which ways are Kureishi’s perceptions of Englishness or British national identity different from the early immigrant writers? The focus in the previous chapter was on Sam Selvon’s depiction of the experiences of early immigrants to London between the 1950s and 1980s, a period throughout which it is argued that the notion of “Englishness” is characterized by the mimic performance of “Englishness,” with the black immigrants playing out a role reversal of the stereotyped manner or features of “Englishness.” During their process of searching for a home in their “Motherland,” Selvon’s immigrant characters develop their relationship with England from their starting point as total strangers to the landscape of London.

However, in their processes of claiming Englishness, where Selvon’s immigrant characters aim to search for similarities with which they can identify themselves, Kureishi’s protagonists in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, set out to establish their own identity through their diaspora experience, which, in Hall’s opinion, is defined as “the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity,” by “a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference . . . [and]

by hybridity”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the focus here shifts to the way in which Kureishi sets about creating the hybridized identities of his characters.

### **Diasporic Hybridity in *The Buddha of Suburbia***

In Kureishi’s first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the protagonist Karim, like Kureishi himself, has mixed parentage (Pakistani father and English mother); thus, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is semi-autobiographical insofar as both Kureishi and his protagonist have the same experiences of struggling to make sense of a mixed racial and cultural inheritance. Other autobiographical experiences such as “his theatrical apprenticeship in the West End” and some “painful incidents of bigotry” are also written into *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Kaleta 75).

Although the novel is autobiographical in terms of the hybrid identity experiences of Kureishi and Karim, there is an important and significant difference between them, in that the upbringing of the former was far more mono-cultural than that of the latter.<sup>13</sup>

Kureishi describes his upbringing in an interview with the *New York Times*, stating that: “I was brought up really as an English child. . . . [M]y father was very Westernized. He wasn’t a practicing Muslim; for example, he didn’t believe in arranged marriages or practices that would have conflicted with what was around us. I wasn’t influenced by

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<sup>12</sup> Hall attempts to deal with the complexity of contemporary migration movement here, rethinking such phenomenon in a less essentialist manner (“Cultural Identity” 235).

<sup>13</sup> Kureishi grew up in white suburban Kent, an area which was particularly detached from Pakistani communities. He never spoke or even heard Urdu at home, essentially because English was his father’s first language. For further commentary on Kureishi’s ethnic upbringing, see Ranasinha, *Hanif* 6; *South Asian* 230.

Asian culture at all” (qtd. in Ranasinha, *Hanif* 6).<sup>14</sup> Although Kureishi’s father is described as an immigrant who almost assimilates himself to English culture, in contrast, Karim’s father is depicted as adhering closely to his Indian background and culture.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is primarily about identity, with the novel being propelled by Karim’s search for his positionality in his continual movements between “here and there.” The plot begins with Karim identifying himself as “a new breed of Englishman” and ends with his more affirmative recognition of his positionality as he sits “in the centre of this old city that I loved, which is itself set at the bottom of a tiny island” (*Suburbia* 284). Throughout the course of the novel, Karim moves from the suburbs to the city, from school life to theatrical apprenticeship, from his homosexual adoration of Charlie to a heterosexual affair with Eleanor, from the hippy culture to Oriental culture, and from London to New York.

In the opening of the novel, Karim accompanies his father, Haroon Amir, the “future Guru of Chislehurst,” to Eva Kay’s house in Beckenham, where Haroon is invited to give a lecture on Eastern wisdom to Eva’s guests. Haroon soon develops an extramarital relationship with Eva and eventually leaves his wife and home in Bromley. Karim also moves out of their house in Bromley to live together with Haroon, Eva, and Eva’s son, Charlie, with the novel subsequently focusing on Karim’s movements.

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<sup>14</sup> This interview was first undertaken by J.B. Miller in *New York Times* (2 August 1992: 16).

As Mark Stein observed, Karim “commutes between different households across London” (117), occasionally taking a train to see his mother Margaret and brother Allie in Bromley. He sometimes visits his extended families, Aunt Jean and Uncle Ted (Gin and Tonic, as Haroon refers to them), the family of another Pakistani couple, Anwar and Jeeta, whose daughter Jamila is Haroon’s long-time good friend, or the family of a newly-wed couple, Jamila and Changez.

Whilst the protagonists in Selvon’s London novels are constantly on the move in order to determine their positionality in London by setting up a home of their own, in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim is also continuously kept on the move, due to “the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging or not,” in order to give a redefined conception of “Englishness” which includes the earlier reference to “funny kind of Englishman” by Karim himself (*Suburbia* 3). It is clear that Karim discovers his identity through his continuous movements, constantly maintaining his alliances with different households across London. Commuting, therefore, has as much importance to Karim as a strategy of evasion, escape and liberation: “I was not too unhappy, criss-crossing South London and the suburbs by bus, no one knowing where I was. Wherever someone, Mum, Dad, Ted, tried to locate me, I was always somewhere else” (94).

Similarly, Yu-cheng Lee sees Karim’s continuous movements, particularly his



decision to leave home and revisit his family back home, as a strategy of cultural and social resistance. As Lee points out, Karim consistently wishes to seek his development by moving out. Therefore, following bell hooks' way of seeing constructions of home, Lee asserts that Karim needs to leave home in order to move beyond the boundary (〈閱讀後帝國倫敦〉 153).<sup>15</sup> In Lee's reading, which stresses Karim's movement from the margin to the center or from the suburb to the city, Karim becomes "a flâneur" while managing to walk through labyrinthine London in such a way that he always remains in his own world of reality (157).

James Procter offers a useful reading of Karim's movements, describing him as "bohemian," essentially because his "zig-zag journeys throughout *The Buddha of Suburbia* have as much in common with the back and forth trips of the suburb commuter" (*Dwelling* 150). He goes on to suggest that Karim's identity politics are revealed in his deployment of "strategies of evasion and uncertainty in his day-to-day communications, through strategic shifts 'back-and-forth'" (*Dwelling* 153).

Nevertheless, whilst Susan Brook opposes Procter's reading of Karim's journey to the suburbs as "politics of evasion," based mainly upon the image of the suburbs which Procter sees as a shrunk and staid place of provincialism,<sup>16</sup> it seems that Brook tends to

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<sup>15</sup> bell hooks claims that "I had no choice. I had to struggle and resist emerging from that context and then from other locations with minding intact, with an open heart. I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond boundaries, yet I needed also to return there" (*Yearning* 148).

<sup>16</sup> Brook asserts that she sees Procter's reading of "Karim's journeys throughout the city as both politically evasive and mirroring the commuter's desire for return" (223).

overlook the novel's comparative treatment of the differences between the city and suburbia, as well as the way in which it shows the movement from the suburb margins to the city centre, which is metaphorical and emblematic of Karim (re)locating his identity. For Karim, commuting between the suburbs and the city, or between different households, provides him with an opportunity to question or search for his identity. With his hybrid identity, Karim shuttles "between identities, positions and politics without ever firmly committing or attaching himself to any" (Procter, *Dwelling* 154).

Karim's hybridity will ultimately stress "uncertainty" as his guide in finding his positionality in English society, thereby opening up a "new model of social possibility" for him.<sup>17</sup> Being the offspring of a racially mixed marriage, and born and bred in a lower middle-class suburb of London, Karim comes to resemble what Rushdie refers to as "hybridity" which celebrates "impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics".<sup>18</sup>

Caught in between different cultures and identities, Karim is faced with the problem of defining himself as an Englishman, and although he sees himself as English, his Englishness has not yet been accepted by others: "The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of

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<sup>17</sup> Virinder Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk define hybridity as "a contender for a 'new model' of social possibility that will assert its political guide" (87).

<sup>18</sup> In *Imaginary Homeland*, Rushdie celebrates the concept of "cultural hybridity," the mixing of cultures. Seeing hybridity as a combination of ideas, cultures and identities, he asserts the notion of hybridity "rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure" (394).

it” (*Suburbia* 53). Karim’s hybrid identity, “almost English, but not quite,” serves as a strategy enabling him to engage in movements back and forth in order to construct his sense of belonging and to establish his positionality, with one way of constructing this identity being to reflect on the group of first-generation immigrants.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Haroon and his childhood friend, Anwar, represent a group with which Karim is unable to identify himself, although their ambivalence to India, their imagined homeland, appeals to him. Both Anwar and Haroon migrated from Bombay to London in 1950; however, in settling down in their adopted country, their pursuits were quite different. Anwar is a docile, hardworking grocery shop owner in a poor suburb full of neo-fascists, whilst Haroon, who never socializes with colleagues or neighbors, leads a life of middle-class suburban boredom. Nevertheless, they both share the same experiences, pursuing the India of their imagination in their old age. Based upon his observations on their behavior, Karim comments:

Maybe there were similarities between what was happening to Dad, with his discovery of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar’s last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. Anwar even scoffed pork pies, as long as Jeeta wasn’t looking (My dad never touched the pig, though I was sure this was conditioning rather than religious scruple, just as I wouldn’t eat horse’s scrotum . . . now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling; neither of them expressed any desire to actually see their origins again. (64)

Based upon his very keen and clear sense of the peculiarities and paradoxes of

the first-generation immigrants, Karim concludes that their problem is concerned mainly with the negative effects associated with lacking a “home.” In Haroon’s case, such paradox is apparent in his preference for England over India, despite the fact that he clearly never feels at home in England. As Karim observes, Haroon has always been honest about his preference for England in every way. He generally preferred to think that “Things worked (in England); it wasn’t hot; you didn’t see terrible things on the street that you could do nothing about. He wasn’t proud of his past, but he wasn’t unproud of it either” (213).

Nevertheless, it is through Anwar that Karim determines that some first-generation immigrants are both radical, but in some ways, pathetic. Readers may laugh at Anwar, but they may also sympathize with him at the same time; for example, he begins his hunger strike to provoke feelings of guilt in his daughter, Jamila, who refuses to accept an arranged marriage with a man from Bombay. Karim is extremely shocked to see the lengths to which Anwar will go to adhere strongly to his religious beliefs and to maintain strict traditional patriarchal control in alien surroundings, such as England:

It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim. I’d never known him believe in anything before, so it was an amazing novelty to find him literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority. (*Suburbia* 64)

Avtar Brah emphasized that “‘Asian’ patriarchal discourse and practices in Britain

are not exogenous to British society” (137). Therefore, a strong-headed Jamila, who is brought up in a British system with a westernized culture, gives in to her radical father’s hunger-strike protest, despite having previously told Karim that she would rather leave the house and ask for the care of the Council.

The problem of cultural belonging amongst the first-generation immigrants plays an important part in Karim’s quest for identity, since he recognizes an apparent contradiction in his father’s identification with India. When Karim tells his father about Uncle Anwar’s hunger-strike for his strong-headed daughter, Haroon sadly comments: “We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India” (*Suburbia* 74). For both Haroon and Anwar, India is merely an “imaginary homeland” whilst the immigration conditions in England, a country where they have chosen to dwell, leave them disillusioned and disappointed; they are, therefore, caught in between “here and there.” Such contradiction reflects what Clifford refers to as the “empowering paradox of diaspora” which is “dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there” (322).

Anne-Marie Fortier provides a further illustration of Clifford’s idea by explaining the paradox of dwelling here and connecting there, when she states that “[b]y dwelling in a place where they do not ‘come from,’ migrants potentially disrupt the ‘natural’ order of things in both their nation of origin and of settlement” (*Migrant* 70).

Therefore, the paradox of diaspora manifests itself in Anwar and Haroon living outside India but maintaining their contact with Indian tradition and culture.

In fact, Anwar and Haroon continue to live in England as if they are visitors; Haroon still feels estranged by streets in London despite having lived there for fifteen years, and when Anwar dies, his coffin is arranged facing Mecca. Yet, for British born-and-bred youths, like Karim or Jamila, it is more difficult to identify with the culture and traditions to which Anwar and Haroon strongly adhere. For Karim, the social identity of the old generation is inappropriate, insofar as it lacks any cultivation bestowed upon it by English society.

If identity is marked by difference, the identity manifested between Karim and the first-generation immigrants is his Englishness, having been born and bred in England. However, since his identification with English society is characterized by conflict, problems relating to his ethnicity and class are apparent in Karim's identity. Susie Thomas places particular focus on the issue of class, as represented in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, arguing that Kureishi attempts to present "how race can affect class, and vice versa" (74).

Karim has a particular experience of class distinction when he takes his social upward mobility from the suburbs into the city. Having lived in the lower middle-class suburbs and been addressed as "Paki," Karim holds an uncertain sense of issues such

as “who I am” and “where I should go.” One particular representation by Kureishi of Karim’s struggle with his identity is provided when Karim compares himself to his peers, Charlie, Jamila and the others. When his white friend, Helen, tells him that she is planning to leave behind “the pettiness of living with parents and the irrelevance of school,” Karim feels particularly anxious about where he should go:

I hated the idea of her going away, mainly because I hated the idea of staying behind. Charlie was doing big things, Helen was preparing her escape, but what was I up to? How would I get away? (*Suburbia* 71)

Karim can neither find any feelings of being at ease in a suburban life to which he should be able to adapt, nor can he think of any way of escaping from it. A further example of how Karim’s sense of his class inferiority comes to the fore occurs when he tries to seek intimacy with white, upper-class Eleanor:

And where I could have been telling Eleanor about the time I got fucked by Hairy Back’s Great Dane, it was her stories that had primacy, her stories that connected to an entire established world. It was as if I felt my past wasn’t important enough, wasn’t as substantial as hers, so I’d throw it away. I never talked about Mum and Dad, or the suburbs, though I did talk about Charlie, Charlie was kudos. (178)

As is clearly indicated by his relationship with Eleanor, Karim has been constantly aware of how much he loathes the suburbs and his past; in other words, in his attempts at finding sexual fulfillment, he instead finds himself part of some group defined as “other, deviant, inferior” or just “plain.” Karim’s class anxiety prevails in his courtship with Charlie, Helen and Eleanor, since all are white and more superior

in their social status; thus, the class barrier prevents Karim from identifying with them.

However, his relationship with Jamila is strikingly different. Jamila is, to Karim, a childhood friend, a soul mate and sometime sexual partner, yet it is through this couple that Kureishi attempts to set up polarities in order to delve into Karim's problem of belonging. As compared to the irresolute Karim, Jamila is a "militant," belonging to the group of "those who knew what they wanted to do" (95). Jamila is more rationalistic, rebellious and independent. Although Karim and Jamila both come from immigrant families and share the same experiences of living in a poor suburb district, Jamila is more self-assertive in her feminist, anti-racist stance.

Ruvani Ranasinha points out that such polarities suggest an attempt by Kureishi to depict "a concomitant dismissal of modes of political solidarity." Thus, Karim is "notable for the extent to which he avoids politics";<sup>19</sup> and as such, his motivation for upward mobility is presented as being something that is quite personal, as opposed to political (*Dwelling* 154). Thus, when his father begins his new life with Eva, Karim decides to follow them to their new flat in West Kensington. Eva offers Karim an opportunity to escape from the boredom of suburban life and access into the London

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<sup>19</sup> From her comparative analysis of Jamila and Karim, although she feels that readers are meant to admire Jamila more, Ranasinha suggests that they will be more inclined to identify with Karim, thereby concluding that Kureishi seems to dismiss the political solidarity in his portrayal of Karim (*South Asian* 246).



which he has always desired.

As the plot moves to Part Two, in which Karim begins his new life in South London, his personal growth progresses towards another stage of development. With a focus on the transformation of Karim's individuality, some critics argue that Kureishi writes it in "bildungsroman" form. Nick Bentley, for example, asserts that the growth and development of Karim are achieved by passing through several social spheres, in which Kureishi aims to "comment on various issues of cultural politics including class, race, sexuality and gender".<sup>20</sup> In comparing *The Buddha of Suburbia* to Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that both Kim and Karim are involved "in a process of inner growth" and that they eventually suffer "a series of crises which marks their evolution towards adulthood" (126). Thus, according to Moore-Gilbert, to some extent, Karim and Kim experience "the typical confusions of adolescence" which are caused mainly by "the conflict between different cultural affiliations".<sup>21</sup>

Yet, Mark Stein considers the novel to be an "anti-bildungsroman" because the development of Karim and his father, Haroon, progress alongside each other. "Growing up with one's father," as Stein argues, "goes against the conventions of the novel of

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<sup>20</sup> It becomes clear that Bentley is comparing Kureishi's Karim Amir with Pip (Philip Pirrip) from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. From Bentley's viewpoint, both novels trace the development from childhood to adulthood of a central character, establishing such a theme in a contemporary political setting. For further discussion on the comparison between Pip and Karim, see Bentley, *Contemporary* 161.

<sup>21</sup> Unlike Bentley, who merely compares Karim to Pip essentially on the basis of their maturation process, Moore-Gilbert juxtaposes Karim to Kim based on the issues of cultural belonging. For more comparisons between Karim and Kim, see Moore-Gilbert 125.

formation” (117). However, whilst neither Stein nor Bentley take Karim’s identity crisis into consideration, Moore-Gilbert points explicitly to the fact that Karim’s personal growth is propelled by certain crises surrounding his life. Indeed, the most crucial of all the crises that Karim will eventually encounter occurs when he moves to London, where the complexity of city life requires him to assume another identity, despite such identity contradicting the way in which he perceives his sense of self, or in a more specific way, the way in which he perceives the Indianness that is a part of him.

The conflict arises out of tensions between social expectations and Karim’s subjectivity, with the second part of the novel, “In the City,” dealing with the way in which he confronts his dream with reality; however, it is also in the city where he experiences his identity being contested, challenged and re-negotiated. Here, Kureishi utilizes London as a centre of cultural and social diversity. Thus, part one closes with Karim expressing his feelings and anticipation for London:

There was a sound that London had. It was, I’m afraid, people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands; there was also the keyboard on the Doors’ *Light My Fire*. There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn’t feel exposed; there were bookshops with racks of magazine printed without capital letters or the bourgeois disturbance of full shops; there were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties where girls and boys you didn’t know took you upstairs and fucked you; there were all the drugs you could use. You see, I didn’t ask much of life; this was the extent of my longing. But at least my goals were clear and I knew what I wanted. I was twenty. I was ready for anything (*Suburbia* 121).

For Karim, London is “a kind of inferno of pleasure and madness”,<sup>22</sup> with Kureishi presenting London as not so much a setting, but a place of diversity where Karim wants to belong. Comparing the literary London of Kureishi to that of Sam Selvon or Timothy Mo, Nahem Yousaf argues that Kureishi’s London is “overblown and unrestrained, sexy and cheap, grotesque and theatrical”.<sup>23</sup> However, since London clearly provides Karim with possibilities and opportunities, it also motivates him to ponder on what he can find in himself to offer to the city.

If Karim’s London, with its “thousands of black people everywhere,” is internally affected by the culture of diversity, then it is difficult to see in what ways he can find his identity or “positionality,” with unique qualities that will differentiate him from those “thousands of black people everywhere.” Thus, one way that Karim can try to make it out of the suburbs is to become an actor; and indeed, this is also a way in which his progress shifts towards success.

Like his father, Haroon, who acts out the role of mythic Buddha for Eva and her white middle-class friends, Karim is also required to give a performance of his ethnic identity when given the role of Mowgli in a play adapted from Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*.

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<sup>22</sup> In an interview with Colin MacCabe, Kureishi expressed what he thought of London, noting that it was “a kind of inferno of pleasure and madness” and also a place where he could always imagine (MacCabe, “Interview” 37).

<sup>23</sup> From the viewpoint of Yousaf, Kureishi’s London is not the same kind of “city within a city” as that in either Sam Selvon’s London novels or Timothy Mo’s *Sour Sweet*. Instead as Yousaf argues, by using a portrait of cultural images of 1960s and 1970s London, Kureishi makes this city “the best of all possible worlds” (37-38).

It is through the theatrical direction of Jeremy Shadwell that Kureishi attempts to show how society intends to define racialised “otherness” in terms of reductive identities.

With his fixed ideas on the notion of “Indianness,” Shadwell is surprised that racially-mixed Karim can speak neither Punjabi nor Urdu, and equally, that he has no experiences of India. It becomes apparent that Shadwell intertwines identity with appearance and thinks of Indianness as an “exotic other” when he sneers at Karim, saying:

What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington . . . Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century. Yes? (141)

Thus, when Shadwell cannot find Indianness in British born-and-bred Karim, he constructs a fixed ethnic identity for him by demanding that he should appear more “Indian” and speak in an “authentic accent.” Shadwell shouts angrily, “Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience,” in response to which, Karim helplessly pleads, “It’s a political matter to me” (147).

Although Jamila sarcastically ridiculing Karim’s performance in playing authentic Mowgli, succumbing to Shadwell’s theatrical direction and requirements, Karim takes on Shadwell’s cultural racism by making himself more authentically Indian and putting on brown make-up and a fake accent. Remaining cool and cynical

in her response to Karim's staging of Indianness, Jamila nevertheless snaps at him: "It was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices" (*Suburbia* 157).

Thus, Karim's painful identity crisis emerges from his theatrical role-playing performance of Mowgli; although he sees himself as English, he is considered by others to be Indian. This consciousness of his identity does not, however, involve a denial of his Indianness; the problem is primarily that he has no definitive idea as to what it means to be Indian, nor can he obtain any guidance on this point from his father.

With no essential connections with his cultural or ethnic heritage, he finds himself in a very painful and difficult situation, needing to find his identity in a world where he has never been, and where he can therefore never hope to have any sense of belonging. If, in the mind of Haroon or Anwar, India is a place where they are able to fall back on their memories, memories of what Rushdie refers to as "imaginary homeland".<sup>24</sup> India is not Karim's homeland to imagine, but a place with which he must create some linkage. Where Haroon's identity is described as being "at once plural and partial," Karim's identity would seem to be even more plural and partial; thus, as his inability to identify with the Indian part of him stemming from his father is revealed, he decides that if he wants "the additional personality

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<sup>24</sup> As Rushdie reflects on his own migration experience, he announces, "It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt . . . we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (*Imaginary* 10).

bonus of an Indian past,” he will have to create it himself (213).

Thus, Karim’s desire to create his Indian identity is similar to the way in which Hall sees third-generation black youths in Britain. According to Hall, these young people know that their parents come from places other than England, know the fact that they are black, and know that they are British, but they want “to speak from all three identities” and do not wish “to give up any one of them” (“Old and New Identities” 59). This is also the case for Karim; accordingly, he injects his perceptions of Indianness, which he has learned from Anwar and Changez, into the staging of his identity.

Karim strives to work out his Indian identity through such staging by including many aspects of his acquaintances; first of all, those of Anwar, and ultimately, Jamila’s husband Changez. Indeed, it is Karim’s caricature of Anwar which again invites critique. Although Karim may neither comprehend nor approve of Anwar’s strong adherence to his culture of origin, he feels offended when Tracey, a young middle-class black actress, comments on Karim’s theatrical rendering of Anwar’s hunger-strike protest:

“Two things, Karim,” she said to me. “Anwar’s hunger-strike worries me. What you want to say hurts me. It really pains me! And I am not sure that we should show it!”

“Really?”

“Yes,” She spoke to me as if all I required was a little sense. “I’m afraid it shows black people – Indian people – Black and Asian people – One old Indian man – as being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as

being fanatical.”

“Fanatical?” I appealed to the High Court. Judge Pyke was listening carefully. “It’s not a fanatical hunger-strike. It’s a calmly intended blackmail.”

“And that arranged marriage. It worries me. Karim, with respect, it worries me.” (180)

It is obvious that Karim rejects the term “black” – a political language and a label of “inclusiveness” throughout the 1970s – as a suitable term for identifying Anwar, and he also refuses to refer to Anwar using the hyphenated identity “Black-Asian people.” In other words, Karim refuses to use the term “black” or “Black Asian” to replace Indian. If the term “black” had been appropriated as “the organizing category of a new politics of resistance” for the 1970s, Karim’s insistence of using “India” instead of “black” seems to assert a gesture of anti-resistance on his part.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the character of Tracey is employed by Kureishi to serve two functions. Firstly, as in the case of Jamila, she serves as a foil to Karim; as compared to Karim, both Tracey and Jamila are conscious of the lives they are leading in racially discriminating Britain. Thus, it seems from the heated argument between black Tracey and racially-mixed Karim, which takes place in front of their white English colleagues, that their confrontation represents the staging of a scene of conflict in which two marginal blacks are making their appeal to the white majority, who they consider to be

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<sup>25</sup> According to Stuart Hall, the term “black” comes to provide “the organizing category of a new politics of resistance” (“New Ethnicities” 442).

appropriate judges. Thus, as an outsider to white society, Tracey is able to criticize the way that Karim renders his ethnic identity through stereotyping Indianness.

Examining Tracey's strategic role, Gayatri Spivak refers to Tracey as a "politically mature African-British woman" (293). Kenneth Kaleta similarly approves of Tracey's resentment against Karim's racist portrayal of Anwar: "Tracey defines black politically. Anyone who is white in a racist society is black. The actress is certainly right. In the London of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, power, values, economics and art are all part of a white person's world" (230). However, whilst Tracey does appear to have a valid point when she asserts that the blacks in Britain are usually stereotyped as "funny, with strange habits and weird customs," she is certainly not right to refer to Karim's portrayal of racist Anwar as a self-hater for "yourself and all black people." Tracey focuses much more attention on white racial ideology, which underscores the negative stereotypes of the blacks, as opposed to attempting to understand or sympathize with a wretched immigrant like Anwar. When Karim insists that his portrayal of Anwar aims to present a true portrayal of an "irrational, ridiculous [and] hysterical" old Indian man, Tracey argues that Karim's truth is only the "white man's truth" (*Suburbia* 180).

In his account of Karim's efforts to prove the efficacy of theatrical performance, Kureishi presents such performance as an opportunity for Karim to negotiate his



various identities, enabling him to act out the part of him that is Indian, with which he feels familiar, whilst retaining his relationship with both the immigrant communities and his theatrical friends. Through such a theatrical performance, Karim is able to formulate for himself a new identity which incorporates aspects of the culture of his Indian acquaintances, Anwar, Haroon and Changez, whilst also combining this with that of the society in which he was born. For Karim, this is clearly the hybrid culture and identity which stands out as his defining feature.

### **“In-betweenness” in *The Black Album***

It is generally acknowledged by most critics that Kureishi’s second novel, *The Black Album* (1995) describes a more specific historical context.<sup>26</sup> The book is set in 1989, the same year in which the controversy arose over Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and also the year which marked the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Bruce King notes, “The liberations of the 1960s, the ideologies of the 1970s, the massive immigration, and Thatcherite economics” have all led to the uncertainties of the 1980s, a time full of “social, emotional and intellectual anarchy” (“Gurnah and Kureishi” 91). Reflecting on the riots and racial confrontations of 1989, Kureishi presents a London which has witnessed violent clashes brought about by Muslim fundamentalism. It is also in this

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<sup>26</sup> Comparing *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Thomas concludes that the latter has “a specific historical context” which includes the *fatwa* issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and the fall of the Berlin Wall (*Kureishi* 101). Similarly, Moore-Gilbert indicates that Kureishi presents “the more socially and racially polarized context of 1980s Britain” in *The Black Album* (119).

novel that Kureishi explicitly writes about racism and cultural clashes.

Similar to *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi's second novel is also primarily about identity, extending his exploration of the problem of identity amongst the second-generation immigrants. Indeed, following the protagonist Karim's identification of himself as "having emerged from two old histories" in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the theme of searching for identity is also prominent in *The Black Album*, in which the protagonist, Shahid, is caught up in a binary force between Muslim fundamentalism and western liberal culture. With the hybrid identities and heritages of Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as he moves here and there, grappling with the need to position himself in racially exclusive British society, so Shahid in *The Black Album* strives incessantly to determine his positionality in Britain, as well as his faith in postmodernist society.

As Shahid himself says, "There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity" (*Album* 228). Yet, the places which Shahid moves to and from are set in extreme opposition, "pleasure versus politics polarity",<sup>27</sup> as represented by western liberal individualism, in the form of the white, liberal English lecturer, Deedee Osgood, and radical Islamic fundamentalism, represented by the charismatic Riaz. For Shahid, there is much

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<sup>27</sup> In her critical assessment of Kureishi, Ruvani Ranasinha asserts that the theme of polarity in writing about "pleasure versus politics" is prevalent throughout his works, such as *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* (Hanif 32).

conflict in the way that each of these forces interacts with the other; in other words, Shahid is caught in between two oppositional cultures. Thus, Bhabha's concept of "in-betweenness" is addressed as a means of examining how Shahid redefines his identity through problematization of the notion of belonging.

According to Bhabha, "in-betweenness" is a complicated spatial, political and theoretical concept, with the notion of such "in-betweenness" carrying the full burden of the meaning of culture. As Bhabha explains:

To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third space, we may elude the politics of polarities and emerge as the others of selves. (*Location 37-38*)

Under Bhabha's notion of "hybridity," identity is constituted by "in-betweenness" and movement – the "overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (*Location 2*). Thus, for Bhabha, striving for difference in politics is an absolute necessity, essentially because, as opposed to evading the differences, it will allow the interplay of the contradictory elements of hybridity.

However, prior to Bhabha's theoretical verbalization of the concept of "in-betweenness," Trinh Minh-ha had also articulated the "in-between" position of a subject who is both an insider and outsider. As Trinh remarks:

Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined

threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the “inside/outside” opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider. She is this Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures; that of affirming “I am like you” while persisting in her differences; and that of reminding “I am different” while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (74)<sup>28</sup>

Paying particular attention to cultural difference, Trinh detects from her hybrid identity a problematic position which is located somewhere “in-between” Asian and American, despite these two positions often being regarded as fixed enclosures. Thus, both Bhabha’s notion of “in-betweenness” and Trinh’s idea of “thresholds” indicate that the identity, which occurs primarily in a liminal third space, is an unstable and undetermined space.

Yet, Bhabha’s term and Trinh’s idea both point to “the space of ambivalence.” In proceeding to further explain “the space of ambivalence” enunciated from the defined terms of the above theorists, Ien Ang particularly notes that Bhabha appears to be very hopeful about “the subversive potential of this liminal in-betweenness, seeing it as the place where one might go beyond the contained grid of fixed identities and binary oppositions through the production of hybrid cultural forms and meanings” (146). Thus, for Ang, ambivalence is the essential operator on the positioning of the minority subject, in terms of her “in-betweenness.”

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<sup>28</sup> Trinh Minh-ha, a Vietnamese-American filmmaker, considers herself a figure with multiple positions – a writer, a woman, a woman of color – so she explicitly asserts that the multiplicity of her “selves” dwell in an “undetermined threshold place” (74).

Several aspects of “in-between” identity can be found in Kureishi’s *The Black Album*, which sets out to present the notion of Englishness from the perspective of a second-generation immigrant. Set in the late 1980s, the novel portrays Shahid Hassan, a college student in North London, vacillating between an affair with his Literature and Cultural Studies professor, Deedee Osgood, and involvement with Riaz, the leader of a group of Islamic student activists. From the very beginning of the novel, Shahid is depicted as struggling with a crisis of identity, but unlike Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* who recognizes himself as being “an Englishman born and bred, almost,” Shahid is not at all convinced about the part of him that is Indian/Pakistani; for example, when the novel opens with his first encounter with Riaz, Shahid demonstrates his hesitation in identifying himself with Pakistan. When Riaz speaks of Shahid as “my fellow countryman,” Shahid hesitantly replies: “well . . . not quite” (*Album* 2). It would therefore seem that racial and ethnic identity is not so much of a reality for Shahid as it has apparently become for Riaz.

The way in which Shahid incessantly wavers on the issue of his identity can be regarded as a narrative developmental tool used by Kureishi as the means of tackling the emergence of fundamentalism in British society. As the story develops, Kureishi presents the London of the late 1980s as a sphere within which racism is played out, with the novel beginning with Shahid’s extreme reaction to the racism that he sees in

Britain. The existence of racial discrimination and prejudice denies any self-perception by Shahid of his position in society:

Everywhere I went, I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred. (10)

Sensing his lack of any real association with his white peers in school, and observing what he sees as the superior power of the white, Shahid allegedly confesses to Riaz that he dreams to be a racist:

Shahid was trembling. "My mind was invaded by killing-nigger fantasies."  
"What kind of thing are we talking about here?" Chad asked.  
"What kind of thing? Of going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum. I slagged them under my breath whenever I saw them. I wanted to kick them up the arse. The thought of sleeping with Asian girl made me sick. I'm being very honest with you now –"  
"Open your heart," Chad murmured. He didn't touch his food. . . .  
"I argued . . . why can't I be a racist like everyone else? Why do I have to miss out on that privilege? Why is it only me who has to be good? Why can't I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior? I began to turn into one of them. I was becoming a monster now." (11)

Clearly, Shahid recognizes that he cannot fight against the racial discrimination that has been built up against him, but what he can do is to try to make himself become the oppressor, one who can freely oppress the others. Surprisingly, however, we find that he has a desire to join the British National Party and to become a "racist"; in such a way, by claiming the approval of society, Shahid is calling for the fulfillment of his desire for total assimilation into British society, which is regarded as the exclusive

centre of power.

Shahid's face-to-face encounter with racism marks another difference between *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, insofar as the issue of racism is presented more directly in the latter novel. Using Shahid's creative writing as a conduit, Kureishi is able to present how racism weighs on a Pakistani family in Britain. When Shahid was fifteen, he wrote a short, fifteen-page autobiographical story entitled "Paki Wog Fuck off Home," which featured Shahid perceiving himself as being "picked up" in the social environment of the school. Since he was often subjected to verbal abuse and lived in fear of it, his writings, which recorded such experiences, had become an outlet for his emotions, writing down "the dismal fear and fury in a jagged prose of cunt-fuck-kill, that expressed him, like a soul singer screaming into a microphone." Yet, when Shahid's mother accidentally came across this piece of writing, she angrily ripped it up, shouting to her son: "Not one person is interested! Who should want to read this? People don't want this hate in their lives" (*Album* 72).

Clearly, what was going on between Shahid and his mother represented an extremely complex exchange between generations. Being immigrants, both generations had experienced racism in their daily lives; however, such differences between the generations revealed that the first-generation immigrants tried to accept racism, essentially because they believed they had to do their best to adjust within this society on

the grounds of survival, whereas the second-generation immigrants, like Shahid, preferred to deal with racism in a completely different way. Thus, Shahid's mother clearly demonstrates that more than anything, she has an intense dislike for any talk of race or racism; on the other hand, however, Shahid is content to make his experience of racism known to the public through his writing.

As Yasmin Hussain observes, the second generation immigrants have "political values of equality, higher expectations of education and the labour market" with their public political assertiveness being clearly "grounded in their identification with British citizenship and its associated rights".<sup>29</sup> She therefore notes that some second-generation immigrants in British Pakistani communities began to construct a new form of identity by building up religious allegiances, often asserting "their religious identifications more readily than their ethnic identifications, so they are Muslims first and then Pakistanis or Bangladeshis second" (27).

In *The Black Album*, Riaz and Chad represent a group whose religious allegiance is far stronger than that of their parents. Being Pakistani immigrants in Britain, they share the same racial experiences as Shahid, having been treated as third-class citizens in a white racist society. Riaz, a charismatic leader of Muslim students, spent his

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<sup>29</sup> In her exploration of the experience of the British South Asian community, Hussain pays special attention to the "inter-generation conflict," noting that communication between the first-generation immigrants and white British society was built on their economic roles, whereas education, particularly the acquisition of English proficiency, gave the second-generation immigrants more opportunity to access information, gaining better knowledge of their British citizenship and associated rights (27).



childhood in Lahore, but had lived in Leeds since he was fourteen. Speaking in an accent which combines these two places, Riaz is inclined to believe that Pakistani people tend to “lose themselves” as a result of coming to England (*Album 7*).

For Riaz, the dimension of “belonging” is mediated through religious orthodoxy, and, always feeling a stranger in England, Riaz tells Shahid: “This will never be my home. I will never entirely understand it” (175). Chad’s religious allegiance, on the other hand, is presented as self-defining and personally empowering. Throughout the novel, Chad is characterized as a young Muslim, full of radical Islamic fervour, “bulk and suppressed violence” (78). Adopted by a white couple, Chad had been placed under the care of a white racist mother who “talked about Pakis all the time and how they had to fit in”; thus, a sense of “rootlessness” had been his legacy ever since he was a teenager, usually discriminated against by white people in England looking suspiciously at him “as if he were going to steal their car or their handbag” (106).

Like Riaz, Chad reestablishes his self-respect and salvation by adhering to politicized Islamic fundamentalism. Sandra Young keenly points out that Islam gave self-respect to young Muslims on the streets of Britain.<sup>30</sup> Although Chad is not blessed with as much charismatic personality as Riaz, he is by no means a fanatically

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<sup>30</sup> In the discussion held by Colin MacCabe of *Critical Quarterly* on the London bombings of 7 July 2005, participant Sandra Young tells Kureishi what Islam can offer the young Muslim people: “When you speak to young Muslim boys on the street, they have a definite need to be respected. Islam gives a free ticket for instant self-respect and respect from others” (MacCabe, “Multiculturalism” 13).

fervent follower; for instance, in a conversation with Shahid, Chad aggressively asserts his religious identification, shouting: “No more Paki. Me a Muslim. We don’t apologize for ourselves neither. We are people who say one important thing – that pleasure and self-absorption isn’t everything!” (128)

Within his novels, Kureishi often portrays a minor, but important, character functioning as a dramatic foil to the protagonist, such as Tracey as a foil to Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*; in the same way, he creates Chad as a foil to Shahid in *The Black Album*, and in so doing, intends to show what Shahid’s fate will be if he follows the steps of Chad, who faithfully follows Riaz and his fundamentalist beliefs. *The Black Album* is dialectic, insofar as Kureishi creates dramatic opportunities for Shahid and Chad to debate issues of faith, western culture and art, as well as their ongoing problems of identity; for instance, Chad confesses to Shahid that he had once led a life similar to that of Shahid, whom he saw as being unable to evade the tempting secular influences, controlled by music and fashion industries, addicted to drugs and alcohol. However, instead of giving Chad the approval that he sought, Shahid asks: “Isn’t that what art helps us do? Life would be a desert otherwise. Wouldn’t it, Chad?” (*Album* 79).

The tension between Shahid and Chad is presented particularly well in the way that they each think of art. When Chad demands that Shahid should participate in the

book-burning of a blasphemy novel,<sup>31</sup> Shahid suspiciously replies, “Are you sure that’s necessary?” (169) For Shahid, literature is art, but truth doesn’t matter; however, for Chad, any words in the book are meant as truth. Shahid would therefore rather take the likes of Rushdie’s words as being as common as an insulting occurrence in a pub, whereas Chad would recognize them as truth, aimed at insulting God. According to Kenneth Kaleta’s viewpoint on the book burning in the novel, its validity lies in the question, “how powerful is each of the conflicting beliefs about sex, violence, god and literature?” Kaleta further points out that Kureishi uses Shahid “to question how genuine, consistent, comforting and defensible any belief is, whether it is the belief in love, in family, in religion, or in art” (138).

Another serious tension between Shahid and Chad is in the way in which they react to Shahid’s rewriting of Riaz’s poetry. When Shahid is assigned the task of transcribing Riaz’s dogmatic verses, he finds himself unable to copy it, especially after his relationship with Deedee has left him wondering and puzzled, such that he is unable to faithfully keep to Riaz’s prose. Shahid considers his rewriting of Riaz’s poems only as “playing with words” rather than treachery against Riaz’s group (*Album* 235).

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<sup>31</sup> Throughout the novel, Kureishi makes no specific comparison between the book burning and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*; however, it is clear that *The Black Album* “relates directly to issues brought to the fore by the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and the fatwa against its author” (Stein 212). In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Kureishi confessed that this novel was “never intended to be about Salman or the Rushdie affair; instead, he preferred it to be “about the issues that interested me at the time of the fatwa” (qtd. in Thomas, *Kureishi* 102).

Yet, Shahid is named “the spy, the infidel” when Chad, Strapper and Sadiq break into Deedee’s house, attempting to beat up Shahid for his sexual relationship with Deedee and for his commitment to rewriting Riaz’s poetry in an erotic way; but despite denying his disloyalty against his people, Shahid is still assaulted by Chad and his gang for “having deceived and spat on his own people” (*Album* 265).

The analogy between Shahid’s rewriting of Riaz’s poems and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* is implicitly drawn by Kureishi. Both are perceived as blasphemy against Islam and both lead their writers to hide in fear of threats to their lives; indeed, at the end of *The Black Album*, Shahid has to run away with Deedee for their own personal safety, forced to hide from the fanatical, extremist Riaz and his gang. However, such tension between Shahid and his Muslim brothers invites some debate from several critics. Ranasinha, for example, argues that in his depiction of Muslims in *The Black Album*, Kureishi tends to offer two stereotypes:

In his characterization, Kureishi invents a polarity between radical orthodox Islam and detached liberal individualism with no recognition of the spectrum of attitudes in between. His Muslim characters tend to either scorn religion like Shahid’s “secular” father, brother Chili, and his patrician wife Zulma in *Black Album*, and Parvez in *My Son the Fanatic*, or they are represented as extreme “fundamentalists” – already a highly charged term in Britain (*South Asian* 241).

For Ranasinha, Kureishi seems to create two very simplistic images of Muslims that are excessively reductive, thereby avoiding any detailed discussion about Islamic

fundamentalism or any deep probing into the migratory experiences of British Muslims; however, Moore-Gilbert holds a different viewpoint from that of Ranasinha. For Moore-Gilbert, the portrayals of Riaz, Chad and their followers contradict many stereotypes about “fundamentalism.” By observing an episode of Shahid’s participation in a religious segregation held by Riaz, Moore-Gilbert argues that Islam is not a monolithic religion: “Shahid’s visit to the mosque leads to his recognition of the hybrid nature of Islam’s adherents, rebutting the widespread conception that the religion is monolithic and essentially non-western formation” (135).

Moore-Gilbert continues to point out Kureishi’s sympathetic characterization of fundamentalism, with a particularly strong focus on his portrayal of Chad.<sup>32</sup> However, if *The Black Album* is written as a means of counteracting the stereotypes of Islamic fundamentalism or as depicting Asian Muslim stereotypes, then Kureishi appears to neglect such analysis in his portrayal of Shahid’s role-playing, particularly in his interactions with Riaz and his gang. It is sufficiently evident that Kureishi depicts the deep-rooted stereotype of Islam as a warrior religion, but he also seems to be more concerned with the way in which younger British Muslims, of immigrant parents, can adapt themselves to a diversified society characterized by liberalism and racism.

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<sup>32</sup> In Moore-Gilbert’s opinion, radical Chad deserves more sympathy, not only for the reasons why he decides to turn to “fundamentalism,” but for what he has been through, given the racism in British society. He notes that, “Chad is a soul ‘lost in translation,’ the most ironic lesson of his trajectory is that it is precisely the intolerance of the host society towards its ‘others’ which generates the physical and ideological resistance that the dominant ethnicity most abhors and fears.” For further analysis on the portrayal of Chad, see Moore-Gilbert 135.

Shahid, a British-born middle-class Pakistani who escapes from suburban Kent for a liberal life in London as a college student, becomes a mouthpiece for the way in which Kureishi perceives another new breed of Englishman, a young, wealthy Englishman born and bred, caught in between a Muslim community and British society.

During an interview with Colin MacCabe, Kureishi was criticized by the audience who observed that he seemed to “only show one side to the fundamentalist character in *The Black Album*.” In his reply, Kureishi denied that he had any inclination to take sides (“Interview” 54); indeed, on the overall issue of fundamentalism, Kureishi expressed a view during the interview that being an Islamic fundamentalist in English society would be “terrifying,” essentially because both attempt “to create a purity” in their culture (50).<sup>33</sup>

According to the viewpoint expressed by Kureishi, although Islam is an old religion, it does need to evolve in a modern age; therefore, for a British Muslim like him, or Shahid, it is necessary to have a conversation with Islam. Throughout the novel, Shahid functions as an enquirer of Islamic fundamentalism, challenging and contesting the way that it works; and indeed, the more he gets involved in the congregations of Riaz and his gang, the more questions he has, both for Islamic fundamentalism and for

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<sup>33</sup> As Kureishi himself states, “That's why fundamentalism is interesting. Because, to me, it's an attempt to create a purity. It's to say we're not really living in England at all. We're going to keep everything that's English, everything that's capitalist, everything that's white, everything that's corrupt, it's going to be outside. And everything that's good and pure and Islamic, you know, it's going to be in here, with these people” (MacCabe, “Interview” 50).

his lack of faith:

Shahid frequently fell into anxiety about his lack of faith. Observing the mosque in which all he saw were solid, material things, and looking along the line of brothers' faces upon which spirituality was taking place, he felt a failure. But he was afraid that enquiry would expose him to some sort of suspicion. (*Album* 96)

Whereas the reaction to racism by Riaz and Chad is to assert their own religious beliefs and to try to make such beliefs dogmatic, Shahid seems to have gradually opted for passive resistance to Riaz's leadership, which invariably placed heavy demands on Shahid's time, whilst also showing disrespect for his privacy. The frantic antagonism displayed by Riaz against Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, which Shahid actually considers to be a piece of art, ultimately leads to a split between Shahid and Riaz's active group, with such breakdown in his affiliation with the group also being attributable to his relationship with Deedee. Although Shahid is very conscious of his inferior position in British society, he is lost in his relationship with his white college teacher, Deedee, who in some way embodies some elements which arouse Shahid's creativity, leading to him rethinking his identity in other ways.

Deedee not only encourages Shahid to indulge in many pleasures, but is also very patient with him when he proposes a series of challenging questions against her authority. Their teacher-pupil relationship is not, however, confined to the classroom, since Deedee incites Shahid to think for himself and to discover truth for himself; for

instance, in her response to his challenging question on the preoccupation with pleasure and alcohol, Deedee encourages Shahid to question instead the dominating Islamic tradition defined by men:

Shahid shook his head. "You're slurring your words. Why are you always trying to make me take things?"

"Alcohol is one of the great pleasures."

"Is life just for pleasure, then?"

"What else is there?"

"I'm not sure. I know you're just trying to provoke me. But pleasure isn't enough, is it."

"It's a start."

"What about making the world better?"

She made a face. "Is that what you think Riaz does?" (*Album* 109)

In her relationship with Shahid, Deedee also functions as a teacher who, through sexual cross-dressing, makes him recognize that his entire conception of identity may be brought into question. In a scene in which Deedee persuades Shahid to engage in sexually-reversed role-playing with her, she makes him dress up as a woman and applies makeup to his face. By so doing, she tries to make him realize that identity can be merely camouflage, and that such identity can be constituted simply by dressing up. The particular significance of this scene is the way in which Kureishi sets it in contrast to another scene where Chad dresses Shahid up in a "white cotton salwar kamiz" (131). Kureishi himself comments on the contrast between these two scenes of dressing Shahid up: "Dressing up has a new fluidity. . . . Chad dresses Shahid up, he makes Shahid wear a salwar. . . . Shahid and Deedee dress up. Deedee becomes a guy who



wears makeup; Shahid becomes a woman. If you're a Muslim, you can't play with your identity in that way" (qtd. in Kaleta 140). From the act of dressing up and the comparison telling how he is put on different identities by different persons, Shaid eventually comes to learn how to recognize his identity.

At the end of the novel, Shahid and Deedee are ready for a new departure which promises that, despite their differences, they will eventually be able to celebrate their affiliation. By outlining Shahid's relationship with Riaz, which proves that insistence upon one authentic identity does not work, and by describing Shahid's relationship with Deedee, which asserts the possibility of identities being created, Kureishi presents a hybridity or "third-space," as Bhabha puts it, which proposes the possibility that identity is a flow, not fixed, but rather constituted in a negotiable relationship.

Although less satirical and more historic than *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* is also given an ending in which the protagonist is no longer troubled with any sense of an ongoing struggle to seek out his identity. Even though Shahid decides to search for something to believe in, a sense of belonging for Shahid is no longer an ambivalent issue. As Lee has put it, Karim has eventually found his home, his career, and more importantly, his sense of belonging from the post-imperial London (〈閱讀後帝國倫敦〉149). By questioning how anyone could "confine themselves to one system or creed" and why they should "feel they had to," Shahid asserts that there "was no

fixed self,” positively claiming that “several selves” would have “melted and mutated daily” (*Album* 274).

## Conclusion

Kureishi does not seek to redefine Englishness in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*; indeed, he presents a kind of social reality which is no longer an exclusively white society, but is instead characterized by hybridity. His depiction of social reality reveals an increasingly hybrid and multicultural Britain. Advocating a vivid evocation of a new way of being British, Kureishi notes that:

It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into what this “new way of being British” involves and how difficult it might be to attain. (“Rainbow” 38)

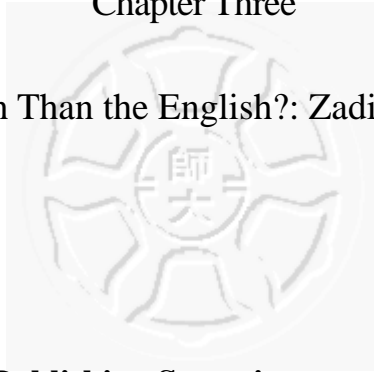
It is sufficiently clear that Kureishi writes *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* as devices to establish terms of a “new way of being British,” a less insular approach to defining British national identity and a more elastic way of perceiving diversity, change and interactions within society. If, as Kureishi asserts, the aim is no less than to define a “new way of being British,” then his novels on hybridity should lead to some recognition amongst his readers of a change from the monolithic notion of Englishness, inherently and exclusively white-centered, towards new ethnicities.

With these two novels, Kureishi not only illustrates the way in which his protagonists see themselves as Londoners, British, Indian, Asian and Muslim, but also, the way that they may ultimately choose to see themselves, as a new breed of Englishman.

As the next chapter unfolds, we see the theme of hybridity reappearing in Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth*. With its setting of a multiracial and multicultural England, *White Teeth* questions the authenticity of Englishness, as well as the significance of roots, by presenting Britain as a hybrid nation in which its peoples and cultures are not only mixed up, but also cross-pollinating.

## Chapter Three

### Who Is More English Than the English?: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*



#### **A Young, Black, British Publishing Sensation**

Britain has perennially sought to define herself and her character by defining others. Naturally enough, the country finds herself in great difficulty when presented with those who seem keen to resist definition. (Caryl Phillips, *New World Order* 284)<sup>1</sup>

Zadie Smith is celebrated as one of the most talented young British novelists of her generation. Her first novel, *White Teeth*, published in 2000, brought almost instantaneous worldwide critical acclaim. Her obvious skills, and her ability to deal with such diversified themes as multiculturalism, fundamentalism, postcolonialism, Englishness and hybridity, all within a 462-page baggy novel, have been lauded by reviewers ever since its publication.<sup>2</sup> The success of Smith's work is partially attributable to her own background; and indeed, she has drawn considerable attention from both the media and academics alike, with a review in *The Observer* noting, "She's Young, Black, British -

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<sup>1</sup> On 9 January 2000, Caryl Phillips wrote a review in *The Observer* on Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, entitled "Mixed and Matched." This review is reprinted in a collection of Caryl Phillips' essays entitled *A New World Order*. For more details on Phillips' views on how Smith writes about Britain as a "mongrel nation," see *New World Order* 283-287.

<sup>2</sup> *White Teeth* was first published by Hamish Hamilton (London) in 2000, and reprinted by Penguin Books (London) in 2001. Any reference of Smith's *White Teeth* in this dissertation refers to the 2001 Penguin edition.

and the First Publishing Sensation of the Millennium”.<sup>3</sup>

Zadie Smith was born in 1975 in Brent, North London, to a white British father and a Jamaican mother; however, she was not born with the given name Zadie, but instead, at the age of fourteen, she decided herself to change the name, from Sadie to Zadie, a name which seemed, to her, to be more exotic. What has grabbed most of the public attention is the prodigious talent which Smith obviously possesses. Whilst studying at Cambridge, the twenty-one-year-old Smith wrote a short story of just twenty-four pages, entitled “Mrs. Begum”; this work caught the attention of a literary agent and subsequently initiated a bidding war over the publication of *White Teeth*.

Smith published *White Teeth* at the age of only twenty-four, with the resultant almost instantaneous and enthusiastic response from the publishing market and the media leading to her being promoted as the new face and fresh voice of contemporary British literature. Smith’s mixed racial heritage, her extraordinary name and talent, and the instant fame which she has earned at an exceptionally early age has made her all the more intriguing and fascinating; thus, she also features in the 2003 *Granta* list of “Best Young British Novelists”.<sup>4</sup> As Maria Russo observes, “Besides her striking author

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<sup>3</sup> This was the title of the interview between Stephanie Merritt and Zadie Smith reported in *The Observer* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/jan/16/fiction.zadiesmith>).

<sup>4</sup> The first issue of *Granta*, which is devoted to selecting the “Best Young British Novelists,” appeared in 1983, with Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift and Martin Amis being amongst the first group of novelists named. The second issue of selecting “Best Young British Novelists,” which appeared in 1993, included novelists such as Caryl Phillips, Will Self, Kazuo Ishiguro and Hanif Kureishi. The third and latest issue, published in 2003, included ethnic writers such as Hari Kunzru, Monica Ali and Zadie Smith.

photo, her age is the thing about Zadie Smith people seem most intrigued by – especially people who write novels, or want to” (“Girl Wonder”).

Graham Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* offers an appropriate framework for use in explaining the extraordinary way in which Zadie Smith has managed to grab the attention of the public. The factors behind the way in which she was propelled into stardom can be interpreted as the process within which, with her ethnicity, family background, age and talent, she was domesticated as strange and exotic. Huggan defines such “exoticism” as “a particular mode of aesthetic perception” which “renders people, objects and places as strange, even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness, even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (13). If her achievement in the writing of *White Teeth* is not mentioned here, the way in which the media praises Smith, as an instant literary celebrity, is clearly an “exoticism” in Huggan’s notion of the definition. While there can be no denying Smith’s talent or uniqueness, the circumstances of her rapid rise to literary celebrity, in Huggan’s opinion, show that she is now regarded by the media, in both the UK and the US, as an “exotic spectacle.”

At the start of his interview with Zadie Smith, David Mehegan introduces her as “beauty and brilliance, talent, marriage to an acclaimed poet, financial success, and great good luck” (“Zadie Smith”). Since such “great good luck” is rendered as

extraordinary, Peter Childs observes that her immediate success makes Smith different from authors like “Nick Hornby and Helen Fielding” (Childs, *Contemporary* 202).

In light of the special attention paid to her background by the aforementioned critics and reviewers, it is obvious that Zadie Smith herself is acknowledged as an “exotic product” which has already been consumed massively by the global market. In Huggan’s words, the readership which has been drawn to Zadie Smith and her first novel is a feeding on the “exotic.” However, even if her background is seen as intriguingly exotic, Zadie Smith’s in-between experiences clearly require some attention in any attempt at analyzing her work.

As the child of a British father and Caribbean mother, Smith shares the same in-between experience as Hanif Kureishi; however, she rejects the notion that *White Teeth* is autobiographical novel and that the portraits of the characters appearing within it are drawn from her own experience. As she reveals in an interview, “*White Teeth* is not really based on personal family experience. . . . [W]hen you come from a mixed-race family, it makes you think a bit harder about inheritance and what’s passed on from generation to generation” (Merritt).

As her reflection upon her work and experiences suggests, Smith’s themes of inheritance are apparently developed throughout *White Teeth*. Although she rejects the suggestion of any close resemblances between her background and her work, Smith’s

keen sensitivity on the issue of inheritance, which results from her in-between life experiences, is truly reflected in *White Teeth*.

In terms of migration and identity, “in-between” identity can be seen as a situation in which people have a form of relationship with one country in which they do not live, and with another in which they are currently living. This is invariably characterized by the hyphenated description of the person, as in English-Jamaican, Zadie Smith, or by being referred to as a second- or third-generation descendant of parents who originated from another country, such as Andrea Levy, or as a person born in one country and then migrating to another, a prime example being Caryl Phillips.

Proposing a detailed exploration of the term “in-between,” Homi Bhabha suggests that the “in-between” space lies in “the realm of beyond.” Placing the emphasis on the ideas of “crossing” and “transit” in the “in-between” space, Bhabha urges the readers to “think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities”; moreover, Bhabha requires readers to “focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (*Location* 1). Similarly, John McLeod points out that the notions of “crossing” and “border” can facilitate an “in-between” subjectivity which enables us to consider “communal identity that departs from older ideas, such as the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ of the nation” (*Beginning* 218).

Thus, from McLeod’s perspective, Smith’s “in-between position” has an



“impartial perception of the world” which places her on a creative pedestal, and which enables her to produce “new, dynamic ways of thinking about identity which go beyond older static models, such as national identity and the notion of ‘rootedness’” (*Beginning* 216). Thus, positioned as she is at the “in-between” space, Zadie Smith is empowered to contest the cultural inheritance of England and the “in-between” positionality in response to English culture and tradition.

The primary aim of this final chapter is therefore to analyze the way in which Zadie Smith, with her “in-between” stance and multiple heritages, sets out to depict cultural differences, in-between experiences and hybridity in *White Teeth*, all of which question and challenge the notion of Englishness. Set in Willesden, North London, between 1975 and 1999, the narrative of *White Teeth* focuses on the intertwined relationship between three ethnically different families, the Iqbals (an immigrant family from Bangladesh), the Jones (an English working-class father, Jamaican mother and a mixed-race daughter) and the Chalfens (a white, middle-class English family). Thus, even in her first novel, Smith offers an extremely broad range of characters with diversified ethnicities.

Like Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Smith’s *White Teeth* is a novel which focuses on the issue of identity. Both Kureishi and Smith, through their London novels, question the ways in which “Englishness” can be defined.

Yet, Zadie Smith's novel, which more directly acknowledges multicultural Britain, presents a more complex and indeterminate question of "identity," with critical commentary on *White Teeth* having dealt, by and large, with Smith's notion of "happy multicultural land."

According to Dominic Head, "*White Teeth* is artfully constructed as the definitive representation of twentieth-century British multiculturalism" ("Zadie" 106), whilst Peter Childs views the phrase "happy multicultural land" as satirical, although he points out, in particular, that Smith's depiction of England as a happy multicultural land appears to be far too optimistic. According to Childs' observation, "Smith's narrative paints a generally optimistic view of multicultural Britain; one that largely directs its gaze away from issues of social difference between ethnic groups" (*Contemporary* 210).<sup>5</sup>

Childs' argument clearly sheds some light on the key issue of *White Teeth*; that is, the issue of mixed race relationships in Britain. However, rather than agreeing with the optimistic reading of Smith's perspective of multicultural England as a country in a mode of happiness, a stance which is evident in many other critics, in a review of *White Teeth*, Caryl Phillips argues that Smith presents England as a country of "helpless heterogeneity." In Phillips' view, Smith's "in-between" characters, its

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<sup>5</sup> In his comprehensive study of contemporary British novelists since the 1970s, Peter Childs devotes one chapter to Zadie Smith, where he fully engages with the themes and qualities of her novels. According to Childs, there is "a sophisticated dissection of society and culture in Smith's fiction that is beyond the scope of most other popular contemporary writers" (*Contemporary* 202).

“mongrelised mixtures” set out to redefine British identity.<sup>6</sup>

Considering Smith’s use of the phrase, “happy multicultural land,” as being ironic, Molly Thompson argues that *White Teeth* deliberately attempts to present the ambiguity which is contained within it. As Thompson refers to Bhabha’s notion of “in-between” and “third space,” she indicates that such “in-between” experience, as exemplified in the representation of the mixed family and cultures, challenges “the existence of a ‘happy multicultural land’” because the “in-between identities” connote transience, indeterminacy and “homelessness” (123).

The question therefore arises as to why Zadie Smith’s stance on multicultural England elicits such utterly opposing viewpoints. Smith herself once revealed in an interview that her first novel presented “a utopian view” of race relations: “It’s what it might be, and what it should be, and maybe what it will be”.<sup>7</sup> Although Smith’s own statement on race relations in Britain, as well as her depiction of this throughout *White Teeth*, may well lead to readers interpreting British reality quite optimistically, it is, nevertheless, very easy to overlook the multi-faceted interactions that occur between the different ethnicities presented in Smith’s narrative, and thus, to eventually jump to some conclusion that there is no real issue of “racism” in the UK.

If, like her peers, Monica Ali and Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith bears witness to the

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<sup>6</sup> For a further review on Smith’s *White Teeth*, see C. Phillips, *New World Order* 283-287.

<sup>7</sup> Zadie Smith’s interview with Sarah Lyall was entitled “A Good Start: An Interview with Zadie Smith” (*New York Times Review*, 30 April 2008).

everyday racial experiences that they and their parents were forced to endure in the multicultural metropolis, whilst also offering her distinctive version of contemporary Englishness, then the question must arise as to whether she fully intends to claim that contemporary Englishness is itself multicultural. Thus, if Smith considers that the England of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is a multicultural land, how does she present the complexity of the multicultural English experience?

Through the comically satirical modes and tones in her representation of the multicultural social landscape of England, Smith attempts to deal with the raptures and ruptures of the multi-ethnic and multicultural state, a key theme on the definition of Englishness that prevails throughout the novel. As Smith develops the setting of the novel in late-twentieth century England, a period during which has witnessed the merging of different ethnicities making up contemporary British social life, as compared to the depiction of the notion of Englishness by Sam Selvon or Hanif Kureishi, Smith's is a far more contemporary one.

Nick Bentley argues that *White Teeth*, presents “a version of competing contemporary Englishness,” which “emphasizes and addresses the multicultural make up of late-twentieth/early twenty-first century England” (“Rewriting” 495).<sup>8</sup> Yet, in

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<sup>8</sup> In comparing Julian Barnes' 1998 novel *England, England* with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Nick Bentley focuses on their representation of Englishness; the former, Bentley argues, does not reveal the debate between Englishness and multiculturalism whilst the latter “engages more openly with the debates around Englishness and multiculturalism and attempts to offer a reframed model of national identity.” For further comparisons between the two novels, see Bentley, “Rewriting” 483.

contemporary England, with its ethnic diversity, questions relating to whether “quintessential Englishness” actually exists clearly require further debate. Such debate prevails throughout *White Teeth*, with Smith approaching this by presenting the issue of “identity” as the main theme of the novel.

Whilst the focus on identity cannot be overlooked, the inter-generational tensions and cultural conflicts within and between its protagonists are also the main discussion in this chapter. In addition to exploring the “identity” and “belonging” of the migrant characters in *White Teeth*, this chapter will also attempt to shed some light on the issue of “roots” and “routes” which Smith implies throughout the novel. Smith’s novel is divided into four sections, each containing five chapters; each of these begins with an epigraph and continues with a focus on the life of a single character over two different years. What is special about this novel, however, is the continual reference to teeth as the metaphor linking the narrative structure throughout the entire novel.

Amongst the various critical comments on Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, few focus on any analysis of why she refers to the image of teeth so many times throughout the novel. Whilst most critics analyze her work through the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies, Molly Thompson places particular emphasis on the observation of Smith’s obvious preoccupation with teeth and hair. According to Thompson, teeth are symbolic because they imply the meaning of roots:

Because teeth have roots, Smith's utilisation of this imagery in the book's title is significant and immediately indicates that teeth are to be a major preoccupation of the text. Indeed many chapter headings are associated with this theme (for example, "Teething Trouble," "Canines: The Ripping Teeth" and "Molar"), and there are references to teeth in several vignette scenes. The trope of white teeth, however, ironically signals a semantic paradox. Although all racial types have white (ish!) teeth, racist discourse has stereotyped – people of African and Caribbean descent using the image as a potent essentialist marker of Blackness as well as an identifier of difference. (124)

In addition to her observation that the reference to white teeth is an essential contrasting marker of blackness, Thompson also makes it clear that a set of white teeth can be bought or modified, such that the essential assumptions inscribed to teeth can also be deconstructed. Thompson's analysis admittedly illuminates the key implications of teeth, indicating the importance of the chapter headings, all of which are concerned with teeth and therefore connected to the theme; however, she does not explicitly describe why special chapter heading contribute to a central issue which centers solely on the identity of an individual character and of the problem of "belonging."

Questions arise for example, as to the reasons why Smith gives a chapter heading of "root canals" to the story about Alfred Archibald Jones, Samad Miah Iqbal, Mangal Pande and Hortense Bowden, "Canines" to the story of the Chalfens, and the heading "Molars" to Samad's twin sons and Irie. How, and in what ways, does such dental terminology as "canines," "molar" or "root canal" contribute to the themes in *White Teeth*? By using such dental parlance, what does Smith attempt to tell the reader?

This final chapter follows the focus of Molly Thompson on the image of teeth, and argues that the central theme of the novel, that of the identity of migrants in England and their children, is represented throughout the novel through the utilization of analogies relating to teeth.

### **False Teeth, Fake Identity**

Clara was from somewhere. She had roots. More specifically, she was from Lambeth (via Jamaica) and she was connected, through tacit adolescent agreement, to one Ryan Topps. Because before Clara was beautiful she was ugly. (Smith 27)

We are left in no doubt, from the very opening chapter, that *White Teeth* is extremely multicultural and multi-ethnic; the first chapter opens very comically with the futile suicide attempt of Alfred Archibald, a white, working class Second World War veteran who has just been divorced by his violet-eyed Italian wife. As an indecisive and tentative person who never makes a decision without tossing a coin, Archie again flips a coin to decide on the nature of his death. Although the result of the coin flipping does indicate that there is a chance that he will kill himself, his suicide attempt is thwarted by Mo Hussein-Ishmael, a Pakistani Muslim immigrant who runs a butcher's shop in North London: "We're not licensed for suicides around here. This place halal. Kosher, understand?" (Smith 7)

The English-Pakistani butcher's words sound to Archie like a sort of revelation,

so instead of ending his life, he goes to an “End of the World” party where he meets the nineteen-year-old Jamaican immigrant girl, Clara, whom he subsequently marries just six weeks later.<sup>9</sup> His life is restored when he meets Clara who is “beautiful in all senses except, maybe, by virtue of being black,” and smiles with “a complete lack of teeth in the top of her mouth” (24). It is in this first accidental encounter between Clara and Archie that Zadie Smith evokes the image of teeth as a particularly valuable metaphor.

Clara’s missing teeth epitomize the central issues of *White Teeth* – identity and roots. If the faces of all racial people are covered whilst their mouths remain open with teeth shown, it is not so easy to identify whether the whitest teeth belong to the black or the white man. Conversely, however, if people of all races were to stand and show a grin, in comparative terms, the teeth on the black faces would appear to be whiter. As Thompson notes, given the colour contrast effect, a black’s teeth seem relatively whiter, so white teeth on a black face represents “a potent essentialist marker of Blackness” and “an identifier of difference” (124).

What is striking about the identity given to the black man is the contrast; not only the extreme contrast of white teeth against black skin, but the contrasting differences which distinguish the black man from the white man. As Frantz Fanon argues, “for not

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<sup>9</sup> As Smith herself told Amazon UK, her writing of *White Teeth* was inspired by her father, with the first encounter between her parents in the party turning out to be the scene in the novel where Archie meets Clara. Refer to Farry (2005) for the discussion with Amazon UK on Smith’s novel.



only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (110).

Fanon’s argument indicates that there is more than just the power relationship between black and white. In similar manner, Stuart Hall points out that the identity of the black is “constructed historically, culturally, politically” rather than “stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee” (“New Ethnicities” 446).

Clara Bowden’s blackness is constructed politically, so when she gets married to Archie, the only wedding guests are “two Indians” (actually two Pakistanis), Archie’s war pal, Samad Iqbal, and his wife, Alsana. Archie’s white boss and other family members had politely declined the invitation to the wedding; the inter-racial marriage between Clara and Archie is therefore not openly acknowledged.

References to Clara Bowden’s teeth, signified as a marker of her black identity, are also employed by Zadie Smith as a means of describing the issue of roots. Clara’s missing teeth symbolize a recurring theme throughout the remainder of the novel, questioning how roots, especially the roots of the migrants, can be reconstructed in a diaspora community. When nineteen-year-old Clara loses her upper teeth in a scooter rider with Ryan Topps, who shares the same outcast experience with Clara in high school, she is deemed by Ryan as the unsaved one, the forsaken one: “Likewise, when Clara fell, knocking the teeth out of the top of her mouth, while Ryan stood up without a scratch, Ryan knew it was because God had chosen Ryan as one of the saved and

Clara as one of the unsaved.” (44)

Ryan’s enlightenment leads to his conversion to a Jehovah’s Witness, to which Clara’s mother, Hortense Bowden, faithfully devotes her whole life; meanwhile, Clara turns her back on Jehovah’s Witnesses and her mother, and instead, chooses Archie, imagined by the desperate Clara as her savior. “By February 1975, Clara had deserted the church and all its biblical literalism for Archibald Jones” (46).

For Clara, the loss of her upper teeth also meant losing her faith, her connection with her strong-headed Jamaican mother. According to the analysis of identity and family resemblances undertaken by Jill Kiecolt and Anna LoMascolo, any individual may “perceive resemblances to their parents on any sort of identity; physical appearance (tall), mannerisms (gestures), personality or character traits (honest, hard-working), social types of persons (intellectual), role identities (Presbyterian ministers) or even socio-demographic (African-American)” (Kiecolt and LoMascolo 27). With her front teeth missing, the physical characteristics identifying Clara, both in terms of her roots and the resemblance to her parents, are somewhat shrunken.

Thus, Clara’s teething problem leads not only to the loss of her roots but to her engagement with a brand new identity – “Englishness.” In the wedding scene when the bride Clara emerges together with Archie and “a perfect set of false teeth” (Smith 36), this indicates that teeth can be remodeled; thus, one’s identity can also be replaced. As

the critic Esra Mirze observed, Clara turns to Archie in the hope that she will be able “to embrace secular Englishness as an antidote to religious fanaticism” (188). However, since Clara can now wear false teeth, she can choose not to disclose the authenticity of her teeth/roots to others. The set of false teeth for Clara is, thus, a secret. Not only is it a secret to Clara, but it is employed as a metaphor of hidden secrets throughout the remainder of the novel.

Through her portrayal of Clara Bowden, with her set of false teeth, Zadie Smith seems to assert an absence of biological facts in making distinctions of any racial difference. Smith does not choose skin colour – the “primary sign of racial difference and a frequent target of racialising characteristics”<sup>10</sup> – as evidence of racial difference that gives away Clara Bowden’s identity; instead, she cunningly uses a set of buck teeth to describe Clara, as well as Irie, Clara’s daughter. Through Smith’s portrayal, Irie is described in her adolescence as “not a pretty child”; as Smith writes, “she had got her genes mixed up, Archie’s nose with Clara’s awful buckteeth” (149).

It is in the chapter entitled “the Miseducation of Irie Jones” that Smith again deals with the issue of identity, and yet the biological factor which troubles Irie Jones is not her teeth, or her skin colour, but instead, her hair. Like Faith Jackson in Andrea Levy’s

*Fruit of the Lemon*, as a black woman struggling for her identity in white British

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<sup>10</sup> Considering the ways in which race and ethnicity are used to decide “the norms and limits of the nation’s imagined community,” John McLeod points out that theories of racial difference usually take “skin colour” as the “primary sign of racial difference and frequent target of racialising discourses” (*Beginning* 110).

society, Irie Jones also has a problem with looking into a mirror.<sup>11</sup> However, from the mirror that is England, what Irie sees is a non-reflection. Instead of seeing herself as an English person, she finds her Jamaican frame “loaded with pineapples, mangoes and guavas” (Smith 265). Irie Jones also has the same battle as Faith; that is, the desire to define herself through the looking glass.

Discussing the character of Irie in an interview with Kathleen O’Grady, Zadie Smith herself admits that Irie gets to the centre of the book, but that it is “not really about her,” but instead, about “a certain idea of indeterminacy” and about “the centre always being slightly displaced, and there are a whole myriad of reasons for that” (O’Grady 107). Thus, the novel is not merely about the construction of Irie’s identity; it is more about the way in which her identity is constructed in relation to that of her parents’ generation or her childhood mates, Magid and Millat Iqbal, and the Chalfens. Irie’s sense of self, as Smith explains in the interview, has always been displaced, and indeed, there are many reasons for this displaced self-identity.

Being the child of a white English working-class father and a Jamaican mother, Irie has inherited mixed physical features; however, as a young girl with a troubled period of pubescence, Irie has a rather diffused identity, essentially because she lacks

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<sup>11</sup> Andrea Levy’s third novel, *Fruit of the Lemon* tells the story of Faith Jackson, with one part of the novel describing Faith’s desire to evade seeing herself as black: “A black girl lying in a bed. I covered the mirror with a bath towel. I didn’t want to be black any more. I just wanted to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. *Voilà!* I was no longer black” (160).

any clear and defined sense of her identity. During her pubescence, like most other teens, Irie Jones occupies herself more with school or with her friends than with her family. The family of young Irie exists only as the providence of her mixed racial heritage and the providers of a house to live in, but her personal relationships with Magid and Millat, who she grows up with, are much more significant; they have a “shared history” of growing up as the children of immigrants.

Being very much aware of the way that Irie suffers as a result of following Millat, but receiving no attention from him, Alsana’s niece-of-shame, Neena, reminds Irie that she shares too much history with Millat, and as a result, knows him very well; thus, these are good reasons why Millat would want to shun her. However, what Irie imagines her self-image to be in Millat’s eyes is an Irie who is fat and ugly, “with an Afro” (Smith 284). Irie therefore sets out to change her hairstyle in the hope that Millat will look at her and like what he sees. From the heading of this chapter, “the Miseducation of Irie Jones,” which tells of the satirical episode of Irie changing her hairstyle for Millat, one can almost hear the critical voice of the author, Zadie Smith, chiding Irie’s obsession with her false identity.

As a result of her predisposition with following Millat’s every movement and her fixation with his flirtation with the girls, Irie notices that the “nice oboe-playing, long skirted middle-class girls” seem to adore the lady-killer Millat, and that these girls

were “hair-flicking” and “fugue-singing” (Smith 269). With her racially mixed background, Irie feels desperately out of place growing up with wiry hair and a “full figure” in a nation full of thin white girls with straight hair. Irie proclaims her wish for “straight, straight, long, black, sleek, flickable, tossable, shakable, touchable, finger-through-able, wind-blowable hair” (273). For Irie, straightened hair is beautiful.

Analyzing this episode involving Irie changing her hairstyle, Thompson points out that her hair, like Clara Jones’ gapped teeth, has “roots” which are determined “by its genetic composition that is ‘rooted’ in one’s ancestral heritage” (126). Thus, she holds the view that Irie’s decision to change her “Afro” hairstyle is a political act, essentially because she desires to minimize her African characteristics and to make herself capable of fulfilling the “norms” of white ideological values.

Kobena Mercer also argues that black hairstyles are political, essentially because they connote racism and negative meanings:

Alternatively, I suggest that, when hairstyling is critically evaluated as an aesthetic practice inscribed in everyday life, *all* black hairstyles are political in that they each articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of ethnic signifier with both social and symbolic meaning and significance. With its organizing principles of biological determinism, racism first politicized our hair by burdening it with a range of negative social and psychological meanings. (*Jungle* 104)

Black hairstyles, as Mercer notes, have been invested with negative social and psychological meanings as a result of the white ideology dominating the aesthetic

standard, such that white people's hairstyles are accepted as the norm, while non-white people's hairstyles, such as Dreadlocks, are devalued, essentially by being regarded as ugly. Thus, in Mercer's opinion, Michael Jackson's altered image, achieved by engaging in skin-bleaching cosmetics and curly-perm hairstyle is a way of "becoming white" – a "deracializing sell-out" and a "morbid symptom of a psychologically mutilated black consciousness" (*Jungle* 98).

Irie's wish to change her Afro hairstyle and her decision to have "flickable" hair similarly resemble Mercer's idea of a "diseased state of black consciousness" (*Jungle* 97). The act of straightening her hair is, in Mercer's view, a cultural practice that she chooses to follow; however, such cultural practices demonstrate a willingness to kowtow to the aesthetic white-biased standard, which regulates that white hairstyles have a naturally privileged position over black hairstyles. Thus, as Thompson suggests, Irie Jones is found to be inhabiting "a body that is physiologically rooted in two places, 'belonging' to both England and Jamaica in a sense" such that she experiences "a kind of corporeal nomadism or not-at-homeness in her skin" (127).

As in many other parts of the novel where Zadie Smith demonstrates her penchant for presenting stories of false identities or false histories, Irie Jones' recognition of her negative body image is also depicted as being false, with the end result being that her attempt to straighten her hair turns out to be a total, abject failure. Smith concludes this

episode with a playful and satirical result, with Irie's hair horribly damaged as a result of her long ordeal at the hair salon. Irie is therefore forced to accept some poor Pakistani hair woven into her own. In such a way, Zadie Smith is telling readers that Irie's pursuit of white-bias aesthetics is due to mis-education and that her effort to define her identity by taking what she knows about the British idea of beauty is mistaken. Irie's attempt to fight her genes has been unsuccessful. Irie thinks of England as "a giant mirror" through which she sees "no reflection," such a mirror, to Irie, cannot reflect a person like her. "There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land" (Smith 266).

An artificial identity has been cast upon both Clara Bowden and her daughter Irie; since Clara now has her false teeth, and Irie is forced to wear a wig. The way in which the novel articulates the identity of the second- or third-generation immigrant emerges with a rejection of their inheritance as a way of fighting against their genes. Just as missing teeth can be replaced by false teeth, so Afro-textured hair can either be straightened or replaced by a wig; however, their roots, which reveal their biological traits, such as race, ethnicity or inheritance from their families, are not easily replaced.

What lies behind Clara's and Irie's intentions in taking on some sort of artificial identity is a gesture of rejection that they, in Debbie Weekes' viewpoint, "wish to move away from the position of other" As Weekes continues, "Black people who do so wish



to redefine themselves as subject in order to exert some control over their lives” (123).

It is clear, in the case of Irie in particular, that she refuses to be considered unattractive just because of the texture of her hair; however, her identity crisis develops more from her specific wish to redefine herself as a subject.

Thus, when reading a Shakespeare sonnet at school, Irie interprets the allusion to the “dark lady” as a literary reference to a black woman.<sup>12</sup> Irie’s reading of the sonnet represents her desire to move from the object to subject, to define reality not only for the dark lady in Shakespeare’s sonnet, but also for herself. Such movement resembles the proposition which bell hooks offers:

As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history ... as objects, one’s reality is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one’s history named only in ways that define one’s relationship to those who are subject. (*Talking* 42)

Yet, Irie’s attempt to redefine her own reality fails when her exertion is gently denied by her teacher and laughed at by her classmates; “Irie reddened. She had thought, just then, that she had seen something like a reflection, but it was receding” (Smith 272). For Irie, a girl in her puberty, lacking in self-confidence and extremely self-critical, any dissent in public would make her attempts at self-assertion even more problematic. Nevertheless, she will ultimately turn to re-examine her identity and to

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<sup>12</sup> The discussion in class in which Irie and her classmates take part, follows the lines of Shakespeare, citing “For since each hand hath put on nature’s power, Fairing the foul with art’s face borrow’d face”; this is taken from Shakespeare’s sonnet number 127. Irie’s teacher, Mrs. Roody, later attempts to oppose Irie’s claim by citing another of Shakespeare’s sonnets, number 131, saying “In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds.” See Smith 225.

attempt to move from object to subject when, in the later part of the novel, her close association with the Chalfens once again causes her to dwell on the notion of identity, and further, on the notion of “Englishness.”

### **Problems with the Third Molars**

Another depiction of the metaphor of teeth in *White Teeth* is clearly portrayed in the chapter entitled “Molars,” which turns out to be one of the most amusing, and yet, exotic chapters. This chapter is included in the second section of the novel entitled “Samad 1984, 1857,” a section which starts with a quote from Norman Tebbit: “The cricket test – which side do they cheer for? . . . Are you still looking back to where you came from or where you are?” (123) The epigraph of Tebbit’s infamous speech is an essential element of the section on “Samad 1984, 1857,” and particularly of the chapter “Molars,” which will be discussed later.

According to Norman Tebbit, too many Asian British fail an essentially fundamental test of loyalty – by cheering for India during the cricket game between India and Britain. His “cricket test,” in other words, is used to measure whether migrants have been assimilated to Britain.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Zadie Smith takes on Norman Tebbit’s infamous speech as the epitaph of the section narrating “Samad 1984, 1857,”

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<sup>13</sup> Brah refers to the “cricket test,” noting that: “when a British politician, such as Norman Tebbit, the former Conservative Cabinet Minister, argues that young British Asians cannot feel allegiance to Britain if they support a visiting cricket team from India or Pakistan, his ‘cricket test’ is more a reflection of the politics of ‘race’ in Britain than an indicator of British Asian’s subjective sense of their own Britishness” (94).

with the aim of depicting whether Samad, the first-generation migrant to Britain, will be able to pass “the cricket test,” a test which will ultimately measure his loyalty to either Britain or Pakistan. This quote unequivocally indicates the first-generation migrant’s diasporic position and dilemma.

In light of Avtar Brah’s observation on the relationship of first generation migrants to their place of migration, Samad has been troubled by “memories of what was recently left behind” and by “the experiences of disruption and displacement” as he tries to “form new social networks” (Brah 194). Samad Iqbal, a Bangladeshi Muslim, migrates to England in 1973, as a newlywed, accompanied by his wife Alsana. He identifies himself as an Englishman based upon his experience of fighting for the British in the Second World War, yet he knows quite well that his racial identity will not lead to him being accepted by the English:

Blackness. I’m a cripple, Jones. And my faith is crippled, do you understand? I’m fit for nothing now, not even Allah, who is all powerful in his mercy. What am I going to do, after this war is over, this war that is already over – what am I going to do? Go to Bengal? Or to Delhi? Who would have such an Englishman there? To England? Who would have such an Indian? (Smith 112)

Samad Iqbal’s dilemma is similar to that of the Caribbean soldiers who were recruited to fight for Britain in the Second World War. They considered themselves changed because of their patriarchal duty fighting for their “motherland.” Although Samad feels himself more superior with a university degree from Delhi and with his

experience of fighting for the British in the Second World War, he cannot find a proper job for himself, save for accepting the offer of working in his cousin's Indian restaurant. "He did leave the restaurant, Samad remembered vaguely, for a short time in 1979 to start up a security firm, but 'nobody wanted to hire Paki bouncers' and he had come back, a little less aggressive, a little more despairing, like a broken horse" (142).

Samad has long been troubled by the questions "where is my place?" and "where do I belong?" as he continues with his struggle to find some sense of direction and to determine his position within British society. Samad's anguish of "unbelonging" eventually leads to him devoting himself to the "imagined homeland" which he has left behind. Relating back to Salman Rushdie's conception of "imaginary homeland," we see Samad Iqbal, as a migrant, similarly suffering from his "physical alienation from India," so his images of India are invariably "invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (*Imaginary* 10).

In his attempts to provide an in-depth explanation of Rushdie's idea of "imaginary homeland," John McLeod notes that under this sort of formation, home becomes "primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past" (*Beginning* 211). Thus, homeland for diasporic immigrants is seen as an idea of mentally-constructed home. As Brah observes, home

is “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (192). In the case of Samad Iqbal, his image of Bangladesh, his “home,” is constructed as a place where his Allah dwells, a place to which his spirit goes.

Both Allah and Bangladesh represent Samad’s imaginary homeland, with the idea of such imaginary homeland, or vision of Bangladesh, being crucial to the examination of Samad Iqbal’s “schizophrenic existence” in British society in the narrative focus of the section on “Samad 1984, 1857.” Samad is like the first-generation diasporic immigrants in Britain, like Anwar and Haroon in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, who ultimately choose Britain over India, but who continue to think of India or Bangladesh as their imaginary homeland. Yet, Samad is different. His relationship with Bangladesh is depicted by Smith as more of a purely spiritual one in which Bangladesh as his homeland is constructed solely as a source of religion and culture. According to Amitava Kumar, for Samad, Bangladesh is an imaginary homeland “that is everything the inhospitable West is not,” and it therefore remains “the space of wholesome purity” (A. Kumar 215).

People are inevitably prone to different temptations and are invariably beset by their own sins and feelings of guilt; and indeed, Samad Iqbal is no exception. The relationship between Samad and his homeland is not premised on his return to the homeland; nor does he maintain Muslim religious practices in his adopted country. The

complexity of Samad Iqbal's ambiguous identity becomes even more convoluted when he plans for the future of his twin sons. Samad's problem lies in his contradictory conflict, which, on the one hand has him fearing that the British culture and education will poison the minds of his sons and lead them astray, whilst on the other hand, sees him vulnerable to the temptations of alcohol and his twin sons' music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, a red-haired young English woman.

Thus, the chapter in *White Teeth* entitled "The Temptation of Samad Iqbal" provides the narrative on Samad's conflicting desires. Upon hearing that his son Magid wishes to participate in the Harvest Festival – a festival which the headmistress in Magid's school asserts celebrates "religious diversity," but which is denied by Samad at a school governor's meeting – Samad becomes furious and chides Magid's wish to identify with western culture and tradition:

Samad blew his top. "Whose tradition?" he bellowed, as a tearful Magid began to scribble frantically once more. "Dammit, you are a Muslim, not a wood sprite! I told you the condition under which you would be allowed. You come with me on hajj. If I am to touch that black stone before I die I will do it with my eldest son by my side." (Smith 152)

Samad's greatest fear is clearly that his sons will lose their religious identity as Muslims, and accordingly, suffer moral corruption; however, such fear that either Magid or Millat might be contaminated by English culture is not without good reason. At the age of nine, Magid already senses that he is different from the rest of society.

Like Irie, he wishes to be the same as his white English classmates, and to merge with them. Thus, in a futile attempt to assimilate himself into English culture, he engages in such pretence by calling himself Mark Smith in front of his white peers. Magid's rejection of both his ethnic identity and his parents' culture bring much grief to his parents; yet young Millat is no better than Magid. To Samad's dismay, Millat naïvely tells his schoolteacher and his parents that he continues to learn western culture from listening to the songs of Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jackson (Smith 156).

Nevertheless, Samad himself is soon to break his vow with Allah, forgetting all of the deals that he has made with the prophet, when his gaze begins to settle upon the red-haired Poppy Burt-Jones. As Claire Squires observes, Samad "swings between the poles of faith and secularization, between absolutism and compromise, between rejecting and falling prey to temptation" (30). Thus, the metaphor of "teeth" appears once again in the scene in which Samad is caught between his desire for Poppy Burt-Jones and his fear for his twin sons, who, he considers, may be corrupted by their English education.

It is in the chapter entitled "Molars" that Zadie Smith once again uses teeth to narrate the migrants problem of "identity." At the very point where Samad cannot control his desire for Burt-Jones, at their date in Roundwood Park, where he makes his first attempt to kiss her, he suddenly finds his sons waving and smiling to him, with

“their white teeth biting into two waxy apples” (182). With this blatant allusion to the fairy tale, *Snow White*, Zadie Smith seems to symbolically cast Burt-Jones in the role of the calculating evil stepmother, whilst depicting Samad’s twin sons biting into two waxy and poisonous apples, obviously containing something of which Samad has a real dread.

For Samad, the poison contained within the apples is “Englishness,” a poison which will ultimately lead to his twin sons losing all memories of their own culture. Thus, Samad begins to think of the English culture as a deadly poisoning influence on his children, and so, before Magid and Millat become inextricably drawn to it, Samad decides that he must send one of his two sons back to Bangladesh, his homeland, which, in his view, can offer this son a proper education.

Samad’s painful decision is indicative of the crucial message which Zadie Smith attempts to convey to readers in the chapter “Molars.” It is in this chapter that the old white veteran, whom Irie, Magid and Millat go to visit, informs them of the importance of the third molars.

[W]hile you’re still young, the important matter is the third molars. They are more commonly referred to as the wisdom teeth, I believe. You simply must deal with the third molars before anything else. That was my downfall. You won’t have them yet, but my great-grandchildren are just feeling them now. The problem with third molars is one is never sure whether one’s mouth will be quite large enough to accommodate them. They are the only part of the body that a man must grow into. He must be a big enough man for these teeth, do you see? Because if not – oh dear me, they grow crooked or any



which way, or refuse to grow at all. They stay locked up there with the bone – an impaction, I believe, is the term – and terrible, terrible infection ensues. (Smith 173)

As a result of the old veteran's advice, the reader is unlikely to forget that the molar is used to grind food, and that the third molar is easily infected. In a sense, therefore, it seems that Smith's intention here is to use the analogy of the crucial importance of the third molar to relate the story of Samad's urgent wish to send his son back to Bangladesh. In other words, Samad has to send Magid back before he has his third molar and is thus old enough to grind the food, or, as it were, digest the knowledge. Samad's concerns and fear on the issue of their children's education comes to the fore as he argues with Archie:

Well, take Alsana's sisters – all their children are nothing but trouble. They won't go to mosque, they don't pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption. Corruption! (190)

Corruption turns out to be "Samad's word for cultural diversification" (Childs, *Contemporary* 209), but in order to resist the temptations leading to such corruption, Samad has to take action. Smith borrows here from the mythical allusion of "Odysseus and the Sirens" to describe Samad's conflicting encounter with temptation. Samad is portrayed as the mythic figure, Odysseus, who is so brave as to listen to the songs of the Sirens, luring all who hear them to temptation, whilst he does his utmost to lead his sons

away from the Sirens, in the same way that Odysseus waxes his crews' ears:

Roots were what saved, the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning men, to Save Their Souls. And the further Samad himself floated out to the sea, pulled down to the depths by a siren named Poppy Burt-Jones, the more determined he became to create for his sons roots on shore, deep roots that no storm or gale could displace. (Smith 193)

Samad's conflict is fully revealed when we find his own conduct contradicting that which he demands of his twin sons. Whilst constantly fearing and resisting the corruption of his children at the hands of Western culture, he helplessly surrenders himself to the temptations of the West. Thus, the juxtaposition of his own conduct and his insistence on the "appropriate" education of his twin sons renders him "schizophrenic."

The comedy and irony which Smith expertly interweaves into this character transformation operate vividly through the mockery of Samad's careful scheme. In accordance with Samad's steadfast ambitions for the future of his twin sons, whilst Millat is required to remain in Britain, Magid is sent back to Bangladesh, ostensibly as a means of keeping him away from the corruption of Western culture, but also to enable him to assimilate Eastern wisdom.

It is, however, clear that Alsana holds a different view towards the education of their twin sons than that held by her husband, Samad. Whilst Samad is incredibly implacable when discussing their sons' acculturation, Alsana, on the other hand, seems to be more open-minded and sensible. "Let go, Samad Miah. Let the boy go. He is

second generation – he was born here – naturally he will do things differently. You can't plan everything. After all, what is so awful – so he's not training to be an Alim, but he's educated, he's clean!" (289)

Alsana's plea ultimately proves to be very profound, when Magid, the elder twin by all of two minutes, returns to England after eight years of absence. Much to Samad's shock and disappointment, on his return from Bangladesh, Magid seems more English than the English, with Millat, raised in England, appearing to be more Muslim than Magid. This result is the exact opposite of what Samad had anticipated. As Mirze puts it, both Samad and Magid are in exile; "the former is not at home in England during his early arrival, while the latter is not at home in Bangladesh".<sup>14</sup>

Under Smith's portrayal, amongst all of the characters, Samad is the funny and amusing one, and yet, the most pathetic. His character comes across as most pathetic when considering his expectations of his twin sons. Samad, is equally disappointed by Magid and Millat; "The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white-suited silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is a fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. I sometimes wonder why I bother" (407).

As a first-generation migrant to Britain, with another "homeland" culture always looming over him, Samad is continually troubled by his sense of belonging, of finding

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<sup>14</sup> As Esra Mirze observes, "What Samad does not understand, however, is that Magid is not at home in Bangladesh, but rather has been sent into exile, just as out of touch with the new realities forced upon him as Samad was when he arrived in England" (194).

his place in his adopted country, and yet, his sense of “unbelonging” is further aggravated when he finds that his sons have even greater problems with their identity.

Samad painfully confides in Irie:

Who would want to stay? Cold, wet, miserable; terrible food, dreadful newspapers - who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. Like you are an animal finally housebroken. Who would want to stay? But you have made a devil's pact ... it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere. (407)

As Dawson comments, *White Teeth* “satirizes Samad’s belief in cultural determinism” (164). Samad might well have expected that one of his sons would learn Islamic doctrine and become a proper Muslim; yet, the end result is exactly the opposite of his expectations. Instead of Magid, Millat has been cultivated to take on Islamic piety through fervent practice, in Britain of all places. As Jane Lowe observes, Samad’s manipulation of his twins’ future indicates a mistake, in that he “misreads the global current of politics that blows the wind of change and continuity in the most unpredictable directions” (170).

Samad’s wish to control his twin sons’ future has failed. With his futile attempts at moulding his sons, Samad represents what the old white veteran related to Irie, Magid and Millat, the problem with the third molars. As one is never sure whether one’s mouth will be quite large enough to accommodate the third molars, so Samad can never be certain whether the cultures and identities he prepares his sons for

assimilation into will be sufficient to accommodate them. Throughout her references to the “third molars,” Smith is apparently developing another metaphor of teeth. In writing about the problems of identity with which Samad Iqbal and his sons must learn to cope, Smith uses the wisdom teeth as the metaphor of identity. In light of the old veteran’s words, as wisdom teeth are passed down by the father, so Samad’s identity is passed down to his sons.

### **Birds with Teeth**

Continuing with the metaphor of teeth and the theme of identity, Smith uses yet another, somewhat different, approach when dealing with the sense of “quintessential Englishness.” Smith’s exploration of Englishness is exemplified by her portrayal of the Chalfens, a scientifically oriented family, who usually prefer to explain their success as a result of “having good genes.”

Smith first introduces Marcus and Joyce Chalfen as “an aging hippie couple both dressed in pseudo-Indian garb” at a school parent-governor meeting (131). The Chalfens lead a middle-class life; Marcus is a scientist who works on genetic experiments, whilst Joyce is a horticulturalist who applies her husband’s theory to flowers. They ultimately represent something which neither Irie nor Millat can find from their own families. As required by the headmaster, Millat and Irie have to go to the Chalfens’ house and join Joshua Chalfen in a two-hour after-school study group

twice a week. Thinking of this as a really interesting idea, the headmaster says, “This way Joshua’s strengths can be shared equally among you, and the two of you can go to a stable environment” (303).

It is quite apparent that, as compared to the Chalfens, the link which the headmaster makes with both the Iqbals and the Jones is their poverty and unstable social position; thus, it is through offering this opportunity to Millat and Irie that they can become acquainted with a middle-class family, and consequently gain a sense of the gap that exists in their social class. Yet, Irie’s first impression of the Chalfens differs considerably from that of Millat; “Where Irie saw culture, refinement, class, intellect, Millat saw money, lazy, money, money that was just hanging around this family not doing anything in particular, money in need of a good cause that might as well be him” (322).

The more that Irie and Millat get together with the Chalfens, the more their lives are caught up in this way. This technique of contrast is exploited particularly well by Smith in *White Teeth*: the assimilated Alsana acts in direct comparison to the implacable Samad; the atheistic Clara confronts her mother Hortense, a fanatic Jehovah’s Witness; Magid embraces secular Englishness whilst Millat joins a militant Islamic group. Yet the most striking example is the comparison made between the Chalfens and the other two families, the Iqbals and the Jones. The Chalfens appear to

be a family of perfect middle-class rationalists with perfect genes. They are very aware of their family tree, and Irie is very much in awe of this:

The differences between the Chalfens and the Jones/Bowdens were immediately plain. For starters, in the Chalfen family everybody seemed to have a normal number of children. More to the point, everybody knew whose children were whose. The men lived longer than the women. The marriages were singular and long lasting. Dates of birth and death were concrete. And the Chalfens actually knew who they were in 1675. (337)

Dominic Head sees the Chalfens as “embody[ing] a normative model of genetic health and stability”; however, they lead a life of boredom because they have no friends and only engage in interaction with their extended family members. Thus, Head concludes, “their boredom that results from this enclosed perfection, with the family members seeming like ‘clones of each other’ ” (“Zadie” 113).

With their regular visits from Irie and Millat, the Chalfens now have a new focus and no longer feel quite so bored. However, they begin to interfere in the lives of both children, firstly by making them feel inadequate or inferior, and then by assuring them that the Chalfens are always ready to offer them whatever they need. For instance, Joyce Marcus adores Millat and continually provides him with money to hold a KEVIN meeting,<sup>15</sup> or to phone his brother Magid in Bangladesh. Joyce has a desire to save Millat, to have him need her as a child needs his mother, to protect him from any possibility of becoming degenerated.

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<sup>15</sup> In the novel, Smith amusingly creates KEVIN, the abbreviation of the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, for naming a fundamentalist Islamic group. See Smith 295, 301.

Meanwhile, Irie shows her deep gratitude towards Marcus, who “had helped her these four months as her brain changed from something mushy to something hard and defined” (Smith 335). As she had earlier wished to have straight, red hair, in order to change her Afro outlook, so she now yearns to have some of the Chalfens’ Englishness. As Smith describes Irie, “She had a nebulous fifteen-year-old’s passion for them, overwhelming, yet with no real direction or object. She just wanted to, well, kind of *merge* with them. She wanted their Englishness” (328).

The way in which the Chalfens exert their influence over Irie, Millat, and later, Magid, is considered by Alsana and Clara to be aggressive and vicious. As mothers, they are both afraid that the Chalfens will attempt to steal their children away from them. Resenting Joyce’s endeavor to take Millat away from her, Alsana deliberately mispronounces the Chalfens as “Chaffinches”:

I’ll call them Chaffinches – little scavenging English birds pecking at all the best seeds! Those birds do the same to my bay leaves as these people do to my boy. But they are *worse*; they are like birds with teeth, with sharp little canines – they don’t just steal, they rip apart! What do you know about them?  
(344)

Again, the metaphor of teeth is employed by Smith. Referring to the Chalfens as “birds with sharp little canines” who are “Englishifying (Millat) completely” and are “deliberately leading him away from his culture and his family and his religion,” Alsana apparently feels that the Chalfens are captivating Millat and Irie in order to get their



teeth into them (Smith 345). In dental terms, canines are explained as teeth functioning “primarily for firmly holding food in order to tear it apart, and occasionally as weapons” (Icon Group 386). To Alsana, the Chalfens seem like barbarous birds which are not only intent on stealing her son, but also on ripping their family apart.

As the chapter “Molars” tells the story of the younger generation, Millat, Magid and Irie, implying the importance of grinding knowledge which these children should bear in mind, so the chapter entitled “Canines: The Ripping Teeth” focuses on the story of the Chalfens, associating their characteristics with the capability of stealing, “ripping off.” In this chapter focusing on the Chalfens, teeth are, to some extent, used as a metaphor assigned to indicate their intention to change Millat and Irie.

In addition to the metaphor of teeth with regard to the Chalfens, Alsana’s mispronunciation of “Chalfens” as “chaffinches” is also interesting. The Chaffinch, a species very common to the UK, is not migratory, although the population is increased in winter by large numbers of birds coming from the Continent.<sup>16</sup> Smith therefore uses Alsana’s mispronunciation to question the authenticity of the Chalfens’ Englishness. Irie is fascinated by the Chalfens’ genuine sense of Englishness: “She wanted their Englishness. The purity of it. [...] To Irie, the Chalfens were more English than the English.” What Irie does not know is that the Chalfens, like chaffinches which may

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<sup>16</sup> For more introductions on the chaffinch, see “Chaffinch” in *Birds of Britain* (2009); see also, RSPB (2008).

vacate from the colder north places of the Continent to the UK, are also immigrants – “third generation, by way of Germany and Poland, née Chalfenovsky” (Smith 328).

The question therefore arises as to what constitutes Englishness. Smith denies that Englishness can be easily pinned down; even the Chalfens – the ideal model of a refined middle-class family which Irie desires and considers to represent real culture and the real English way – are in fact, immigrants too. Yet the Chalfens are more English than the English. Irie Jones desires the Englishness that she hopes to find in the Chalfens or in an altered hairstyle, but her desires turn out to be no more than a delusion.

In an ironic deconstruction of the supposed “authenticity” of well-assimilated “Englishness,” when dealing with Irie’s quest for a sense of quintessential Englishness, Smith eventually questions, quite ironically, whether there is indeed any authentic Englishness in multicultural England. Again, Smith presents such a question through Alsana, a character cast with bitter contempt for the Chalfens, whom she regards as being incompatible with the notion of integrity, and who is also cast with the role of a strong-headed wife refusing to submit to her implacable and obstinate husband.

After submissively obeying Samad’s command to pay attention to their own culture, Alsana looks up Bengali in the encyclopedia and discovers that Bengali natives are descended from Indo-Aryans. Thus, Alsana nags at her husband, using her English accent, “you go back and find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe. Do you

think anybody is English? Really English? It's a fairy tale!" (236) As an immigrant from a wealthy Bengali family reduced to a meager life in multicultural London, Alsana would rather assert that society is mixed up than believe there is one pure, authentic, eternal Englishness. However, Alsana's words appear to mock the pursuit of purity (biological or psychological) which haunts Irie, Samad and Hortense.

Is there any meaning to quintessential Englishness? Smith appears to speak through Alsana's words, and answers that Englishness is merely a fairy tale. With her satirical portrayal of Irie's miseducation, Samad's futile attempt at manipulating his twins' future, and the Chalfens' being more English than English, Smith seems to ridicule any sense of quintessential Englishness which, as some insist, grows out of the soil or is presumably equated with "whiteness."

### **False Teeth, Hidden History: Root Canal Problem**

In addition to her use of teeth as a metaphor for identity, Smith also employs teeth as a metaphor for exploring history. As Peter Childs argues, Smith uses teeth as "a symbol of history" (*Contemporary* 213). Although focusing on his analysis of teeth as a metaphor for identity or history through the exploration of the identity crises which Irie, Magid and Millat have to come to terms with, Childs provides no further explanation of Smith's use in the novel of the terms "false teeth" and "root canal," nor does he attempt to illustrate Smith's particular emphasis on the importance of history. Yet it seems clear

that Smith expresses teeth as a metaphor of history to the extent that the phrase “false teeth floating silently to the bottom” is employed to denote a secret, hidden history.

The metaphor of “false teeth floating silently to the bottom of a glass” appears initially in Archie and Samad’s last days of military service in the Second World War, during which they are assigned to the same English Army tank on a mission through Eastern Europe. “Until finally the tank rolled into a day that History has not remembered. That Memory has made no effort to retain. A sudden stone submerged. False teeth floating silently to the bottom of a glass. . . . 6 May 1945” (Smith 90).

That date, 6 May 1945 was the day prior to the signing of the unconditional surrender terms at Reims, France, by the German military commander, General Alfred Jodl, ending Germany’s participation in the war; it is also on the same day that Samad and Archie lost their companions at a stop in a Bulgarian village and vowed to continue their mission without knowing that the war was coming to an end. The past, about how Samad and Archie carry out their military mission, is implied as “false teeth floating silently to the bottom of a glass,” an individual’s past, and also the collective hidden secret history.

The metaphor of “false teeth” appears again when Samad absconds with his elder twin son, Magid, to Heathrow airport with the intention of sending him to Pakistan: “A year from now, even hours after that plane leaves, this will be a history that Samad tries not to remember. That his memory makes no effort to retain. A sudden stone

submerged. False teeth floating silently to the bottom of a glass” (Smith 209). Once again the plot focuses on the connection of teeth and individual history. Teeth are, therefore, employed as a metaphor denoting history.

Through the metaphor of “false teeth floating silently to the bottom of a glass,” Smith implies that one’s past, or a historical incident, can be hidden, forgotten, but some day the truth in it will be revealed, just like the secret that Clara has always kept with regard to her false teeth will be disclosed by Irie. As Squires observes, with the teeth metaphor, “the novel’s thematic concern with history and the inescapability of the past is reflected in the novel’s structure, a matching of subject to plot” (57).

Another reference to teeth in *White Teeth* as a metaphor for history is provided in the chapters that come under the heading of “root canals.” Three chapters dealing with three pieces of history are given the heading of “root canals”: Eastern Europe in 1945 in the chapter entitled “Root Canals of Alfred Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal,” the 1857 mutiny in India presented in the chapter “Root Canals of Mangal Pande” and the 1907 earthquake in Jamaica told in the chapter “Root Canals of Hortense Bowden.” Smith’s utilization of “root canal” is significant because it immediately points out that teeth are again a major preoccupation in the life stories of these characters, and as the plots of the “Root Canal” chapters unfold, it becomes readily apparent that the life histories of these characters are inextricably interwoven with

history.

Referring to the dental term “root canal” to relate these stories, Smith is particularly concerned with the way in which the collective and personal histories are transformed into the narrative of bodily experiences. A root canal, according to the definition of *The American Heritage Medical Dictionary*, is “a treatment in which diseased tissue from [a certain] part of the tooth is removed and the resulting cavity is filled with an inert material” (*American Heritage* 2007). Since root canal treatment is used to repair and save a tooth that is badly decayed or infected, Smith’s use of this imagery in the stories of these characters indicate that action has to be taken to remove the diseased or infected parts in order to save their lives.

In the chapter entitled “The Root Canals of Alfred Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal,” set in a Bulgarian village in the closing days of the Second World War, Archie is forced to tell a lie in order to maintain his special friendship with Samad, “a friendship that crosses class and colour” (96). In order to fulfill Samad’s wish that their heroic actions will become “destinies” for their children, and to keep their friendship, Archie assures Samad that Dr. Perret, a Nazi scientist, has been killed by him in the small house where crippled Samad is kept waiting outside. Samad encourages Archie, saying “You must live life with the full knowledge that your actions will remain. We are creatures of consequences” (Smith 102).

As Samad aches for brave acts to relate to his children as acts of heroism, such yearning becomes an infection that stimulates his pain. Since fate has taken away any chance of Samad engaging in any heroic deeds during the war, he must seize the final opportunity to persuade Archie. If the “root canals” of Samad and Archie describe their desire to create a heroic history for their families, as a memory to be transmitted to their children’s children, the “root canals” of Hortense Bowden tell of Hortense’s apocalyptic birth. As an illegitimate child of a Jamaican maid and an English captain, Hortense always remembers her unusual birth: “And then the world began to shake. Inside Ambrosia, waters broke. Outside Ambrosia, the floor cracked” (361).

Since her birth in the Jamaican earthquake of 1907, Hortense has clearly been obsessed with an equally apocalyptic belief which was passed down from her mother Ambrosia. “It soon come, it soon come,” Ambrosia said, repeating what she had learned from Durham, from the white colonists about the Revelation (363). For Hortense’s mother, the English education infects her, and the act of her delivery to the baby, Hortense, in the apocalyptic earthquake, is a symbolical removal of colonial power from inside her.

By making the connection between personal history and collective history as a “root canal,” Smith illustrates her deep concern for the relationship between trauma and history. Demonstrating her conceptualization of trauma, Smith tells O’Grady:

If you take the whole of human history as a body or as a person, then there are events within that which are like trauma, like childhood traumas. The Second World War is a trauma like being abused as a child, being slapped over the head with a brick, or whatever. It's a trauma, and it's something that takes generations to get over. And as you know any abuse in the family can be passed down again and again and again. And likewise the characters in the book are [traumatized]. (O'Grady 105)

Samad, for instance, is deeply traumatized, essentially because he has always been keen to restore to the center the historical memory of his great grandfather, Mangal Pande, whose actions were considered to have triggered the Indian Mutiny of 1857. "It runs in the family" says Samad when he explains the way in which he, like his great grandfather, holds on to tradition (Smith 179). Samad is continually haunted by his pride in Mangal Pande. As Archie is traumatized by his memory of Dr. Perret, so Hortense is also haunted by her apocalyptic birth at the very historical moment of Jamaica's greatest calamity. Smith's particular illustrations in the "root canals" chapters convey her pervasive theme that the present is greatly affected by history, as trauma continues to haunt generations.

## **Conclusion**

Focusing on the story of three families (the Jones, the Iqbals and the Chalfens) with its extension to the Bowdens, *White Teeth* presents "a London of social and cultural admixture and ongoing change" (Stein xi-xii). These characters are haunted by their "roots" problem, with their lives being interwoven with their relationship with England.



Portraying a world of lives interwoven and intermingled, Smith notes,

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks. It is only this late in the day, and possibly only in Willesden, that you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other, because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble). (Smith 326)

With her assertion that there comes “a century of strangers, brown, yellow and white,” Smith presents an image of London as a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial city which is constantly recreated. More than this, is Smith's intention to present her vision of a hybridizing world; however, the hybrid identity is neither easily identified nor explained. Sita's mother prefers the name “Sita” because it sounds pretty, or perhaps exotic; Sharon's mother prefers to give an anglicized name to her daughter in Britain where children with Pakistani names are easily picked on or discriminated against.

Smith does not merely present the notion of hybridity as a mixture of race, ethnicity, culture and language. If Hanif Kureishi's notion of hybridity, as represented in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, aims to challenge the fixing notion of Paul Gilroy's so-called “ethnic absolutism,” which is defined in terms of race and blood, then Smith

clearly writes beyond Kureishi's challenging notion.<sup>17</sup> In addition to writing about hybrid, intermingled and in-between experiences, she places significant emphasis on interaction. Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith concentrates on the theme of hybridity through the use of metaphors. Joyce's horticulture, for instance, is presented as a metaphor illustrating the notion of hybridity. In her notional book, *The New Flower Power*, Joyce proclaims her idea of cross-pollination:

The fact is, cross-pollination produces more varied offspring, which are better able to cope with a changed environment. It is said cross-pollinating plants also tends to produce more and better-quality seeds. If my one-year-old son is anything to go by (a cross-pollination between a lapsed-Catholic horticulturalist feminist and an intellectual Jew!), then I can certainly vouch for the truth of this. (Smith 309)

Through the mouthpiece of Joyce, who speaks of an anthropological idea that cross pollination will increase genetic heterogeneity, Smith implies that hybridity emerges as a result of the mixture of races. Moreover, Joyce's theory further indicates that hybrid plants, or a hybrid child like her one-year-old son, will be more superior and better able to cope with a changed society. But how about a hybrid girl like Irie Jones? Based upon Joyce's theory, would Irie be considered, with her mixture of races, as being biologically superior? Since it is clear that white superiority still looms over Joyce, the answer is presumably "No"; the cross-pollination "between a lapsed-Catholic horticulturalist

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<sup>17</sup> According to Gilroy, if taken from "the viewpoint of absolute ethnicity" any theorization of "hybridity, creolisation and mestizaje" (or métissage) would be "a litany of pollution and impurity." See Gilroy, *Atlantic 2*.

feminist and an intellectual Jew” will still produce a white child.

Although Joyce’s rationalist stance is presented under a biased model, her idea of hybridity is, nevertheless, accurate. The lives of the generation of Irie, Millat, Magid and Joshua, or even their next generation, are culturally mixed up; they live in a world where cultural crossing and interaction defines their lives, resembling what Laura Moss terms “hybridity as the practice of everyday life.” According to Moss, hybridity is “no longer an exception to a concept of identity based on some kind of unity, or even unity in diversity,” but is becoming increasingly ordinary (12). To claim “Englishness” in a century where hybridity is “ordinary” is indeed fallacious. As Smith’s narrator says, “we have finally slipped into each other’s lives with reasonable comfort, like a man returning to his lover’s bed after a midnight walk” (Smith 327).

Several critics (such as Head 2003; Phillips 2005; Childs 2005; and Thompson 2005) have commented on Zadie Smith’s notion of “happy multicultural land,” engaging the question of whether Britain, under Smith’s representation, is indeed a happy multicultural land. Yet within such criticism, there appears to be a complete misunderstanding of Smith’s major focus; her intention appears to be to demonstrate that there is no coherence, but instead, coexistence, in a multicultural society where everyone may interact or intermingle with the lives of others.

With her delineation of the picture of “a century of strangers, brown, yellow and

white,” in which people’s interaction transcends class, race and ethnicity, it is puzzling that Smith declines to give any clear resolution to the ending of *White Teeth*. We are simply informed that every character is present at the exhibition of Marcus Chalfen’s FutureMouse, witnessing the mess-up of the exhibition, but each is not reconciled with the others’ adhered beliefs. Therefore, the outcome of Smith’s “great immigrant experiment” resembles what Moss refers to as “the rediscovery of the ordinary,” which includes “a recognition of history, a negotiation of mixing of cultures, races and languages, and an acknowledgement of the politics of everyday life – Philomena Essed’s notion of ‘everyday racism,’ overt racism and violence included” (13). As Smith says, through her narrator, “It was always going to turn out like this, not precisely like this, but *involved* like this” (Smith 516).

## Conclusion

The Stock Exchange will be pulled down, the horse plough will give way to the tractor, the country houses will be turned into children's holiday camps, the Eton and Harrow match will be forgotten, but England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same. (Orwell 279)<sup>1</sup>

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart, even if that were desirable. Their futures will be intermixed. . . . This decision is not about a small group of irrelevant people who can be contemptuously described as “minorities”. It is about the direction of British society. (Kureishi, 1986: 38)

In anticipating the topics that might preoccupy British novelists in the postwar era, it is indispensable to reflect on the accelerated transformation of Britain into a multiethnic, multicultural society; indeed, it is inevitable to analyze the emergence of multicultural Britain from the perspectives of immigrants. The novelists with immigration background write about “condition of England” from “outside in recursion” (Connor 85).<sup>2</sup> In the hands of British immigrants or their children, the conditions of England and textual conditions of representing Englishness come to

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<sup>1</sup> Orwell’s “England, Your England,” was originally published in 1941 in *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*. It was written with an attempt to reconcile socialism and Englishness in the wartime context. Any reference to Orwell’s “England, Your England” in this dissertation, please refer to this essay in *A Collection of Essays* by Orwell.

<sup>2</sup> In Steven Connor’s analysis, postwar British fiction includes two categories: the writing by “insiders” and another by the writers of “the inside out movement of the narrative of the condition of England.” The latter formulation can be applied to a returning exile like Doris Lessing or “reverse colonists” such as Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo and Kazuo Ishiguro (85-86).

seem very different. Although a literary tradition of Englishness, which has been set up by A. S. Byatt, does not include Hanif Kureishi,<sup>3</sup> yet the writing from “outside in” reflects the transformation of British society and the condition of England after the Second World War.

As Caryl Phillips has announced, the perspectives of “outsiders” shape English literary history. In the preface to *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging*,<sup>4</sup> Phillips asserts that “English literature has, for at least 200 years, been shaped and influenced by outsiders” (xv). In his attempt to introduce the theme of “belonging” in the literary works written by those who were not born in Britain, Phillips argues that English literature has not always been shaped by white English writers. According to Phillips, with imperial power, Britain has always sought to “define her people” by extending its nation and integrating those who don’t belong; consequently, Britain has developed “a vision of herself as a nation that is both culturally and ethnically homogeneous.” Phillips, however, indicates that Britain has tried to neglect the centuries-long cultural exchange and slave trade since the time of Daniel Defoe in seventeenth century. Phillips doesn’t think there’s a complete “pure” English

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<sup>3</sup> In her introduction to the editorship of *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories*, the English woman novelist Byatt attempts to build up a literary tradition of exclusive Englishness and defends that her policy of selecting is based on “looking very narrowly for writers with pure English credentials”. For those writers who are born and bred in England with migrant parents such as Hanif Kureishi, they, in Byatt’s implication, do not have “pure English credentials” (xv).

<sup>4</sup> *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging*, edited by Caryl Phillips in 1997, is a collection of essays by black British writers.

literature in the history of modern literature, and neither does he agree on the homogeneity of British culture and ethnicity. In a similar way, A. Robert Lee indicates that the making of Britain in the history is as plural as in its literary history. As Lee questions in the introduction to a collection of contemporary multicultural fiction, “if multicultural, post-coloniality, indeed do beckon, then why not a novel whose ‘Britain’ speaks from infinitely beyond Middle-England and as plurally as the histories which actually went into, and continue, its making?”(3) Overall, the novels that have examined in this dissertation remind of readers not only the plural state of contemporary English literature but also changing perceptions of British society as being multicultural and multiracial.

Through scrutinizing the issues of identity and belonging, these novels present the overview of postwar changes in Britain. British novels of the twenty-first century are increasingly plural, multicultural while the insular, fixed notion of Englishness has been consistently questioned and challenged. Each of the novelists discussed here, whether a British-born-and-bred or a migrant, engages with London as vividly as Charles Dickens. Their writing also maintains a tradition of social satire which other contemporary British novelists such as Martin Amis have kept to. They approach the issue of national identity with questioning personal identity firstly and eventually come to examine how the collective national identity has been affected by personal

identity. If these novelists reveal the transformation of British society after the war through their diasporic characters, against which vision of England do they compare their own perspectives?

The question therefore goes to: what can the England of 1941 have in common with the England of 1986 or the England of the twenty-first century? Or to what extent is British national identity changed during the decades after the Second World War? To get a good sense of these questions, we shall turn to Kureishi's essay "The Rainbow Sign".<sup>5</sup> In addition to reflect on his affiliation with Pakistan, Kureishi in this autobiographical essay responds to George Orwell's 1941 essay called "England, Your England" and questions the vision of "tolerance" that Orwell saw in the England of 1940.

Giving his account of England in the Second World War years, Orwell presents a picture of English, who he strongly believed, were a gentle people. Orwell speaks highly of English tolerance. "The gentleness of English civilization," as Orwell asserts, "is perhaps its most marked characteristics" (257). England is thus perceived by Orwell as a land "where the bus conductors are good-tempered and the policemen carry no revolvers"; but England for Orwell is also "a family with the wrong members in control" (257, 267). Thus, Orwell's concern for the "soundness and homogeneity of

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<sup>5</sup> Some parts of "The Rainbow Sign" have been included by Kureishi in another essay "England, Your England". This essay, bearing the same title with George Orwell's 1941 essay "England, Your England," was included in *New Statesman & Society* 21 July 1989.



England” is questioned by Hanif Kureishi, who, strongly argues that “there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces [and] a new way of being British after all this Time” (“Rainbow” 38).

Moreover, Kureishi’s critique against Orwell’s vision of England is grounded on Orwell’s conviction that whatever transformation will have brought to England after the war, England will go on “having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same.” (Orwell 279). Whilst Orwell attempts in his “England, Your England” to create the sense of typicality and continuity appropriate to the depiction of the condition of England, Kureishi in his “The Rainbow Sign” cautions readers that the England in Orwell’s vision is under pressure because it does not apply to thousands of blacks who started to settle in British society after the war. Implying that Orwell’s vision of England is romanticized and inapplicable, Kureishi directly points out that the “gentle British whites” in Orwell’s England must “have no idea how little of this tolerance is experienced by blacks here” (“Rainbow” 37). In other words, with the attempt that Kureishi makes through his challenging Orwell’s idea of England, Kureishi aims to evoke a sense that it should be British, instead of blacks, who have to make adjustments to the changes of their society.

A similar perspective is brought by Rushdie, asserting that racism is not the problem of black people but of white Britons. As Rushdie concludes, “And until you,

the whites, see that the issue is not integration, or harmony, or multiculturalism, or immigration, but simply the business of facing up to and eradicating the prejudices within almost all of you, the citizens of your new, and last, Empire will be obliged to struggle against you” (*Imaginary* 138). For either Rushdie or Kureishi, it should be white Britons who stop creating race problems and make themselves adapt to the change of British society, a change indicating that Britain no longer constitutes by homogeneous white people.

The major concern of the novels discussed in this dissertation is the contesting of the fixed sense of Englishness, a sense which has been evoked by Orwell as continuous, unbroken and forever. These novelists have looked at Britain from the point of view of migrancy and diaspora. For example, in the London novels of Sam Selvon, the notion of Englishness is simultaneously dealt with at length and put into negotiation by immigrant characters’ acting out the English way of living. Selvon’s West Indian immigrants arrived with already existing connection with England. They saw England not only as a place of opportunity, but also a kind of home, a motherland whose culture, history, literature, and city names had been taught to them since their childhood. They had kept the idea of England as their motherland, so to act out the English way of living seemed quite natural to them. With such approach to Englishness, Selvon aspires to recognize and come to terms with its insularity and

limitations. Setting his London novels in the postwar decades, Selvon does not present violent or angry immigrants who consistently resist to British cultural imperialism. Instead, Selvon's immigrant characters are portrayed as being often comically ignorant, pathetic and sad, but their amusing gestures of seeking home indicates their claim for defining their positionality in postwar London.

Selvon wishes to create a voice belonging to the old generation of immigrants, of the 1950s, and Moses is representative. As Selvon tells Susheila Nasta in an interview, in spite of all Moses's presumptions to be English, his Moses "comes out in the way he relates all the experiences that happen to him and through using this identical voice which is so much a part of the West Indian immigrant" (Nasta, "Interview" 13). As the plots of *Moses Trilogy* unravel, Moses' problems of searching for home multiply while he incessantly pours himself into acting out English way of living and thinking. However, his acculturation difficulty remains for his being West Indian immigrant. Selvon deliberately adopts a funny but pathetic immigrant figure who is always out of place, so in this way he aims to disclose how Englishness has been imagined and further challenged by early immigrants. With the portrayal of Moses and other immigrant figures, Selvon presents his overriding concern with how these immigrants' colonial experience affects their attitude toward the way they settle in their motherland, and eventually with how England and Englishness change over time. Selvon's London

novels present the conditions of England which are learned from the lived experience of black immigrants: although racial discrimination or violence is something unavoidable, it is through their struggling for home with various ways of assimilation that they become the landscape of London.

For Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith, both born in England, their approach to Englishness is essentially different from Selvon's. They, as well as their characters such as Karim (in *The Buddha of Suburbia*), Shahid (in *The Black Album*), or Irie Jones, Magid and Millat (in *White Teeth*), are second- or third- generation of immigrants; yet they would rather think themselves English, or a new breed of English than immigrants. They are, as Karim has asserted, "born and bred in England" (*Buddha* 3).

Compared with Selvon, Kureishi and Smith are less directly concerned about the immigrants' experiences of finding a home in hostile society; instead, the younger generations under their portrayal construct their identities "inside" Britain, negotiating what Salman Rushdie has termed "the new empire within Britain."<sup>6</sup> If Kureishi's protagonists in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* approach the notion of Englishness by thinking themselves inhabiting various interstitial, hybrid

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<sup>6</sup> "The New Empire within Britain" is the title for an essay collected in Rushdie's *Imaginary Homeland*. In this essay, Rushdie observes that Britain, once a nation of imperial superiority, has now been transferred into a "new empire within Britain": "Four hundred years of conquest and looting, four centuries of being told that you are superior to the Fuzzy-Wuzzies and the wogs, leave their stain. This stain has seeped into every part of the culture, the language and daily life; and nothing much has been done to wash it out" (*Imaginary* 130).

positionalities, Smith's characters of younger generation inquire the authenticity of Englishness by tracing genealogies into the individual past or historical events, searching for the necessity of claiming one's roots, and then deconstructing the fixed notion of identities. As Smith's *White Teeth* is presented with an ending that Irie becomes pregnant with a daughter, who is unable to take a paternity test telling whether the father is Magid or Millat, Smith implicitly shows her concern that preoccupation with "routes" is essentially more important than preoccupation with "roots."

For more contemporary British writers like Zadie Smith or Hari Kunzru, the concept of homogeneous Britain is no longer tenable in the era of globalisation. The flow of people, information, capital, goods and technology brings changes to many aspects. As Donald G. Ellis observes the changes in the era of globalisation, he comes to conclude that "cultures may become a little less distinctive, but they are also less exclusive" (88). The effects of globalisation may enhance global flows of people and remold new networks of people, so the impact of transnational cultural flow is supposed to make a culturally homogeneous Englishness less distinctive and less exclusive.

However, homogeneous notions of Englishness and English national identity do not seem to fade away. This has been noted by some cultural critics. Stuart Hall, for

example, has traced the transformation of English national identity back to Margaret Thatcher's 1979 government. In "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," Hall pays special attention to Thatcher's ideological question asking "are you one of us?" Such Thatcherism, as Hall argues, produces "an embattled defensiveness of a narrow, national definition of Englishness, of cultural identity" (24). As Hall further points out, when the nation-states decline in the era of globalisation, national identity does not become more inclusive and would rather "regress to a very defensive and highly dangerous form of national identity that is driven by a very aggressive form of racism" (*Local* 25). For Hall, the effects of globalisation have produced a defensive return to Englishness.

Whereas Hall recognises the contemporary Englishness and new racism produced from Britain's anxiety to revive its global political and economic prestige, Graham Huggan approaches the production of contemporary Englishness from the publishing industry, notably the Booker Prize industry.<sup>7</sup> Huggan has argued convincingly that the Booker Prize revives Englishness. According to Huggan, the Booker, which "open[s] the door for a more politicised view of 'Englishness' and 'English literature,'" functions to redirect "oppositional energies into the mainstream of western metropolitan cultural

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<sup>7</sup> The Booker Prize, also known in full as the Man Booker Prize, is Britain's most prestigious literary prize awarded each year to the best original full-length novel, written by a citizen of the UK, the Commonwealth, the Republic of Ireland or Zimbabwe. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, the 1981 winner, received "The Booker of Bookers" in 1993 and "The Best of Booker" in 2008.

thought” (120). In Huggan’s view, the Booker Prize is “a popular retailer of the postcolonial exotic” which “exemplifies the double standards in promoting ‘multicultural goods’” (117). On the one hand it broadly defines what “Englishness” and “English literature” are; on the other hand, it defines English cultural heritages. As Laura Chrisman points out, Huggan’s observation upon the Booker Prize industry shows that such prize “allows the English to reinvent their empire” and Britain in this respect is “recentred as a sovereign international power” (108). Looking at cultural production, Huggan perceives the hidden British imperialism and considers it aims to re-invent their global power.

Either Hall or Huggan has suggested that a reformulated vision of Englishness emerges. Although Hall proposes the idea that “race” again becomes a marker for the Thatcher government to define Englishness while Huggan considers that the construction of Englishness is constituted by the whole awarding system of Booker Prize, they both perceive the intention of restoring power to Britain which has come to occupy political or cultural act of defining Englishness. For Hall and Huggan, Englishness is not a vanishing core because it is embedded in the values and belief of imperialism which lay behind cultural or political identity. “Englishness is still tainted with imperialism” says Dominic Head (119). Joshua Esty also makes a similar claim that imperialism “consolidated (and also indeed generated) certain myths of

Englishness; therefore, Esty concludes that imperialism has made “a disintegrative effect on the knowability or completeness of English culture” (28). Thus, whereas postwar imperialism taints Englishness, it also produces miscellaneous cultural influences.

Cultural hybridity makes Englishness more problematic. However, as cultural hybridity makes national identity more complex and unstable, it requires new narratives or approaches to re-examine the past of British history or to re-invent Englishness. Such new narratives, whether spoken from an ex-colonial diaspora like Sam Selvon or from British-born-and-bred writers like Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith, reflect what Rushdie would call “a love song to our mongrel selves” (*Imaginary* 394).<sup>8</sup> When the transnational movement among immigrants in Britain brings forth diversified cultural practices and hybridized culture is generated by diaspora experience, the retained foundation of Englishness has been challenged. Englishness will define a hybrid woman like Faith Jackson in Andrea Levy’s *Fruit of Lemon*, an English-born-and bred woman with Jamaican parents. As Faith has claimed about her positionality, she will have her day in Britain:

Let those bully boys walk behind me in the playground. Let them tell me,  
‘You’re a darkie. Faith’s a darkie.’ I am the granddaughter of Grace and  
William Campbell. I am the great-grandchild of Cecelia Hilton. I am

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<sup>8</sup> When Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* is critiqued as a blasphemous work of Islam, he defends for it, claiming it as “a love-song to our mongrel selves” which celebrates “hybridity, impurity, , intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs” (*Imaginary* 394).



descended from Katherine whose mother was a slave. I am the cousin of Africa. I am the niece of Coral Thompson and the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson. Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day. (326-27)

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