

Reshaping Identities: The Second Generations of Immigrants in
Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the
Light of What We Know* (2014)

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the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Approval

The thesis titled “Reshaping Identities: The Second Generations of Immigrants in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* (2014)” submitted by Musrat Alam (18263004) of Spring, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of MA on 15th May, 2022.

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Abstract

How identities are reshaped and reconstructed through the influence of history and the ways in which the second generation of immigrants react and adapt within the transnational space is the central focus of this dissertation. It is well to remember that these adaptations and transformations are always of a fluid nature. I use the term ‘transnationalism’ to associate it with migration and to include the movement of people, goods as well as ideas and ideologies, beyond the borders set by nation-states. Transnational studies look at deterritorialized regions and subjects where there is a continuous process of reshaping identities and new subjectivities are created. Transnational studies combine the debate on origins as it borrows from post-colonial studies but goes on to look at the ways in which these roots and histories are put through new processes of globalization. This thesis looks at two novels to demonstrate this process: *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith and *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) by Zia Haider Rahman. These two novels represent England as the hub for the interconnectivity between generations of immigrants who now live in the transnational city space which is tainted with the colonial past. The novel *White Teeth* (2000) focuses on the Caribbean community with the inclusion of Bangladeshi characters named Millat and Majid: who go through the continuous reshaping of identities within the multicultural flux. On the other hand, Rahman’s novel portrays South Asian characters (represented by Zafar, who is from Bangladeshi and the unnamed Pakistani narrator) and focuses on their subjectivities as they are reshaped and influenced by transnational processes. With the examples from the novels, this dissertation also focuses on the subtle changes in the timeline of transnationalism through the characters’ identity reformation.

Keywords: transnationalism; migration; identity; immigrants; cultural displacement; history; postcolonialism

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Chapter 1

Introduction

People living in transnational spaces find themselves in an ambivalent position. Their history and identity have been modified and rendered uncertain through migration and global political and cultural events. Peter Hitchcock in his book *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (2009) examines the movement and migration of people and their origins and history. He says that, “Nation is not the fixed point against which the writer’s affiliation can be measured but rather, like language, is a living substance of identification that moves unevenly with the writers’ own dynamism” (Hitchcock 20). Thus, to understand and identify the process of reshaping identities for generations of immigrants in these fluid transnational spaces, we need to take into account the questions of language, knowledge, and the concept of home and belongingness, rather than dwelling on the physical boundary of nations. The second generations of immigrants differ from their parents’ generation living in the same space which displays the effect of migrations, and being in or of being born in exile. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1996) discusses the production of cultures and how space, time and national borders play different roles to determine the location of these cultural articulations coming out of and produced from and within the surface of transnationalism. He says that in the “‘beyond’...we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present...inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha 01). Due to these migrations, people have been forced to reshape their lives and they have also been forced to reconsider their cultural origins and history which are clearly tied to postcolonial discourses. This is why Bhabha also says,

For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile...and economic refugees. It is in this sense that boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing is a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond. (Bhabha 05)

The question of exiles being placed in an 'ambivalent articulation of the beyond' produces the question for the survival of the parent cultural origins and history. It raises self-awareness and continues to crop up since migration allows the cultural and historical displacement of these exiles within the transnational diasporic space. However, to what extent these subjects can tie themselves with the parent culture while adapting to the new cultural space, can never be determined. This is why Edward Said in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000) says, "[m]ost people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that- to borrow a phrase from music- is *contrapuntal*" (Said 213).

This ongoing process of negotiating ones' identity and reshaping the daily lives in a multicultural space creates: the debate of whose culture is it in the transnational space and it is always intertwined as "the event of colonialism... [has not been] historically settled" (Hitchcock 02). The question of the circulation of power and the power of practicing one's parent culture within this new transnational space becomes ambivalent for these people; such as refugees and children of immigrants. The immigrants moving or being forced to move to another nation suggests that their cultural origins and history will collide with their present cultural state. Thus it results in the displacement of subjectivity and identity in the second generation of immigrants growing up in a transnational space. Edward Said says that if we think that culture is not something chronological rather penetrable, we will be able to see that

these different elements i.e. migration and cultural displacements can provide a new form of narrative for culture itself. Said says,

Thus to see Others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we often ascribe to cultures... Cultures may then be represented as zones of control or abandonment, of recollection and forgetting, of force or of independence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element. Exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms, or in John Berger's phrase, with *other* ways of telling. (Said 339-340)

If one were to trace the alleged originality of a post-colonial subject in places such as New York or London, he/she has to understand how that subject is negotiating his or her cultural power within this modern transnational space. Simon Gikandi discusses these issues in his essay "Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality" (2010). He says "I want to reflect on what it means to be a postcolonial subject in the metropolitan cultures of the modern west" (Gikandi 22) while rerouting the original position of culture and history of the postcolonial subjects within the modern nation state or transnational space. He also discusses how the transnational space and cosmopolitanism produce figures such as 'flaneurs' who identify themselves with the ambivalence and ambiguity of 'the metropolitan cultures of the modern west.' Even though postcolonial subjects and the figure of the flaneur differ in terms of their ontological structures, they share a common ground which helps Gikandi to reroute the 'in betweenness' of their cultural roots. This is why Gikandi says, "The rerouting of postcolonialism is authorized by a signature gesture of displacement- the unhomely moment which, in Homi Bhabha's majestic phrase, is 'a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition' which nevertheless negotiates the power of cultural difference in a

range of transhistorical sites” (23). This is why we can see that the ambivalence and ambiguity of a postcolonial subject’s cultural and historical origins in the modern West comes from their ‘displacement.’ Thus “[f]or many postcolonial critics, displacement is a form of recognition” (24).

As a result of this cultural displacement, the effects have different impacts on different generations. The first generation of immigrants can be seen to be always going back to their parents’ culture and trying to hold on to it while they accommodate with the new space of the transnational. On the other hand, the second generation of immigrants tries to identify and put a label on their identity in the transnational space. This is why Homi Bhabha says, “the locality of culture...is more around temporality than about historicity...less homogenous than hegemony...more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism” (Bhabha 140). This form of ambivalence and ambiguity in these exiled subjects can be seen in narratives where cultural displacement acts as the central point. Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) are such novels where the authors use the narrative form to examine how cultural displacements within the fluidity of space (where time is also a non-chronological element) act on their protagonists as they are created within the transnational mould. These two novels represent England as the hub for the interconnectivity between people who migrate from ex-colonies, such as the Caribbean or South Asia and how post-colonial and transnational elements combine to form new subjectivities and identities. The discussion leads to the central thesis of this dissertation which analyses the reshaping of identities under the influence of history and fluidity and therefore how the second generations of immigrants react and adapt to these changes within the transnational space. To elaborate my arguments, I will look at the examples of cultural influences such as the different levels of knowledge existing between

various generations of immigrants and the white man, negotiating the notion of home, politics of religion, space: helping the immigrants to reshape identities and adapt to these changes which are portrayed through the narratives in the two novels. I will focus on multiple theories to help elaborate my supporting arguments; the theories on exile by Edward Said, third- space by Homi K. Bhabha, power-knowledge relationship by Michel Foucault, and Peter Hitchcock's theories on transnationalism.

1.1 Overview of Selected Novels

Zia Haider Rahman is a British novelist, who was born in Bangladesh in 1969. According to an article titled "Zia Haider Rahman 'Reckons with the Elites'", Rahman's "perspective comes from his experience as a self-described class migrant who moved with his family to the U.K. as a child from a village in Bangladesh" (Silverstein 01). In relation to this perception, we can clearly see the influences and the struggle of the second generation of class migrants described through the narrative and character from his first published novel *In the Light of What We Know* (2014). The novel deals critically with the question of rootlessness, language barriers and the impact of colonial history imposed upon a post-colonial subject within a transnational space. Rahman's personal language and communication problems can be compared at some level with the novel's protagonist. Rahman says, "My first language was Sylheti. I still have some command of it, but very quickly it was not enough to express my thoughts...I became aware that there was a gulf between me and my parents, and that we couldn't communicate" (01). Rahman's inspiration from Edward Said and W. G. Sebald's theories on postcolonial literature and history can be seen from the beginning of the novel with the direct quotations from each of these authors respectively. According to Alex Preston's article in *The Guardian*, Rahman not only traces the link between colonial history and transnational space in the 21st century, he defines "a

new mode of postcolonial literature, “that moves between, and powerfully treats, questions of homelessness, displacement, emigration, voluntary or economic migration” (Preston 01).

On the other hand, Zadie Smith being seven years younger than Rahman, was born on October 25, 1975 in north-west London. Her mother emigrated from Jamaica to London and Smith’s father, who died in 2006, is English. *White Teeth* (2000) is Smith’s debut novel which was published in 2000. In an interview with Kathleen O’Grady about the novel’s cultural and historical impact on the second generation Smith says, “*White Teeth* is about people who are obsessed and who build a kind of world which is entirely rational to them...That between void and the other that people kind of construct something that makes sense to them” (O’Grady 01). The novel deals with the impact of the Second World War and the continuation of the influences from the first generation of immigrants’ history on the second generation immigrants living in multicultural London. Smith also claims that, “the whole kind of 60’s, 70’s liberation ethic that you will be released by knowing your roots, that you will discover yourself, I just always thought was...partially true, but your roots come with baggage” (O’Grady 01). This personal note on history and roots can be seen through the characters in the novel where they are constantly trying to construct their own definition of home and roots. However, there are some misconnections on the representation of history especially for the South Asian characters in the novel. Even though Smith tries to bring diversity as a focus in the transnational London space, her work is a result of the pressure on the publishing industry for including the second generation of Black British writers’ writing about post-colonialism in contemporary times. In this regard Irene Perez Fernandez says, “It cannot be denied that the acceptance and recognition of the work of...Smith in contemporary British literature is, in great part, the outcome of the past struggles for publication that postcolonial and second-generation authors underwent” (Fernandez 147).

Both of these authors have portrayed common issue which deals with the struggle of reshaping one's identity in a transnational-multicultural space in their novels. The different timelines in these novels work as a backdrop and helps the readers understand the process of reshaping the second generation immigrants' identities. Even though both these authors come from different parts of the world, representing different geographies they are both children of immigrant parents located in London. Their novels thus provide an in-depth analysis of race, language and history.

1.2 Literature Review

Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) discusses elaborately about the location of cultural elements and how the question of identity can be viewed within the dimension of "third space." Being an integral focus of the book, this term extends to the understanding of other elements of cultures and it articulates within the surface of modernity. The book also focuses on the stance of ambivalence and ambiguity of space and location; therefore resulting in the discussion on the formation of identities for postcolonial subjects put through the "margins of modern nations."

Edward Said in his book *Reflections on Exiles and Other Essays* (2000) discusses the discourse that produces 'exiles.' The book elaborates its discussion on cultural elements such as 'politics of knowledge' and religion play critical role to determine the process of an exiled being formed.

Michel Foucault in his book *Power-Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1972) discusses his interview on the Western penal system. Here in this discussion we see the practice of power and how it can be used as a centralized force to view 'truth' and understand the discourse of power-knowledge relationship.

Chapter 2

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

2.1 Levels of Knowledge and Multicultural English Spaces

The production of knowledge has accompanied all political events. For example, postcolonial studies show us how garnering and producing knowledge about the colonized helped in the process of colonial governance. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978) discusses production of knowledge by saying that an American or European will always look at the Orient with the preexisting knowledge as the 'other' first, giving the Europeans the ultimate power over the Orient. He says,

For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second...It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer. (Said 19)

The process of decolonization saw freedom for the colonized countries from the 18th and 19th centuries, even though the preexisting knowledge as and about the 'other' is still functioning in new and cosmopolitan ways. Due to the movement of people in these transnational spaces, the knowledge is passed on by the first generation of immigrants to the second generation. This constant movement in transnational space creates different levels of knowledge, resulting in the fluid identities of immigrants and exiles. It is this fluidity of space which

produces the lack of knowledge about each other; groups such as the white man and the colonized subject, various generations of colonized immigrants and most importantly the second generations of immigrants. So, it seems that the second generation is forced to create their identities through the lens of their parents' generation, as well as the knowledge and communication gap that exists between them and their parents. This creates some visible differences between both these generations' understanding, of knowledge, practiced through cultures and history. Moira Casey and Eva Rosa White in their article titled "Unsettled Homes: Borders and Belonging in Emma Donghue's "Ashtray"" say that, "this new way of existing in the world...allow for a reinvention of identity that is predicated on both physical and temporal space, as defined by whether the characters presented as occupying or borrowing the locus of their belonging- be it in their minds, bodies or the geographical space they call home" (Casey and White 104). These visible differences in the production and execution of knowledge, which determines ones' reformed identity in the temporal space, can be seen through the characters in *White Teeth* (2000).

The novel is set in the backdrop of a multicultural Britain with the inclusion of several historical events such as the Second World War and colonialism. The multi-cultural London space is portrayed as the place where various immigrant communities come in order to "go other places via the A41" (Smith 11). The novel starts with English character Archie Jones and it soon progresses to the portrayal of immigrant characters of various ethnicities and religions. Hussein Ishmael, Varin, Shiva and an Iraqi family who owns "the half café, half gambling den" (19) are among some of those immigrant characters who paint the picture of a multicultural British space from the beginning of the novel. Even though the author of the novel is of Caribbean origin and the novel is mostly about Caribbean immigrants, this thesis firstly looks at immigrant characters of Bangladeshi origin to bring out the diverse nature of multi-cultural portrayal of London in the novel. Thus, it establishes the intersectionality of

identities. However, among this diversity and intersectional identities, there are misconnections which occur between various immigrant communities. Zadie Smith being a British writer of Caribbean origin also misses out on an authentic portrait of fictional South Asian characters, such as Samad Miah Iqbal. Within this narrative, the author has tried to bring together the mixture of immigrant cultures with several ethnicities within the same multicultural space, but the assimilation of all these cultures “challenges the myths surrounding the grand master narrative of the culturally homogenous and assimilating nation-state” (Hammerton 125-126). This results in the misconnections between the author and the South Asian characters in the novel which will be discussed next. However, there is a common underlying theme for all the immigrant characters portrayed in the novel-which is their state of being exiled and constantly trying to reshape and give definition to their fluid identities. This is why Said says that,

[e]xiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past...Exiles feel therefore an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. The crucial thing is that a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology- designed to reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole- is...impossible in today's world (Said 205).

These lacks of cohesiveness amongst these immigrant communities against the multicultural backdrop of London in the novel allow immigrant characters to interpret the meaning of 'identity.' Even concepts such as 'motherhood' at times contribute toward the interpretation of identity for the immigrants and for families like the Chalfens in the novel. Thus, the novel portrays the concept of 'motherhood' among various immigrant communities which often provides juxtaposition between the immigrant mothers and Joyce Chalfen's discussion of the nature of parenting styles. These immigrant mothers are constantly trying to recover from

their own displacement while trying to hold on to their children in the fluidity of English space. In the novel, Alsana is one such character, who is of Bengali origin, wife of Samad Miah and mother of Magid and Millat. She struggles to pinpoint her own identity as she had immigrated to London in her twenties with Samad. The lack of experience and being a very young immigrant mother in London has shaped Alsana's identity in contradictory ways. On one hand she enjoys the liberty that the English space presents and on the other she believes that English people are incapable of understanding the struggles of 'othered' people. She says, "People who live on solid ground, underneath safe skies, know nothing of this; they are like the English POWs in Dresden who continued to pour tea and dressed for dinner, even as the alarms went off, even as the city became a towering ball of fire. Born of a green and pleasant land, a temperate land, the English have a basic inability to conceive of disaster, even when it is man-made" (Smith 217). Even though she enjoys a certain degree of freedom and prosperity in the English space, she does not want her children to become one of them. Smith juxtaposes Alsana and Joyce Chalfen's take on motherhood in the narrative. Alsana retreats to her South Asian nature and concept of parenting style when she sees Joyce Chalfen continuously belittling her in front of Magid and Millat. She says, "I am saying these people are taking my son away from me! Birds with teeth! They are Englishifying him completely! They are deliberately leading him away from his culture and his family and his religion" (351-352). Her own identity has been unsettled due to migration, and her struggle to cope with her new home, create contradictory pressures, and this in turn affects the ways in which her sons negotiate their own positions. This is why Min Jiao in "Mothering and Motherhood: Experience, Ideology and Agency" says, "For Alsana, the severance of her two sons from her symbolizes her split- a past that she does not want to go back to, a present that betrays her. For both, she is powerless to change but is made a scapegoat" (Jiao 550).

In the novel, Samad Miah Iqbal is one of the South Asian characters who is shown to take shelter in the triumphant history (as Edward Said describes in *Orientalism*) of Mangal Pandey and ideology of a Bengali Muslim culture. In the novel, Samad Miah Iqbal is presented as a South Asian character, born in Bangladesh who immigrated to England after fighting in World War II alongside his best friend the Englishman Archie Jones. Samad is a very proud Muslim who takes pride in his Bengali heritage. He is constantly searching for the recognition and affirmation of his Bengali culture through the other characters in the novel. Though he loathes English culture, he willingly participates in it by having an affair with his sons' teacher Poppy Burt Jones and playing poker with Archie Jones. He is shown to believe that Mangal Pandey is his great-grandfather. In order to urgently reconstitute his undecided identity, Samad is shown constantly telling people that Pandey is his great-grandfather and believes that he ““should be soaring with the Royal Airborne Force, shelling from on high! ...an officer! Not some mullah, some sepoy, wearing...chappals in hard service. My great-grandfather Mangal Pandey”- he looked around for the recognition the name deserved but, being met only with black pancake English faces, continued- “was the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!”” (Smith 74-75). However, Mangal Pandey could not have been his great-grandfather because of both religious and geographical facts. Mangal Pandey was an Indian soldier (sepoy) who rebelled against the British Empire and led the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. One of the reasons that led to the rebellion of 1857 was that Muslim soldiers believed that pork fat was used in the bullets that they had to bite into, and Hindu soldiers believed that beef fat was being used. Pandey was born in a small village in Uttar Pradesh in a devout Hindu Brahmin family. He himself was a devoted Brahmin. Richard Foster in “Drug Crazed Fanatic Or Canny Revolutionary” while discussing the history of Pandey says that, “[a]gainst the current backdrop of a culturally ascendant, though contested, ideology of Hindutva- according to which authentic citizenship of the modern nation state of India is effectively

reserved for Hindus- the celebration of Brahmin sepoy Mangal Pandey as the nation's first religio-nationalist martyr cannot be viewed as a politically neutral gesture" (Foster 4). So out of all this turmoil of South Asian history, the question of inaccuracy comes through the portrayal of Samad's character in the novel. The inauthentic portrayal of Samad Miah Iqbal's character is truly an example of the misconceptions and misperceptions between different immigrant groups residing in multi-cultural London, not merely as a colonizer-colonized relationship. Therefore, even Zadie Smith (English novelist of Caribbean origin), a writer sensitive to the cultural patterns of multicultural London, failed¹ in her understanding of the historical references that pertained to her Bangladeshi characters. The juxtaposition between Samad and Pandey's history shows the misrepresentation of Samad's character as a South Asian and also the author's misunderstanding of South Asian history itself. It is the author's failure to understand the diversity of India or South Asia with its different religions and its vast expanse among other factors. Supriya Nair says, "'Samad's identifications veer from being Indian, Bengali, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi...and between asserting his desire to be "a proper Muslim"... while claiming an ancestral link to the Hindu Brahmin Mangal Pandey, whose apparently singular defiance of British colonial officers in the 1857 uprising is generally acclaimed as the inaugural moment of Indian anti-colonial resistance" (Nair 04). Even, the fictional name 'Samad Miah Iqbal' is incorrect as the part 'Miah' should come after 'Iqbal' and not before that. So Samad is ultimately an inauthentic character and Zadie Smith as a Caribbean British writer has completely misrepresented Indian and Bangladeshi history and identity.

Even after the demise of the British Empire, the production of knowledge and the implementation of power over 'others' find new and cosmopolitan ways within the multicultural English space. Grace Kyungwon Hong in her article "'Most Overrated Western

¹ An ironical contrast can be made here with the portrayal of Dr. Aziz's character in E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924). That novel is avowedly about the misconceptions between the colonizer and colonized, but the author has successfully portrayed the character of Dr. Aziz in a believable manner.

Virtue”: The Politics of Knowledge in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*” discusses these new structural ways of implementing power through Western knowledge in this ““new world order”” (Hong 15). For example, one day when Clara (who is the daughter of the Caribbean immigrant Hortense) is spreading Jehova’s message through leaflets while wandering down the English streets she feels as dominated and marginalized by white power as her ancestors must have done. The narrator says, “The first few doors she received the usual pained faces: nice women shooing her away as politely as possible, making sure they didn’t get too close, scared they might catch religion like an infection. As she got into the poorer end of the street, the reaction became more aggressive; shouts came from windows or behind closed doors” (Smith 40). It ultimately shows that even in this cross-cultural English space, there is still a boundary line which will always have an effect on the present and future generation of immigrants. This is why Hong says while discussing Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), “Given that Western epistemology has neither the means nor the inclination to understand its colonized territories as anything beyond its “other”, as that which exists to give the West meaning and definition, the project of narrating a non-Western history becomes very complex” (Hong 18).

Zadie Smith portrays serious and complex processes of social identity construction in multicultural England humorously. For example, when Alsana and Samad quarrel with each other over differences in religious beliefs, issues such as domestic abuse and how the children normalize such incidents show the failure of these parents’ attempt to deal with their tensions and conflicts that surely are a result of their immigrant status, living as they are within an alien environment. During one of these fights, both Millat and Magid bet on which of their parents will win the fight. There are a lot of misconnections between these ‘othered’ groups in the novel, even though the transnational space allows these various immigrant

communities to assimilate their cultures. For example, when Millat talks in ² ‘Raggastani’ accent, Irie becomes frustrated and says, ““Why do you talk like that? ...That’s not your voice. You sound ridiculous!”” (Smith 245). Here Irie clearly shows where Millat should stand culturally and historically, resisting the integration of Caribbean accent and those of South Asian origins. Despite these gaps, there is also a common thread between these various immigrant communities. For example, at the end of the novel when Samad goes to ask Hortense to protest quietly over Marcus’ genetic experiments with mice, the conversation shows that they both struggle against white domination, and they are all trying to come to terms with the fluidity and uncertainty of the positions that they themselves occupy. The narrator says giving voice to Samad as he “watches it all and finds himself, to his surprise, unwilling to silence her...He knows what it is to seek. He knows the dryness. He has felt the thirst you get in a strange land-horrible, persistent- the thirst that lasts your whole life” (526). Even though the novel is set in the backdrop of a multicultural English space, Smith celebrates the cultural diversity of this space through a story that intertwines the lives of Caribbean characters with those of South Asian origins. In this regard the narrator says,

And the No. 52 bus goes two ways. From the Willesden kaleidoscope, one can catch it south like the children; through Kensal Rise, to Portobello, to Knightsbridge, and watch the many colors shade off into the bright white lights of town; or you can get it north, as Samad did; Willesden, Dollis Hill, Harlesden, and watch with dread (if you are fearful like Samad, if all you have learned from the city is to cross the road at the sight of dark-skinned men) as white fades to yellow fades to brown, and then Harlesden Clock comes into

² Raggastani: According to ‘Urban Dictionary’, raggastani is a person of Asian origins who talks with a Jamaican / Anglo African Accent as they have abandoned their own cultural identity and so adopt black/African culture as their own. A marriage of the words ‘Ragga’ and ‘Pakistani.’

view, standing like Queen Victoria's statue in Kingston, Jamaica—a tall white stone surrounded by black (169)

As the novel progresses, Samad and Archie's friendship forces the readers to question if the historical truth will allow their friendship to find a middle ground. Michel Foucault in one of his interviews on the question of the knowledge-power relationship and how geography comes into being says that, "The problem and the stake there was the possibility of a discourse which would be both true and strategically effective, the possibility of a historical truth which could have a political effect" (Foucault 64). This 'possibility of a discourse' that Foucault talks about resonates in the friendship between Archie and Samad and in how Archie, despite being Samad's friend over the years, can never forget their geographical and racial differences. Archie says, "In short, it was precisely the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and colour, a friendship that takes as its basis of physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not come" (Smith 82). This questioning of the physical proximity between Samad and Archie is not just about what is visible skin and bones, it is also about the underlying power over Samad's class, culture and race. Archie's questioning their friendship also resonates with what E.M. Forster asks at the end of his novel *A Passage to India* (1924). It reflects the question posed in the novel, regarding the possibility of Aziz's and Fielding's friendship, if there would be any bridge to connect them after all that had happened over the years of imperial rule. Thus, Archie shows that he does not know Samad's history and neither does he care to know. All of it ultimately proves that knowledge of the 'other' is not even considered important. This is why Hong says that,

If the metanarrative driving the *previous* geopolitical order...represented by British colonialism... is that of Western rationality meeting and correcting the

irrationality of the non-West,..., *White Teeth* is less concerned with remembering British colonialism as it is with remembering the moment of breakdown, the moment of epiphany that came with the postcolonial critique of British colonialism. That sense of epiphany is what *White Teeth* gently mocks. (Hong 19)

In conclusion we can see the misrepresentation that the British Caribbean writer makes about South Asian history, which leads Samad's character to consider Mangal Pandey as his great-grandfather. In search of his origins and single identity, Samad forces down his take on history and ideologies to the second generations of immigrants: his sons Majid and Millat. The novel also portrays the integration and misconceptions between various immigrant communities, even though the characters meet and connect with each other beyond their borders and origins.

2.2 Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal and Millat Iqbal

In order to understand Magid and Millat's search for particular identities for themselves, we can clearly see the visible differences in the way of consuming and producing. Edward Said says, "the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age- with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers- is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person" (Said 202). This section of the thesis will look at Magid and Millat, Samad's two sons. Both Magid and Millat were born in England and they are admitted into an English school with other English children. From the very beginning of the novel it is very clear that Samad wants his sons to carry on with his idea of culture and history. However, born and being raised in postwar England, where multiculturalism has created transnational spaces, these boys struggle to define which history they are part of. For example, Magid from his childhood starts to show his desire to be just like the other English children and he even

changes his name to an English one so that everyone in his school can call him that. Hearing this it angers Samad and he says to him, “I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL!” ... “AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!” (Smith 126). Since Magid wants to be identified as a true English person, he changes his name, but his father does not allow him to change his name, as it is tangled with Samad’s Bengali origins and history. The changed image of Magid cannot be true itself as his knowledge is also tied up with his father’s knowledge and thus Samad’s power and authority over him. This is why Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) says,

To be true to its image, the rule must be abstracted from any question concerning its origin; thus, it goes beyond the operations that it controls.... Only the authority of the master allows the contradiction to be concealed, but he is himself an object of representation; presented as possessor of the knowledge of the rule, he allows the contradiction to appear through himself (Bhabha 146-147)

So in turn, Samad in order to establish his interpretation of culture and history sends Magid away to Bangladesh: hoping that he will learn and gather knowledge about Bengal’s culture and history and become a true Muslim. Instead, when Magid returns to England after spending some years in Bangladesh, he is more of an Englishman than any original Englishman living in England. Samad says “this is some clone, this is not an Iqbal. One hardly likes to touch him. His teeth, he brushes them six times a day. His underwear, he irons them. It is like sitting down to breakfast with David Niven” (Smith 350). Magid’s changed behavior worries Samad and he is baffled with his constant usage of ‘reason and logic.’ For example, when Magid has a conversation with Mickey in the restaurant about consuming pork (which is forbidden in Islam), Samad becomes furious. Magid tries to reason with him

as he says, ““My father’s heart will not be broken by a bacon sandwich. It is far more likely that my father’s heart will break from the result of a build-up of saturated fat which is in turn a result of eating in your establishment for fifteen years” (372). Magid here is not only trying to be as accurate as Western knowledge and reason claims to be, he is trying to tie together Western knowledge and Muslim religion in equilibrium. This is why Hong says, “It stages—quite literally, in its “bad ending”—the meeting of rationality and religion, between Fascism and fundamentalism, between science, the secular, and the sacred—and in this way, nothing seems outside its purview” (Hong 30). Magid’s direct portrayal of desire to be identified as an Englishman is tangled with his journey to Bangladesh and coming back to England, where he is completely detached from his parents’ cultural values as he never was before.

In addition to Magid, Millat’s childhood was also marked by their fathers’ insistence on maintaining their culture and history. He is seen to be constantly in a battle with himself regarding his identity and feels like living in “constant estrangement” (Said 202). Like his older brother, Millat also wanted to follow and be like other English children and he would listen to Western music. Millat’s choices hurt Samad and he thought that “the sins of the Eastern father shall be visited upon the Western sons” (Smith 135). What Samad did not understand is that once he sent off Magid to Bangladesh, how much it would impact on Millat’s adolescence and how it would shape his knowledge of Bengali culture and history. Thus, all Samad’s efforts to save and reproduce Bengali heritage is now concentrated on Millat, as he is the only son Samad can control and inflict his patriarchal power upon. However, Millat resists and feels he needs to find his own definition and knowledge of roots, history and identity. This leads him to joining a radical group named KEVIN. And so,

a more melancholy child than Millat, a more deep thinking child, might have spent the rest of his life... making himself miserable, chasing the elusive quarry, laying it finally at his father's feet. But what his father said about him

did not concern Millat all that much: he knew himself to be no follower, no chief, no wanker, and no sell-out... no matter what his father said. In the language of the street Millat was a rude boy, a bad man, at the forefront, changing image as often as shoes; sweet-as, safe, wicked, leading kids up hills to play football, downhill to rifle fruit machines, out of schools, into video shops. (181)

Millat had to struggle between two poles: that of carrying out his fathers' heritage as his own and experiencing the transnational multicultural space that various communities in England were creating. Millat being caught between these two poles finds himself protesting in Bradford against the publication of Salman Rushdie's controversial book *The Satanic Verses* (1988). In 1989 after the first publication of the novel several massive protests were carried out mostly by South Asian Muslim communities throughout the UK, including Bradford. They accused Rushdie of insulting the sacred name of Prophet Mohammad in the book and the situation soon escalated when several Muslim leaders "wanted Rushdie's death" (Sajbotva16). In the novel we see Millat going to the protest at Bradford to burn Rushdie's book. Joining the protest and burning the book was Millat's vain attempt to belong 'somewhere' with something that he can put a label on in the fluidity of English space. Perhaps because of this sole reason when encountered by his mates, Millat admits that he has never read the book and he declares that he does not need to read it. Thus, the narrator says, "Millat hadn't read it. Millat knew nothing about the writer, nothing about the book...But he knew...that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelled of curry, had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs or had no job and bummed off the state" (Smith 240). On the other hand, Samad agreed with the protestors' cause for burning of Rushdie's book because it was an expression of rage at the injustices that Asian Muslims suffered. However, Alsana, Millat's mother, seeing her son at the protest, burns Millat's

favourite things in order to teach him a lesson. In light of this Supriya Nair says, “It is likely that the protests against the alleged blasphemy in the novel primarily emerged from South Asian Muslims, although Smith’s depiction of the book burning suggests support by other groups” (Nair 5). Millat being stuck with the dogma of history feels the pressure of identifying himself within the chaos of multiculturalism. The narrator of the book calls him a ‘schizophrenic’ and says, “But the fact was Millat didn’t need to go back home: he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here. He did not require a passport to live in two places at once, he needed no visa to live his brother’s life and his own” (183). This schizophrenic attitude leads him to create his own history, his own sets of values, even though he feels that his father Samad is “A faulty, broken, stupid, one-handed waiter of a man who had spent eighteen years in a strange land and made no more mark than this” (419). Katina Rogers in her article “Affirming Complexity: “White Teeth” and Cosmopolitanism” discusses how representation of knowledge works in both past and present readings and how it shapes ones’ future knowledge and identity. She says, “The images of tangled roots and root canals are important tools for this perspective” (Rogers 58).

Therefore, we can now understand that the criterion of knowledge for each of these South Asian characters acquire and requirement is fundamentally different. For Samad, his Bengali culture will be a source of pride, including the inauthenticity of his alleged great-grandfather Mangal Pandey. It shows his desperate attempt to identify himself out of his exilic status. For Magid and Millat, their knowledge is tangled between the past and present history which they share through their fathers’ generation and their current transnational-multicultural space. They are also trying to reshape their identities through all these turmoil, but keeping one foot here in the present and one foot in the past. Thus the narrator says,

Immigrants have always been particularly prone to repetition- it's something to do with that experience of moving from West to East or East to West or from island to island. Even when you arrive, you're still going back and forth; your children are going round and round. There's no proper term for it- *original sin* seems too harsh; maybe original trauma would be better. A trauma is something one repeats and repeats, after all, and this is the tragedy of the Iqbals that they can't help but re-enact the dash they once made from one land to another, from one faith to another, from one brown mother country into the pale, freckled arms of an imperial sovereign. (Smith 135-136)

2.3 Irie Ambrosia Jones

Irie Ambrosia Jones is the daughter of an English father Archie Jones and immigrant Jamaican mother Clara Bowden Jones. As a second-generation immigrant, her quest to understand her own space and cultural identity begins when she enters her adolescent years. Throughout these years until she decides to visit Jamaica, she struggles to discover where she 'belongs' and thinks that tracking down the history of her ancestors' in the transcended English environment will help her. The sense of being exiled in her own birth land begins with the fascination of changing her outer image, especially her curly hair. Even though the main purpose is to attract Millat's attention, she believes to have something fundamentally misplaced about her body image. Irie feels "a stranger in a stranger land" (Smith 271). Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2019) discusses the definition of identity and how cultural identities are formed within Caribbean immigrants in the post-colonial era. He identifies two positions from where definitions of the cultural identity within the Caribbean diaspora can be seen to emerge. The "first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of 'collective one true self', hiding inside the many other...Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common

historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provides us as ‘one people’...This ‘oneness’ is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbeanness’, of the black experience” (Hall 223). Thus, looking at Irie’s desire to change her curly black hair into a straight hair explains her dilemma for ‘belongingness.’ She clutches to the essence of the ‘oneness’ in the cross-cultural English space and reminds herself that “Sometimes you want to be different. And sometimes you’d give the hair on your head to be the same as everybody else” (290).

In order to understand Irie’s struggle, of reshaping her identity, the novel portrays the clear gap regarding communication and conveying the value of Caribbean history between Irie and her ancestors. She continuously searches for a particular single identity so that she can claim it for herself. In the light of this, she takes suggestions from anyone and thinks that they are steering her to the right path. For example, when Marcus talks about his ancestry, it is shown as a clear and articulated process of grandparents and their children. However, when Irie in turn tries to calculate hers, there is a lot of gaps and questionable marks, which ultimately confronts the question of hiding their family origins. Marcus says, “We’ll go back as far back as each other...the Chalfens have always written things down...it helps if you want to be remembered” (Smith 343) and he then taunts Irie by asking if there is “any historical figure of note in your lot?” (344). Responding to this conscious attack on Caribbean culture by Marcus, Irie replies, “No...no one...*significant*. But my grandmother was born in January 1907, during the Kingston-” (344). This conversation shows not only Irie’s lack of knowledge about her family and history, it also shows the striking neglect and ignorance about ‘other’ cultures in multicultural England. . In this regard Amanda Medlock says, Irie “removed from the Caribbean and kept from the knowledge of her ancestral history, she cannot see herself as the product of a specific cultural history, one that is both and neither British and Caribbean. It is this history that consumes Irie while simultaneously ostracizing her” (Medlock 12).

Therefore, Irie goes to her grandmother Hortense, seeking answers and knowledge about her great-grandmother Ambrosia. When she asks Hortense to talk about Ambrosia, Hortense says, “de past is done wid. Nobody learn nuttin’ from it” (Smith 413). Thus, it stops Irie completely from understanding her origins and she still circles around the process of reshaping her identity as a second generation immigrant in England. It is not just Irie who has fallen in this blindfolding of history and past, her mother Clara is also unwilling to know and convey the message of the past to her daughter. Hortense also kept her daughter Clara in the dark about their family history as Clara “knew little about her grandmother...but could only state definitively that her own mother was born at 2:45 P.M. on January 14, 1907, in a Catholic church in the middle of the Kingston earthquake. The rest was rumor, folktale, and myth:” (343). Thus, Caribbean cultural identity is difficult for the new generation of immigrants to define, kept away as they are from family origins and histories. Stuart Hall says, “No one who looks at these textural images now, in the light of history of...slavery and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the ‘loss of identity’, which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place” (Hall 225).

Irie continues to search for her origins and tries to give meaning to her exilic identity by reshaping it. However, the process takes a surprise turn. For example, when Irie becomes pregnant, she is unable to find the identity of her unborn child’s biological father. The narrator describes,

Irie was eight weeks pregnant and she knew it. What she didn’t know, and what she realizes she may *never know*...was the identity of the father. No test on earth would tell her. Same thick black hair, same twinkling eyes...she could not know her body’s decision, what choice it had made, in the race to the gamete, between the saved and the unsaved. She could not know if the

choice would make any difference. Because whichever brother it was, it was the other one too. She would never know. (Smith 513)

This failure to pinpoint the unborn child's identity both physically and culturally brings Irie to a halt. The failure of articulating the unborn child's cultural position in the transcendent English space thus can be defined through Stuart Hall's second position on cultural identity. Hall says,

Cultural identity...is a matter of 'becoming as well as of being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identity comes from somewhere, has histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (Hall 225)

Thus, the child's cultural identity will always be subjected to Irie, Magid and Millat's unsolved questions regarding their own past history, their own fluid identities and the same time as the child him/herself will always go through the transformation of 'being and becoming.'

Through all of these, Irie is forced to think if trying to understand her origins and past history was worthwhile when one has only the present and future to think about. Irie says while thinking of families like the Chalfens that, "as far as they're concerned, it's the *past*...they don't run around, relishing, *relishing* the fact that they are utterly dysfunctional. They don't spend their time trying to find ways to make their lives more complex. They just *get on with it*" (Smith 512). Even though she is complimenting the Chalfens' ability to just move on with their past, there is a resentment and anger as well: the anger is towards the treatment of Caribbean history in this transnational-multicultural space. At the end, the

readers find that Irie and Joshua become partners and Irie becomes mother to her “fatherless little girl...[who]...writes affectionate postcards to Bad Uncle Millat and Good Uncle Magid and feels free as Pinocchio, a puppet clipped of paternal strings?” (537). Thus, Irie reshapes her identity as a second generation immigrant in the transnational English space and shows that one’s question on identity is and will be subjected to the continuous process of reshaping, transformation and redefining: which will always come from ‘within.’ This is why Hall says, “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking identity as an already accomplished fact, ...we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 222).

In conclusion, we can understand how much impact ones’ history can make on generation after generation. *White Teeth* portrays this ontological backdrop and articulates the process of reshaping the second generation of immigrants’ identities. Even though we see that these communities try to navigate their lives through connections and disconnections, the transcended fluid spaces allow them to question their ‘belongingness’ by constantly reshaping their identities. Magid’s desire to be a perfect English gentleman despite his father’s attempt to preserve Muslim and Bengali values, show that how interfering with childhood’s natural development can bring out the struggle of identity and belongingness—especially for a second generation immigrant. Millat on the other hand despite being in his parents’ site for his whole life struggles to belong anywhere becomes ‘schizophrenic.’ Irie, who is already suffering from her own unsettled identity issues, becomes the permanent bearer of the child who will belong ‘nowhere’ and ‘everywhere’ at the same time, despite race and gender differences. Thus, the fluidity of English space constantly brings out the question of diversity and identity.

Chapter 3

Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*

3.1 Borders, Nation and Home

Zia Haider Rahman's first novel *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) deals with the question of identity in a very different manner than Smith's novel. It is no longer confined within the English space; rather it crosses boundaries and time. The history of colonial discourse repeats itself in a very modern way where agencies such as NGO's dominate the war torn South Asian country Afghanistan. The novel engages the readers vividly with scenarios of wartime sexual violence against women and their voicelessness. The novel is narrated elaborately while revisiting 9/11 and its aftermath on immigrants. It portrays the question of 'exile' centering on the main character named Zafar- who finds himself at crossroads of cultures. Edward Said says, "And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (Said 201).

The novel deals with the protagonist Zafar's perception of transnational spaces as a second generation immigrant. Zafar was born in Sylhet, Bangladesh and he moved to England with his adoptive parents as a child. Throughout the novel we see how he searches for the meaning of his given identity as a second generation South Asian immigrant via his experiences as an international consultant and mathematician. He tells his story to his unnamed best friend who is the narrator in the novel. In order to find meaning and define his identity, he finds himself dwelling in the liminal spaces between cultures. This in-betweenness or as Homi K. Bhabha calls it the "Third space", allows Zafar to navigate and

continually reshape his given identity as a second-generation immigrant. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) describes this “third space” elaborately, which is where split subjects- divided between cultures, nations and identities dwell. Migrants and exiles live within the fluidity of transnational spaces and “display ambivalent and divided forms of identification” (Bhabha 43). To understand and find meaning and develop a sense of belonging in a particular location, the “Third space of enunciation...challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people" (54). In the novel *Zafar*, the protagonist also challenges the traditional sense and perception of maps in order to portray his understanding of belonging. He says, “The map helps you navigate your way around its own schematic world and requires you to abandon the reality of tarmac and buildings and parks... [and if] you stand on the earth and start walking in any direction and just keep walking, you’ll never hit any kind of boundary” (Rahman 22-24). It shows that he is explaining on one hand that the meaning of these borderlines in real life depend on individual experiences and via this experience, he/she can identify their home, culture and nationality. On the other hand, borderlines on maps can only satisfy the illustrative version of different nations. To illustrate his point further he gives examples of “mountaineers and orienteers [who] use maps that by means of lines joining points of the same height [gives] you a feel in two dimensions for the three-dimensional relief of the known world” (21).

Victor Roudometof in his essay “Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization” talks about various layers of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and how all of it fits together with the conception of glocalization. He says, transnationalism “can extend into other spaces, including spaces of transnational sexuality, popular music, journalism, as well as spaces fostering the construction of a multitude of identities (ranging from those based on gender to those based on race, religion or ethnicity)” (Roudometof 119). In the

novel, we see how Zafar in order to understand where he belongs as a second-generation South Asian immigrant takes up the comparison between Afghanistan and his birth place Sylhet. Perhaps because of the common thread as a South Asian, Zafar takes up this comparison and distinguishes the natural beauties of these two South Asian countries. While flying to Kabul, he says that he “saw a land bleaker and more beautiful than anything I had seen in Bangladesh...whereas my beautiful Sylhet sang the song of seasons, of a yearly cycle, Afghanistan’s barren, ragged desolation moaned a long dirge of ancient wonder, the earth’s broken features ready to receive the fallen horseman, the lost traveler, and all the butchered tribes” (Rahman 21). Even though Zafar tries to find a common ground in order to identify himself as a South Asian, he consciously mystifies Afghanistan’s natural environment, just as the imperialists viewed the ‘others.’ In order to identify a sense of belonging to a homeland/home from the in-betweenness, Zafar elaborates his affection and love for America as a country and as an idea in itself. He even declares that America has his heart at some point of the novel. This is amply proved for example, by the elaborate recounting by the unnamed narrator of the time he goes through US immigration and identifies himself as an American “when a US immigration officer snaps the navy-blue passport shut and hands it back with a smile and with the greeting ‘Welcome home.’ At that moment [he feels] varying degrees of sensation of a breeze kissing the back of [his] neck, which might very well be called patriotism” (105). This incident in the narrator’s life is used to show, Zafar sense of homelessness, as no such welcome awaits him in British immigration. In Renu Priyadath in “Unhomely Alliances: The colonial Possibility of Migrant Homes” says quoting Gayatri Spivak that “Old diasporas, Spivak argues, were formed through “religious oppression and war, slavery and indenturing, trade and conquest, and intra-European economic migration,” and new diasporas of transnationalism are formed through immigration and migration” (qtd. in Priyadath 53). In the novel, Zafar not only compares his warm greeting between US and

British immigration, he portrays that even in the transnational space, sense and treatment of colonial subjugation is still active within the English spaces. He says, “If an immigration officer at Heathrow had ever said ‘Welcome home’ to me, I would have given my life for England, for my country, there and then. I could kill for an England like that” (Rahman 107). This is how Zafar finds his ‘homely’ belongingness everywhere and nowhere at the same time, leaving him hanging in the in-betweenness of time, history and geographical spaces.

In the novel, Sylhet becomes one of the critical geographical spaces for Zafar to experience and get hold of his understanding of belonging. Zafar at times can relate to his identity as someone who was born here and at some times the place becomes alien to him as well. For example, when he journeys to Sylhet by train, he realizes that people there looked like him from the outside and at the same time they are all unfamiliar and alien to him. He went to Sylhet without receiving any clarification and he thought his father sent him there “to find something of my roots” (Rahman 55). As a 12-year-old boy he did not know that he was a war child, born out of the violence of rape, the rape of his mother during the 1971 Bangladeshi war of independence. In fact, the novel only hints at this possibility, never stating it outright. In the novel when he arrives in Sylhet, the place and the country offer familiar belongingness and at the same times it feels alien. He says, “I was twelve years old and travelling alone across a country that was neither home nor foreign to me, a traveller whose world moved about him. Are we not, as those children’s books tell you, travelling through space at thousands of miles each second, still flying outwards because of that first centrifugal bang?” (58-59). As he tries to find ‘meaning’ in Sylhet, Bangladesh and hopes to be provided answers to his search for identity, he finds himself in the same place he has always been-the ‘third place’ or the ‘in-between.’ Moira Casey and Eva Roe White in their article talk about the issues of boundaries and how within the new diasporas created out of the transnational paradigm can reflect on the question of ‘home’ and ‘belongingness’ as never

ending unsettled spaces. They say, “home spaces are constantly deferred or mediated, which allows the marginal characters only to “crash” those spaces temporarily rather than to settle them” (Casey and White 103). In the novel when Zafar describes the rivers in Bangladesh and how their courses are always unsettled, he finds meaning in this unsettled space. However, when Zafar talks about the pineapples growing in some corner of Sylhet while being in Britain, he at times shows his tone of foreignness and as if he had never been there, even though he saw those pineapples being grown via his journey to Sylhet. He says,

As an adolescent back in Britain, I believed that what I saw in boyhood was a representation of a beginning, a homeland without politics, that such memories built up a picture of a time and place, that these things I had seen, these things I had tasted and smelled, the stuff set down in the store of memory, that they were an ark from which a whole world could be recreated. But... some pineapples grown in the wild in one corner of a remote part of the world-remote from me (Rahman 85)

Zafar once again feels that he is hanging in a liminal space and time as he clearly reminisces his childhood visit to Sylhet as an adult living in England and as he feels those memories, those pineapples grow remote from him and that visited time and space also become remote. Irene Perez Fernandez says, “This space is problematic; it is characterised by ambivalence and an ongoing process of juggling notions of *belonging* and *exclusion*; it is the outcome of processes of negotiation and change” (Fernandez 144). Zafar negotiates the definition of traditional ‘home’ and that is why when the narrator, his friend asks him how he went home the night that his train had met with an accident on his journey to his village in Sylhet, he clarifies his in-between sense of the word ‘home.’ He says, “My friend, you know me well enough to know that I couldn’t possibly use the word home without couching it in so many

caveats as to make it useless. I was going back to my father's village, the family homestead, the place where I had lived as an infant, the place where I believe I was born” (Rahman 82). Zafar’s in-betweenness and as the narrator calls it his “deep alienation” (137) comes certainly from how he was born. He was born out of violence, out of force into the world and thus it has taken root in his search for identifying himself as a person. This is why the unnamed narrator says while citing his alienation that it comes from the fact that “his true father, was a Pakistani soldier who raped his mother, and that this mother, his true mother, was the younger sister of the man who raised him as his own son” (137).

3.2 Language, Customs and Politics of Religion

Zafar’s search for his identity unsettles him in the land he is growing up in. South Asian cultural nuances met and clashed with British values and he tries to understand while questioning the meaning of these dilemmas. Homi K. Bhabha says while discussing enunciations which come from cultural differences that, “The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between a traditional culturalist’ demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference and the necessary negation of certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings” (Bhabha 51). For example, in the novel Zafar talks about how his mother flinches at his saying ‘thank you’ and such pleasantries to her; portraying that his mother wanted to keep the South Asian heritage alive in the house. Zafar says, “My mother had always winced when I said please and thank you...Thank you was an English phrase that ruptured my spoken Sylheti...[S]he couldn’t bear to hear me say thank you because it signified how far away I’d moved from the culture and values she inherited, even then” (Rahman 157). Zafar uses the word ‘rupture’ to emphasize that it is not only the English language which has ruptured his Sylheti accent, it also bears the dented colonial history. As language has always been one of the strategies used by the colonizers to oppress and divide the colonized people, it was still a

weapon to modernize and affirm English power over the 'other.' For example, in the novel Zafar's encounter and limited experience with the carpenters focuses on the generalization of cultures and lack of understanding the enunciation of which results from cultural differences. One of the carpenters named Bill calls Zafar a 'Paki' using the generic slang term for all people of South Asian origin in Britain. However, Bill's colleague Dave clarifies for him when they find out that Zafar was born in Bangladesh and Dave says that Bangladesh did not fight their war of liberation just to be insulted and dragged back to Pakistan's history of violence. Even amid this generalization of culture and history, Zafar manages to appreciate the goodness in working class people, which is so different from the elites described in the novel. Bhabha says, "The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address" (Bhabha 51).

Furthermore, in the novel we can see that Zafar's experiences in both Pakistan and Afghanistan portray different emotions regarding concepts of 'home' and 'in-betweenness.' On one hand, Zafar's experience in Pakistan introduces him to a very uncomfortable and discomfoting space and Afghanistan also makes him feel uneasy and helpless at times. For example, during the dinner party arranged by the army officials in Pakistan, Zafar shows his hostility towards the officers' treatment of religion and Bangladesh. It also makes him consciously aware of a 'colonial split' as describe by Ngugi wa Thiongo. Zafar says, "These men had rather thick Pakistani accents and I was conscious of my own voice, its decidedly educated English sound. To my mind's ear- I had barely spoken- it already sounded out of place, even false and presumptuous" (Rahman 346). Zafar's conscious mind is also aware that this is the same country that had unleashed untold violence in Bangladesh and that his

real mother was a Birangona³. Zafar's understanding of 'home' here is associated with violence and terror as Priyadath says, "for diasporic people a coherent narrative of 'home' is near impossible to accomplish...Being doubly or even multiply conscious of home as a place of terror/safety, dis/comfort, and un/belonging, for diasporic peoples, disrupting home would involve the continual destabilization of the many homes that migrants inhabit" (Priyadath 56). In the novel, during the party, one of the army officers named Reza says to Zafar that "Welcome home...You're one of us because you are a Muslim" (Rahman 356). As the army officials try to convince Zafar that he is one of them because of his given religion, Zafar for the first time in the novel declares that he is Bangladeshi. His declaration suggests that he recognizes the violence and torture that created him and how it was the same country which had subjected his real mother to this violence. When Zafar says he is Bangladeshi one of the generals says, "The great wound from which we will never recover is the betrayal of East Pakistan" (358) and in reply Zafar asks him "Whose betrayal? ... [and] the conversation came to a standing stop" (358).

Zafar's time in Kabul, Afghanistan portrays the country in the forceful grip of Western domination. Afghani people are portrayed as colonized by modern day imperialism. The place is a victim of global geo-politics and the local people are being uprooted and displaced from their own country and home. Zafar says,

I thought of Suaif, this middle-aged engineering professor reduced to guarding a gate; this proud man who slept in a corner of a room in the AfDARI compound set aside for menial staff; this man in his home away from home, who watches helplessly as a Western woman enters and, by the power vested in her by the UN, ISAF, NATO, the West, and her white skin, smashes in a

³ According to Tahmina Anam's article "Bangladesh's Birangona Women: Tell the World Our Story" published in *The Guardian* cites the term and says "'Birangona women'- the label the state gave to women who suffered sexual violence during the war" (Anam 01).

window without even asking him if there was some other way to get in or look in; this man who then stands stripped of his own authority (Rahman 410).

This description of the chaos that war ravaged Afghanistan and its people suffer highlights the uprootedness of people like Souaif, who have been forcefully displaced from their homes as well as helps to juxtapose Zafar's fluctuating identity, uprooted as he had been by another war, leaving him in the interstices of space and time. Bhabha says, "Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). This is how one's' culture, traditions, identity and history can be 'rehistoricized' and portrayed from multiple perspectives.

3.3 Emily

Emily Wyvern-Hampton is the daughter of English parents. She has an aristocratic background and is in a long-term relationship with Zafar. This relationship exacerbates Zafar's class consciousness. Her company always reminds Zafar of his non-belongingness and the ambiguity of his identity. For example, during Zafar's meeting with Emily's family for the first time, he is reminded that despite his education, class privileges are reserved only for the elite. The impenetrability of class begins to dawn on Zafar at this point who thinks to himself that: "I began then to perceive the complexity of Emily's relationship with privilege, her hostility towards it not merely an intellectual level, hostility that was not even purely emotional blow against injustice but a force that gathered in the depths of rebellion" (Rahman 226). This is an ambiguous rebellion – a protest against injustice but at the same time unable to shed the privileges that his unjust system – of class and racial positioning – bestows on that subject. Their love for each other is also put under the microscope by the narrator. Zafar

refuses to commit himself to ‘truly’ loving Emily, but more importantly, Emily’s behaviour does not bestow such confidence in him. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) analyses why love between a man of colour and a white woman, and vice versa, is not possible. As he explains to Sartre ,

[A]nd if Sartre has appeared to formulate a description of love as frustration, his *Being and Nothingness* amounting only to an analysis of dishonesty and inauthenticity, the fact remains that true, authentic love wishing for others for one postulates for oneself, when that postulation unites the permanent values of human reality-entails the mobilization of psychic drives basically freed of unconscious conflict (Fanon 41).

Throughout the novel we see Zafar being frustrated with Emily because he does not understand her, her class position and her Englishness always bothers him. He knows that he is in unfamiliar territory as he replies to the narrator’s question if Zafar had proposed to Emily. Zafar says,

I don’t think I would ever have occupied the space set aside in the romantic vision of the girl whose formation was in another country, a land that shared not even one border with mine, no border of race or nationality of course but still less any border of class. I’ve said it before: race, or as everyone now likes to say ethnicity, was never so much a source of anxiety as class. In point of fact, racial difference was part of the attraction for both of us, I am sure, an aspect of the fierce sexual love blinding us, central to it (Rahman 381).

In addition to these, Zafar in the novel associates his own search for home and identity with Emily representing England and all things English. He says, “Emily was England, home, belonging, the untethering of me from a past I did not want, the promise

through children of a future that was rooted, bound to something treated altogether better by the world than my mother, the girl who loved me” (422). Their lack of trust and belief in each other, the ambiguity of their relationship, culminates in a scene of ‘unspeakable horror’: the novel ends with a scene of unspeakable horror, another scene of rape, as Zafar encounters Emily, his ever-elusive girlfriend, in a hotel room. Described as ‘*violence-becoming*’ (italics in the original), the act is hinted at, rather than described” (Azim 256). This scene seems to echo the impossibility of interracial relationships as described by Fanon. This scene echoes all the fears of rape and violence on the white woman by the man of colour in colonial writing from Shakespeare onwards. The readers are left with the understanding that a man of colour will always be accused of this ‘unspeakable horror of unrepresentable facts” (256) towards and by the white woman in question. The identity of this man of colour, as in Zafar’s will always be tethered to his past, his skin colour, despite his multiple homes and identities. Thus, at the end of this chapter, we can understand how Zafar will always be associated with his Bangladeshi heritage, be generalized as an Asian and South Asian even, despite being in the presence of cross cultural space-a transnational paradigm. His search for identity thus leaves him stranded in gaps, the interstices between spaces, time and the geo-politics of the 21st century.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The process of 'migration' creates spaces that are eternal mutating and changing. This change in identity, in space and relationships, is always ambivalent and ambiguous. To understand how these identities are reshaped through migration within the fluidity of transnational spaces, the thesis has looked at factors such as language, power, knowledge and the phenomenon of unsettled homes. In order to reconstruct identities in a borderless space, parent/first generation immigrants act and adapt differently than the second generation immigrants. When first generation immigrants are put in the ambiguity of transnational space, they try to hold on to what they have always known-culturally, politically and historically. They try to pass it on to their next generation in the hope of keeping their previous homeland alive. However, the second generation immigrants who are born or raised amid two or more cultures and histories, they are torn between their parents' culture and their present landscape. Thus, from the dissertation we see how from the central point of cultural displacement, the process of negotiating ones' identity start to take place and ultimately it results in displacement of subjectivity and continuously reshaping present identity. In Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000), we see the connections and the misconnections between multiple immigrant communities which occur within the backdrop of multicultural British space. Characters such as Magid, Millat and Irie try to rediscover their take on the question of identity in contrast to their parents' attempt to hold them back. In Zia Haider Rahman's novel "*In the Light of What We Know*" (2014) we see that the protagonist Zafar's search for the impossibility of finding meaning in his given identity and his attempt to reshape it continuously in light of what he experiences in the fluidity of borderless spaces. Thus to conclude, I can say that these are the reasons this dissertation focuses on the analysis of the reshaping of identities under the influence of history and fluidity and therefore this is how the

second generation of immigrants react and adapt to these changes within the transnational space.

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