

Negotiating Spaces: Identity (de)Constructions in Migrant Writing

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is a result of my own work. The contribution of other sources and information have been acknowledged whenever they have been used. It has not been previously included in a dissertation or report submitted to this university or to any other institution for a degree or other qualification.

Signature

Abstract

Migration literature within postcolonial discourse contains at the heart of its narrative identity formations outside national frontiers. This dissertation aims to explore how identity is processed through the consolidation and repudiation of cultures within the “host” and “home” countries, and how fragmentation as a result of historical narratives as well the creation of nation states result in ambiguous states of the self. Through the works of several writers consisting of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) and its film adaptation directed by Mira Nair (2006), as well as the films *East is East* (1999) and its sequel *West is West* (2010), I shall be exploring how multiculturalism is experienced differently between men and women.

Key words: Multiculturalism, race, identity construction, nationalism

Dedication

To my Father and Mother.

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List Of Abbreviations:

Benedict Anderson

IC: *Imagined Communities*

Jhumpa Lahiri

NS: *The Namesake*

Zadie Smith

WT: *White Teeth*

Hanif Kureishi

BS: *The Buddha of Suburbia*

BL: *My Beautiful Laundrette and other writings*

Homi Bhabha

LC: *The Location of Culture*

Salman Rushdie

IH: *Imaginary Homelands*

and

RW: *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*

Introduction

Justin Trudeau's victory in the 2015 federal election received much attention and his tenure since 4th November has already been lauded with praise. The thirty one member cabinet includes fifteen women, along with Maryam Monsef, Canada's first Afghan born MP, as well as Indian-born Amarjit Sohi and Harjit Sajjan¹. When asked by the press why Trudeau has chosen to establish gender equality in his cabinet, Trudeau responded with the iconic comeback: "Because it's 2015." This moment has gone down in history as one that can positively change the world for immigrants and ethnic citizens around the world, as well as change the face of politics and more pertinently, race and identity politics. Canada is also not the first nation to make the leap towards embracing a multiracial nation. This year the US Census Bureau has stated that they will change race and ethnicity classification, which can potentially mean that people will no longer have to 'tick a box.' However, one does not need to be of a mixed race background in order to feel culturally ambiguous; as a child of Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, with an education background formulated by the Cambridge International Examinations, the issue of "belonging" and "feeling at home" has become a long standing dilemma for me, and the more I travel and endeavor to find a 'home', the worse it seems to get. In my reading of migrant literature, the feeling of displacement and rootlessness is one I closely identify with, but further reading reveals that the state is never uniform for any one, for identity is a continuous process. Therefore, writing novels is also a process of self validation, where the gaze is turned inwards, and also backwards in time as one delves into history up to the closest location of primordial origins one can relate with. Migration literature as a sub genre of Postcolonial literature is concerned with the subject's relationship within borders and spaces, and

¹ Harjit Singh is also the first Sikh Canadian to command a Canadian army reserve. Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/harjit-sajjan-badass-canada-defence-minister-1.3304931>

the negotiation of cultures and identities that result from it. This in turn is expressed and characterized as feelings of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘dislocation’ as the individual is confronted with culture shock brought about as a result of mobilization, as well as changes in the cultural terrain occurring over time due to political and other influences. Migrants, often characterized as being marginalized individuals of a mainstream society, therefore represent the subaltern voice, as they write about their experiences and the various conflicts while attempting to belong, the attempts that result in feelings of displacement, exile, rootlessness, and acceptance/resistance to changes that threaten a gradual loss in the individual’s identity, and the process they go through in order to reclaim it. However, as defined by Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), writers writing outside of their home countries do it from memory, and therefore present their own representation of facts (P24). My paper seeks to examine how migrant writing among second generation immigrants or mixed race children is a simultaneous attempt to set themselves apart from post-colonial discourses whilst also understanding its significance in order to understand their parents and backgrounds, in order to create their own space within the post-modern and post-colonial discourse, and how the nationalist discourse and its influence on identity politics have caused men and women to experience multiculturalism differently. For this I have chosen Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) and its film adaptation by Mira Nair (2006), which details the life of a first generation immigrant family and their children in America; Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), and Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) for the multicultural nature of the narratives; as well as the films *East is East* (1999) and *West is West* (2010).

According to a recent report ², Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries are the top destination for Bangladesh, Pakistani and Indian migrants seeking to travel abroad. Yet however post-colonial discourse surrounding migration literature has been centered on narratives from United Kingdom and the United States. Being a country of religious affiliation to billions of people around the world, to account for Islam being the fastest growing religion, it would be fair to say that migration, and as a result, post-colonial discourse have allowed the voice of a particular class of people to be expressed, and it is the voice of the few that dominates post-colonial discourse. Defined as ‘elitist historiography’, Ranajit Guha describes how it ‘originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated into neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse.’ (Guha 1982)

The aftermath of the World War was followed by the rapid succession of nation states and breaking up of English colonies. Nationalism has its roots during the Enlightenment period, where religious ideals were fading and kingship was no longer a God given right. Rational secularism therefore demanded a new mode of thought, and new ideals to ascribe their territorial allegiance. It is therefore a curious matter that all post-colonial revolutions have been nationalistic. Anderson writes that ‘nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being’. Following over a century of British Imperialism, the birth of India was therefore a consolidation of local as well as Imperialistic cultures. Much criticism has been made to the formation of the country, where the government was formulated after the ideological state apparatus of the British Empire. However Partha Chatterjee draws a distinction between the “material” and the “spiritual” aspects surrounding

² Reinforcing Ties: Enhancing Contributions from Bangladeshi Diaspora Members, published by the International Labor Organization

nationalism. The material world is the space comprised of tools such as economy, state apparatus, as well as science and technology, the Western tools India partakes in for development and modernization; and the spiritual, or 'inner' mode being 'cultural identity' and its nuances. The external world and the inner workings of society are kept distinctly separate, and it is there where anti-colonial struggles lie.

In the first chapter of this thesis, a detailed analysis on identity and its nature is made. *White Teeth*, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *East is East* and *West is West* all take place within London from 1960s-1990s collectively. These decades marked a period of drastic social changes, from cultural and social revolutions and underground subculture scenes, and then to Thatcherism. The nature of time, or the zeitgeist followed a compulsion for identity deconstructions and reconstructions, whilst at the same time an intimate understanding of our collective intricate histories is required, in order to create the right social changes. We also come to learn that in a multicultural space, no matter what the predominant cultural influence may be, the individual is never whole if he or she suppresses other cultural belongings.

The following chapter examines identity transformations within women and how social and nationalist reforms of the nineteenth century have instead created new spaces for women to easily adapt in, instead of what was originally intended, which was a simultaneous means of control and emancipation. The female characters in the novels and films are also less fragmented and more self confident and self aware, unlike their male counterparts. Cross cultural relations between women is non threatening and absent of cultural superiorities, but instead is seen as an important means of female agency and strength.

Chapter One

Nation Creation and Identity Reconstructions

“ In this damn country which we hate and love, you can get anything you want. It’s all spread out and available. That’s why I believe in England. You just have to know how to squeeze the tits of the system.”

-Saeed Jaffrey, as Nasser in *My Beautiful Laundrette*

The departure of the British after the Second World War gave rise to national politics around the world. Migration to the west at the time of nation independence and its attempts to decolonize the subcontinent resulted in formation of diasporas abroad with distinct nationalistic identities, which were ultimately attempted to be passed down to the children born away from ‘home.’ In *East is East* (1999) and *West is West* (2010), we examine the negotiation of cultures of the protagonists through the turbulent relationship between George (Jahangir) and his families, and in a similar trajectory, Samad’s children struggle under the cultural values imposed by their father in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000). In Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), we examine the changing cultural landscapes within London and the different subcultures that have shaped identities in the 60’s and 70’s. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) as explores how names carry a gendered statement as well as nationalistic heritage imposed upon individuals, which Gogol struggles against, and eventually comes to terms with. Therefore a distinction is drawn between first generation immigrants, who battle with themselves and the external world with a nationalistic conscience, and their offspring, born into multicultural realms who seek to define themselves outside the colonial and post-colonial realm.

Benedict Anderson (1983) highlights the problems within the discourse of nationalism as a phenomenon subjected and constructed by the human consciousness, and yet this ‘uncomfortable anomaly’ has existed and shall continue to exist. Therefore it becomes a self-subsisting entity, with its ideological state apparatuses – an abstraction, yet concretely legitimate and sovereign in its ever changing form. Anderson notes how nations are cultural artifacts that ‘command such profound emotional legitimacy’, and therefore, nations become ‘imagined communities’:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (*IC* 6)

The word ‘imagined’ is stressed upon as opposed to ‘invention’³; as individuals within a nation are disparate, and although their lives as a community are governed by the state, nations are subjected to splitting and division as ideological shifts occur. The ephemeral existence of a border controlled territory is therefore not a commanding presence presiding over its people, as is evidently reflected in the various struggles and revolutions of independence, but however, nations have become a self perpetuating phenomenon as they are imagined ‘where they do not exist’. It has become a birthright, presiding over a person’s identity along with gender. However a bond of kinship exists among people of a nation, where a united front is put up in the face of national threats.

The Second World War and the departure of English from the subcontinent were followed by a nationalistic struggle of independence leading to the Dominion of Pakistan and the

³ Benedict Anderson formulates this idea upon Gellner’s statement – ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.’

Union of India. Nearly two and a half million Indian soldiers had participated in the Second World War, which is how Archibald Jones and Samad Iqbal embark on their friendship. Confined inside the cramped spaces of a tank, Samad and his unit are dressed in identical uniforms signifying their common purpose, yet Archie is perturbed by their obvious differences (WT 83). Being the only brown man in the unit, Samad is a minority in every sense of the word. Each assigned with specific roles in operating the tank, they quickly learn to work as a single entity. Archie is unable to take away his ‘relentless gaze’ from Samad’s person, probably for the reason that he is meeting an Indian native belonging to a colony for the first time. Samad presents an ambiguous representation with his impeccable English and “light green/brown eyes” that contradicted the political statements regarding the subcontinent. The events of the War coincided with the Bengal famine in 1943 and Churchill’s famous tirade that the demise was brought on by the people of the land due to their tendency to ‘breed like rabbits.’ He further concluded that Indians were ‘the beastliest people in the world, next to the Germans’ (Sen 2006). It is therefore indeed ironic to note the sheer number of Indians that manned the Allied forces in the war.

Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* describes representation “as a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy...in the production of the ‘political effects’ of discourse (LC 72). When Archie gazes upon Samad, it is the recognition of the racial stereotypes as well as the absence of which creates a paradoxical domain. Samad who speaks fluent English and dons the army of the British force, therefore confronts the Englishmen with an ambivalent image – the recognition of a gentrified presence through Samad’s manner of speaking as well as education, against the political notion that Indians were the “beastliest people.” The friendship between the men is established upon this ground of ambiguity, dispelling the notion of power as being

dialectical. Meanwhile Samad's position in the army becomes contrary as heroic ideals of a soldier war against his anti-colonial beliefs and pride to be a descendant of Mangal Pandey. The collective experiences in the War, and therefore the history surrounding it, belongs to the colonized as much as it does to the colonizers.

Shared historical narratives lead to a "shared" present, a world that is too complex to be put into binary oppositions, and Smith highlights the complexity of 'time' and 'being' by connecting three families in the novel who seemingly have little in common, tied together inevitably due to pure chance. Decades later in the mid-seventies, Archie attempts to commit suicide. The attempted suicide of an Englishman in Cricklewood is an event that would have disappeared and forgotten into obscurity, and Archie's choice in the matter was defined by his justification that 'country people should die in the country and city people should die in the city...*In death as he was in life...*'. (WT 3) Divorced by his Italian wife of thirty years who was also indicated to have been psychologically unstable, his reasoning expresses his plight and the very reason he decided to die – a simple man who no longer fit within the changing ideals of society. With his medals clutched in one hand, Archie is a man who had fought in the Second World War, a battle where taking part staunchly defined English standards and British integrity, only to disappear into obscurity once this brave involvement is met with indifference decades after the war. Similarly, Samad upon returning to a home torn apart by the Partition finds he cannot share any tale of war heroism and loses relevance during an era of post-independence nationalism.

The duality that exists within the formation of nations also results in two-sided historical narratives; one being the State truth, and the other being collective personal accounts of history. Historical narratives have thus become cloaked in an aura of ambiguity, where absolute Truth

becomes an imaginary ideal. Truth also takes on different meaning and form when contested by the various cultures within a state. As Salman Rushdie explains, ‘...there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British.’ (IH 27) Fractured histories, thereby lead to fractured identities. When Samad’s lover, Poppy-Burt Jones tells him of her interest in Indian culture, he corrects her saying he is actually not from India, but from “Bangladesh...Previously Pakistan. Previous to that, Bengal.” (WT 133) However Samad declares he is descended from Mangal Pande, who was Indian and a Hindu by faith. This declaration of fact goes uncontested throughout the novel, and despite the skepticism of his peers and family members on the credibility of the story, he is allowed to hang a portrait of the Indian soldier in O’Connell’s Pool House. When Samad speaks up in honor of his ancestor, Archie argues with conflicting evidence to suggest Mangal Pandey’s only claim to fame was his etymological gift to the English language by way of the word ‘Pandy,’ under which title the OED will find the following definition...”. Aside from being defined as ‘any fool or coward in a military situation’, the colonizer’s version obscures the event even further by erasing Mandal Pandey’s historical presence by presenting it as ‘any sepoy who revolted in the Indian Mutiny of 1857-’. (WT 251)

Samad’s and Archie’s debate on the Indian Rebellion is the colonizer and the colonized attempting to dominate the historical narrative of events with one absolute truth, thereby pushing the ‘other’ into oblivion. For the two friends as they struggle with their identities of ambivalence and obscurity, in order to establish “truth and firmness,” acknowledgement of a single ‘fact’ or ‘truth’ also validates their histories. Homi Bhabha describes how the colonized individual struggles to ascertain his identity in relation to ‘an otherness, its look or locus.’ (LC 44) Quoting

Jacqueline Rose, he describes what happens when the native and settler comes within each other's presence:

When their glances meet, he (the settler) ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place.' (*LC* 44)

If "state" is "material", and modeled upon Imperial reformations and modernity, Samad's rebellion is congruent with anti-colonial struggle. His rejection of the state's tool of "print capitalism" when he endeavors to find any source, however obscure, that glorifies his ancestor and hero, also becomes an anti-colonial struggle as he refutes Archie's arguments. This is followed by a simultaneous rejection of his ancestor's identity as he capitulates to his national identity. Samad is plural and fragmented, owing to his multicultural history as well as his cultural assimilation as an immigrant in London. He describes to Mad Mary, the true state of his inner being, in defining 'satyagraha' and his endeavors to find a state of "truth and firmness":

We are split people. For myself, half of me wishes to sit quietly with my legs crossed, letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me. But the other half wants to fight the holy war. Jihad! (*WT* 179)

The Partition in 1947 and War of Independence in 1971 resulted in a shift of cultures and location as well as identities. The time is chaotic, marked by violence and confusion, leading to unreliable "truths". As Salman Rushdie explains,

History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions, and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. (*IH* 25)

The emotional profundity that is central to nation-creation is therefore the individual's attachment to 'remembered truths.' When the individual narrates his version of history, he is putting himself at the centre of the narrative. The 'cracking'⁴ of nations also erases the location of identity. Migration to the West therefore makes the matter more complicated for in addition to being geographically and historically connected to more places; he is immersed in the host country's cultures and norms. For Samad, and George from *East is East*, who have emigrated in the 1970s, their circumstances involve displacement within the fracturing of their own homes, as well as in a new land.

If the disintegration of one's land result in the dislocation of one's self, then the citizen of the nation *in memoriam* is confronted with the assault of new politics, and therefore a cultural hegemony, without having to physically relocate. Relocation and displacement, therefore becomes the natural state of being following the events of the Second World War. This displacement was brilliantly depicted in *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hossain Manto, when a "lunatic" climbs up a tree after "the entire issue of Hindustan-Pakistan and Pakistan-Hindustan resulted in further disorientation." When ordered to come down, he says, "I want to live neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan – I will live on this tree." For children born during post nationalist movements, identities become more fragmented as they try to concede with their parents' struggles of belonging as well as confront the shifting political ideologies over time.

Children of immigrants in the novels are raised in a world where their existence becomes a struggle to fit in as well as asserting their own identities. In the films *East is East* as well as its sequel *West is West*, and the novels *White Teeth* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* we examine the

⁴ In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai describes the "cracking" of nations as the dissolution of his own entity: "Rip, crunch, crack – while road surfaces split in the awesome heat, I, too am being hurried towards disintegration." (P536)

changing realities of London society within the subcultures of 1970s-80s. In the attempts of trying to identify oneself with the ever shifting social realities, children of immigrants or parents of mixed ethnicities are forced to deal with cultural loyalties and the heritage of origin. The moral struggle of false representation among mixed race children also results in their alienation from either society. In 1968 Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech gave rise to vicious racism which lasts to this day⁵. This put forth the indication that to be truly English, one would have to feel strongly against immigrants, other races are denigrated to people of color and outsiders, and the rampant persecution and racial insults made individuals aware that although they identify themselves as 'British', they shall never belong.

Hanif Kureishi in *The Rainbow Sign* describes his friend known as 'Bog Brush' who suddenly went through changing his appearance to emulate a 'skinhead' (BL 74). The subcultures in London prevalent at the time had their own philosophies, appearances, and artistic tastes. As Simon Frith states, "Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective."⁶ In *White Teeth*, Millat grows up to lead a "crew" that "looked like trouble...And, at the time, a crew that looked like trouble in this particular way had a name, they were of a breed: *Raggastani*...a new breed, just recently joining the ranks of the other street crews: Becks, B-boys, Indie kids, wide boys, ravers, rude-boys, Acidheads, Sharons, Tracies, Kevs, Nation Brothers, Raggas and Pakis." The formation of these street crews is one of survival instinct, to not be 'fucked' with. To be large in numbers with a uniform identity also meant they were able to occupy more 'space', within the cultural scene as

⁵ It was revealed in a poll that 74% were in support of Powell's proposed policies in Birmingham. In 1973, "a quarter of all MORI respondents claimed that Powell was the MP who best represented their views." P48, *The White Man's World* by Bill Schwartz

⁶ Frith, Simon. "Music and Identity." *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay. London: Sage, 2003

well as physical space. In a parallel world, Magid grows up to be an atheist despite having attended a ‘madrassa’, and when his parents receive a picture of him as a university student, he is shown attired in a “tweed suit” and a “cravat,” shaking hands with Sir R. V. Saraswati (WT 28), who according to Samad, is a ‘colonial throwback’. The absence of Magid for eight years and his transformation is indicative of the inevitability of unforeseen change, and therein lays the futility of analysis and the location of identity.

Hanif Kureishi’s novel gives us an alternate experience as we follow the journey of the protagonist and his struggle to appear visible and whole in the London theatre scene. He begins the novel by introducing himself:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an 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)...(BS 3)

The first line of the novel presents us the paradox and the ‘problem’. Karim, unlike Magid and Millat, has an Indian father and an English mother, and unlike George’s sons as we shall see later on in the chapter, has an amicable relationship with his father. Haroon Amir, unlike George “Jahangir” Khan, has appropriated the English culture and does not force his national identity upon his children. However, Karim is ‘bored’ and ‘restless’ and blames it on the ‘odd mix of continents and blood’. Despite his complex, he is optimistic and insists he is ‘going somewhere’, and is determined to leave the suburbs to seek success as a performer. He comes to discover that his ambiguous ethnicity gets in the way, and he is frequently typecast as

stereotypical Indian or racial ethnic characters which he accepts and executes with great enthusiasm and aplomb, much to the chagrin of Jamila and Haroon.

Shadwell declares to have chosen Karim “authenticity” and not for “experience” (BS 147), and therefore must perform the part of Mowgli with an Indian accent. Karim’s discomfort at being told to do such a thing is not only due to being subjected to racial discrimination, but also his inability to recognize the “authentic” Indian within him. The dialogue between himself and Terry reflects upon the condition of actors and the roles they are coerced to do, and in this instance, they are the downtrodden working class in the film industry. However this also reflects the reality of “performance”, of having to emulate different forms and characters, and therefore their identities on stage. Karim is fluid, and without depth, and his transformation of different characters is characteristic of the metaphysical reality of migrants. To perform a character, one would also have to emulate his likeness, which is done through mimicry. Later he decides to ‘use’ Jamila’s husband Changez as an inspiration for a character, mimicking his likeness to generate a stereotypical Pakistani. Bhabha’s theory of mimicry states that

...colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.

Homi Bhabha further describes mimicry is a ‘discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible, and that which though known must be kept concealed’. This defines Karim’s fear as being thought of as a ‘liar’ or an ‘untrustworthy’ person. His position as a mixed blood English citizen puts him under much scrutiny of not only the white British, but also

Indians. Hanif Kureishi in *The Rainbow Sign*, writes how during his visit to Pakistan, despite being greeted warmly than he would have ever been in Enoch Powell's England, felt 'patriotic' when 'anti-British remarks' were made:

...I only felt patriotic when I was away from England...But I couldn't allow myself to be too Pakistani. I didn't want to give in to that falsity, that sentimentality. As someone said to me in a party...we are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki. (BL 81)

In relation to race politics, Amartya Sen states, "The connection between cultural bigotry and political tyranny can be very close. The asymmetry of power between the ruler and the ruled, which generates a heightened sense of identity contrast, can be combined with cultural prejudice in explaining away failures of governance and public policy." If we are to consider Benedict Anderson's definition of nations as being "imagined" and borne from cultural effects, then cultural prejudices within a nation can dictate the fate of a migrant as it would be in this case the 'determinant of societal predicaments.' The migrant is never 'free' in the host country and will not have the same social rights, thereby forcing them into restricted spaces.

Karim's inability to secure acting roles outside his supposed racial stereotype and the general predicament characters in the novels have faced throughout their lives, dictates the dilemma of children born of a third culture. His struggle is posited alongside Charlie Kay's success as a rock star, but despite Karim's love and admiration for him, he does not agree with Charlie's methods of becoming completely open to experimentation and receptive to whatever comes his way. Ironically, it is Charlie who tells Karim "what" he is: "Well then, can't you stop standing there and looking so English?" (BS 254)

The term “English” thereby takes on a different form for even the British youth growing up in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, defined by riots and just as importantly, riot music, as well as the growing need and protest for social change. English therefore becomes a “class”, and where ‘hard words and sophisticated ideas were in the air they breathed from birth, and this language was the currency that bought you the best of what the world could offer. But for us it could only ever be a second language...’ Karim’s view of the English is therefore a class that is unmoving and static, and for that reason alone people like him who “never carried no effeminate briefcases since we never did no homework” (BS 178) would never find their footing onto success. The collective use of ‘us’ seems to identify with those that did not have the privilege of being born in an “English” class with “English standards”, and spoke in regional dialects.

Here we arrive at the social realities as depicted by the films *East is East*, and its sequel *West is West*. The title of the film is adapted from Ruyard Kiplings poem *The Ballad of East and West* where it begins with the line: “Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Based on a play written by Ayub Khan-Din (who is also the screenwriter of the film), it the plot centres on the relationship between George “Jahangir” Khan and his British wife and children. Unlike Haroon, George is extremely recalcitrant towards the British culture, and despite having married an Englishwoman, he is against his sons marrying non-Pakistani women.

Religion is at the centre for George’s life, just like it has been for Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*, where the two men rely on the Imam for advice. Apart from being a place for worship, mosques are also the centre of the community and therefore play a central role in Muslim diasporas abroad. In Samad’s life, the “Alim” is an authoritative role, a panoptical eye of culture and social mores whose teachings torment Samad as he is torn between repressing his urges and giving into them. For George, the mosque is the only space where his identity is validated and

whole; it is the only place where he is called by his real name, Jahangir. George's relationship with his children becomes increasingly violent throughout the film as they flout his rules, and therefore his cultural heritage.

In a research carried out in the Bangladeshi community living outside the London suburbs⁷, Tazeen Murshid noted how students interviewed

...generally had no idea about their history of migration or colonization, nor of what constituted their distinctiveness from their peers. They ascribed their "difference" largely to their color and social practices which they confused with religious prescriptions. For example, they believed that their parents were restrictive because Islam was a restrictive religion while their peers led a freer life because Christianity allowed it.⁸

The opening scene of the film depicts George's seven children being the happy participants of a Christian marching band. Upon spotting their father, they quickly run for cover before being discovered and punished for disobedience. In a contrasting scene, the children mumble along to the Quranic repetitions of the Imam, their postures clearly indicating their presence against their will. What began as wary disobedience quickly turns into dissent and the rejection of Pakistani ideals by rejecting their father throughout the course of the film.

The formation of Pakistan was concurrent with the violent Hindu-Muslim riots after the partition, where each group lay claim to a territory based on their religious faiths. Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* describes the Babri Mosque, built in Ayodhya, the hometown of Rama, and the exact location of his birth is said to be situated on the site of the mosque. Upon

⁷ The findings are based on a research conducted between 1988-1991, published as *Education, Identity and Community: Bangladeshis in an Outer London Suburb*

⁸ Murshid, Tazeen. "Education, Identity, and Community: Bangladeshis in an Outer London Suburb." *Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters*. Ed. Niaz Zaman, Firdous Azim and Shawkat Hussain. Dhaka: UPL, 1999

questioning the residents of the town on this matter, the consensus was divided, among faith, as each group was convinced that it had rightfully belonged to them by way of religious affiliation. The attachment to Islam is more than religious fervor; it is their national legacy, and their origin ascertained through the unquestionable truth of Allah and the Qur'an. In *East is East* we witness a dual existence between George and Jahangir- George is the violent and abusive father, who attempts to discipline his children by way of force. This force is an attempt to expose them to Jahangir, who is softer spoken, and loses the rough edges George has. In the sequel *West is West*, Jahangir emerges, and his religious fanaticism gives way to a spiritual asceticism through the character of Peer-ji, who shows Jahangir's son Sajid the joint Hindu and Muslim histories of Pakistan. However Smith poses how religion becomes a problematic emblem of national consciousness; in the face of ambiguous and fragmented identities, religion and steadfast faith becomes an impossible to attain ideal. Similarly in *The Buddha of Suburbia* Kureishi presents the ludicrous image of the spiritual suburban sadhu his father tried to become; it is simply not something that makes sense in the multicultural realm. Religion was also not of political relevance in the secularist and progressive decades of the 1960s-1970s. "Islamization," according to Kureishi, was a process that had stemmed from Bhutto's promises to "appease the mullahs"(BL 83). In a world where change is the only constant, religion becomes a contradiction as well as anachronistic in the goal of creating progress through development. On the other hand, marginalization have compelled youths to turn towards Islam, as is described within Millat's gang, to whom Allah is part of their gang and sympathetic towards their sentiments (WT 233).

The Salman Rushdie affair over *The Satanic Verses* has been pivotal in generating radicalized beliefs around the world, particularly his home, and therefore his Muslim community in Britain. Kenan Malik outlines how the term 'radical' had changed over the publication;

primarily the term had been reserved for liberal left-wing activists, and now it has come to label Islamic fundamentalists⁹. Therefore the interchangeability of the phrase demonstrated a new political conflict in the West. However, it was not the first time Islamic fundamentalism had arrived on the political scene as a form of dissent, preceding decades ever since the 1930's had witnessed Malcom X as well as the onslaught of the Nation of Islam and its influential supporters such as Mohammad Ali. Rebellion against white supremacy had been 'black rebellion', one that Asians also felt a part of until the 1980s. The changing face of Islam had therefore created new spaces for British Muslims, as well as a tool to strongly oppose racism and persecution.

Therefore this outlines the political changes from the 1960s (timelines in which *East is East* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* are primarily set) to the 1980's and 1990s. During Powell's crusade for repatriation, Asians were denigrated to being "Pakis" who should "go back to where they come from." For mixed race children, their identities become nonexistent within this furor and had to keep low profiles for their own safety. The cloak of invisibility also becomes a desire, as is shown in *East is East*; Sajid, George's youngest child wears a hooded parka at all times in the film. It has been indicated in the film that his attempts to remain inconspicuous has played to his advantage; he manages to escape the mandatory Muslim ritual of circumcision and is not subjected to tempers during family conflicts. Sajid's parka therefore becomes an escape, to turn inwards and detach himself from the reigning conflicts outside. It also becomes the only location where he can 'truly belong,' which is to be camouflaged against the backdrop of the conflicts within the family, as his brothers' struggle against their father's dominion, as well as the society at large outside their home.

⁹ From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and its legacy < http://www.kenanmalik.com/papers/fatwa_intro.html >

Sajid's circumcision causes much alarm and dismay to his father and the Alim; similarly when the other boys see it, they taunt and laugh at him for not undergoing a step that is a rite of passage for boys in order to grow into men. Therefore Sajid, is not only 'invisible', but he is also a sexless being. The circumcision becomes a pivotal point where he is drawn out of his hood as he increasingly becomes the object of notice in his community, as well as his own awareness of the 'sex change'. When he draws a picture of his penis, he relays his sexual ambiguity as well as duality between having a foreskin, and living the rest of his life sans foreskin. Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* contains scenes in which Karim engages in sex with both men and women; but he never seeks to define his sexuality. Similarly Millat angrily reflects on how he "was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs..." (WT 234). Sexual identities for the characters become a fluid space between the two worlds of conservative nationalism that their families adhere to, and the rejection of British society. Sexual fluidity is also a rejection of the patriarchal and traditional structure imposed upon them by their fathers.

Name play is a common theme among all the works examined here. Names, given to us at birth, become cultural markers throughout our lives. Despite the plurality of the characters, names signify their 'primordial origins' as well as the plurality of cultures. In *The Namesake*, Gogol is torn between two identities imposed by his "daak naam" and "bhalo naam". What seems to be a struggle against a name that earned him ridicule throughout his adolescence, 'Gogol' signifies loss and pretense (as it does not even pertain to his culture) as the protagonist struggles to find a name that fully defines his identity. Throughout the novel, we meet Bengali characters who are aware of the semantics of their name, which Gogol is robbed of as his name is not even Bengali. The concept of 'daak naam' is not limited to the Indian or Bangladeshi

culture. the Arab equivalent of nom de guerre is 'kunya' which may stem from two occasions; a nickname that is given to a person with hypothetical references, for example, Abu Bakr (father of the camel calf); or the birth of one's first born child where the prefix 'Abu' is used to signify 'father of-'. Native Americans had their own naming system, where the names of children may change during adolescence, or at any significant point of their lives.¹⁰ Thus the concept of 'naming' among children born in diasporas abroad go through a Western naming system, which can never change. For the sons and daughters of mixed race children in the novels, their names are undercurrents of their father's historical backgrounds, and therefore themselves. Names are also subjected to Anglicization; which ironically spurs Gogol to change his name to Nikhil.

Thus to conclude, cultural spaces are heterogenous and are subject to the changing political ideologies of the era, and second generation migrants as well as multiracial individuals have the liberty to travel between the Imperial as well as the colonized space. Their distinct 'breed' allows them the objectivity and freedom to choose their identities, whilst being aware that identity is free flowing and never static. Hanif Kureishi in his essay *The Rainbow Sign* describes what happens when a person's identity is determined by pluralism, and the tension that arises when different cultures and their histories collide and are consolidated:

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. What that intermix means, its moral quality, whether it is violently resisted by ignorant whites and characterized by inequality and injustice, or understood, accepted and humanized, is for all of us to decide

¹⁰ *Names and Identity: The Native American Naming Tradition*, by Elisabeth Pearson Waugaman, Ph.D

Chapter Two

Migration and the Female Space

If migration is the mapping and relocation of families from one place to another, marriage plays a crucial role in enabling women to relocate. Before 19th century reformations in Bengal, the first migration of woman to the West was not for the purpose to fill the shoes of a wife keeping a husband company. Individuals such as Toru Dutt, Kadambini Ganguly, Anandi Gopal Joshi have all migrated to the West in pursuit of a superior education, and numerous women have traveled to other colonies as indentured labor. Cultural standards and nationalist reforms in colonial and post-colonial Bengal asserted the need for marriages to become monogamous, and for women to marry and to preserve the cultural space. Her definite and restrictive role is reflected in the novels of Zadie Smith and Jhumpa Lahiri, where the principal characters mostly male. In *East is East* (1999) and *West is West* (2010), the two films are split between George's two wives, and therefore representing two very different lives. Where at first glance the lives of these women are oppressive, we come to recognize their various triumphs and how they negotiate between the "traditional" and "modern" in foreign territories. More importantly, the cross cultural female friendships that are formed are very distinctive and significant to both the lives of the women concerned, as well as the impact it has on the execution of their decisions, and ultimately motherhood and the raising of a new generation. Although the novels and films are written by men and women, the representation of women in these works are similarly portrayed. Karim's mother, Margaret, and Ella from *East is East* struggle to come to terms with both the foreign cultures of their husbands as well as the actions that cause them much suffering. Alsana and Ashima were married to their husbands via arranged marriage and therefore had to come to terms with living with men who were strangers to them as

well as adapt to a new culture. The birth of a new generation in a multicultural space gives rise to new identities wholly separate and distinct from their mothers, and through Irie, Neena and Jamila we examine how changing politics change the myth of woman.

Women's migration and marriage has its own historical trajectory. Female indentured labor in the 19th century in various parts of the colonial world to work in sugar plantations marked the first mass mobilization of women from India. In Samita Sen's essay *Wrecking Homes, Making Families*, she describes how a need for female labor arose to protect the indenture system in order to prevent Indian men from mingling with the existing colonial society. The violent and underhand ways taken to transport many of these women led to the Act of 1901¹¹, which "forbade the recruitment of women without the consent of husband or guardian." Migration led to the alteration of the traditional caste system, but the need to find 'good' women for marriage led to a reconstruction of the female ideal. Sen describes how marriage laws were 'uneven' across genders, 'the definition of monogamy grew more restrictive in relation to women, while men's right to polygamy was extended.' Further restrictions were made to women's labor contract, thus immobilizing them and their children 'within the family.' (Sen 102) This gave rise to the new "Indian families' in diasporas abroad. Indentured emigration had been met with great opposition and outrage among Indians, and nationalistic movements after the partition quickly sought to protect women, and at the same time control them through restrictive measures by drawing upon cultural myths and making them inclusive within the national imaginary.

¹¹ Sen, Samita. "Wrecking Homes, making families: women's recruitment and indentured labor migration from India." *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. Ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook. London: Routledge, 2013

Nineteenth century reforms in an attempt to ‘modernize’ and ‘emancipate’ women from traditional laws as well as the emergence of the ‘bhadralok’ class gave rise to new family structures. The education of the ‘bhadralok’ inevitably created the idea of the ‘bhadramahila,’¹² who were ‘an articulate group of women able to make their voices heard through public institutional channels hitherto confined to men.’ The emergence of this class also led to a homogenization of culture, as women across the upper Hindu castes and the educated Muslim class dressed in the same manner and spoke the same language, and therefore transcended the existing cultural definitions for their heritage (Amin 1996). Thus for a moment in time women were an ambivalent group, which had opened up further opportunities for them before cultural reconstruction brought about by anti-colonial and nationalistic movements. Partha Chatterjee in *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question* explains how “women’s reforms” were the subject of much debate during the 19th century, but had however dwindled in importance with the rising nationalism and anti-imperialistic sentiments in the 20th century. Pre-Independence era witnessed India turning to methods of “modernization” that was largely Western, and decolonization attempts following Independence “glorified India’s past and tended to defend everything traditional.” (RW 234) Based on this premise, women’s issues following nationalism has taken a backwards turn as the changing myths of women required them to emulate changing ideals. Partha Chatterjee’s arguments are pro-nationalistic and argue how in the previous century reforms were highly selective and limited, and therefore nationalistic movements cannot be seen as “retrogression.” (RW 234) Drawing on his idea of the “material” and “spiritual”, he further expands his theory to note that the “material” or “bahir” is a male domain, and the “inner” or “ghor” is the spiritual where the woman is sovereign. To further extrapolate from the matter of politics, the spiritual realm becomes a space where the West “had failed to colonize the inner,

¹² Amin, Sonia. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal: 1876- 1939*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996

essential, identity of the East...the East was undominated, sovereign, master of its own fate.” (RW 239) The home is therefore a shelter, a refuge from the harsh racist criticisms and humiliations from the outside world.

Although Partha Chatterjee argues that the home is the “uncolonized domain”, attempts to modernize women in the form of education first began in the home before women were allowed to approach external institutions such as schools and universities. As Sonia Nishat Amin explains, writing became “the first site of the bhadramahila’s self expression.” (Amin, 1996) In *The Namesake* (2007), on the day Ashima’s family received her suitors, we come to know of her as an educated girl who tutors students. In the film adaptation Mira Nair chooses to expand on this image, by beginning the film with the colorful image of Calcutta, and Ashima weaving her way through the street protests on her way back home from tutoring. Ashima is also an accomplished protégée of music, and it seemed she was learning the craft professionally. The novel however begins with Ashima’s pregnancy and subsequently the birth of Gogol, but during her pregnancy the reader is shown flashbacks of the life she had left behind in Calcutta, and the single afternoon that led her to America. In Mira Nair’s adaptation, Ashima leaves the colors of Calcutta behind to wake up to a winter’s scene outside her window, which is monochromatic and lifeless in comparison. Mira Nair’s decision to deviate from the novel therefore changes the perception of the narrator – the narration of the novel is told from the eyes of Gogol, and the camera taking the viewer to the scene outside the window, is the scene we see through Ashima’s eyes. Ashima in the film is therefore more self aware, sensory, and self-actualized, whereas Lahiri’s depiction of Ashima is in relation to Gogol, for Ashima’s presence in the novel appears at the same time Gogol does, *in utero*.

When Ashima leaves home to live with her husband in America, she is “admonished by her parents” to preserve the “Eastern inner sanctum” by not eating beef, or ‘wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston.” (NS 37) Migrating to another country, to physically relocate to the West is also removing one’s body from the preserved inner space into the outer. It therefore becomes a natural notion to a family that once the daughter “moves”, her ideals and ways would also change. This is later contrasted by Ashima’s daughter in law Moushumi who angrily retorts to Gogol after revealing she had turned down an opportunity to teach at the Sorbonne, “I’m going to be a good Bengali housewife, and make samosas every Thursday from scratch.”

Ashoke’s arrival at her house is first revealed through his shoes, which were “not like any she’d ever seen on the streets and trams and buses of Calcutta, or even in the windows of Bata.” (NS 8) Her next move, quite curiously, is to slip her feet into them. In the novel, the act was done to feel the lingering presence of the male owner, “the closest thing she had ever experienced to the touch of a man” (NS 8) whereas in the film, Ashima acts outside her gendered norms takes a few bold paces and her face lights up with a look that can be interpreted as ambitious and triumphant. In both the film and the novel, Ashima is unaffected by the actual presence of the man in the room, and therefore it is clear in both instances that the decision to marry was driven by Ashima’s desire to seek a life outside her cultural and gendered norms. The 1970’s student riots depicted in the film also depicts Ashima’s detachment from the state politics, and therefore highlighting Chatterjee’s argument with regards to the nationalist resolution of women’s position in society as well as politics. Ashima’s desire to leave is therefore extended to her desire to escape, be liberated from the restricted space her own country has made available to her.

Partha Chatterjee's notes, the nationalistic attitudes on the "home" and "outside" also become static unchanging realms. His observation of the "relative unimportance of the women's question" because "nationalism had in fact resolved...in complete accordance with its preferred goals" reveal the mistake in the interpretation of the historical significance of the inner cultural space in relation to the outside. Amartya Sen in *Culture and Captivity* writes how culture is heterogeneous and dynamic, where "there can be great variations within the same general cultural milieu." (Sen 112) The argument is extended to politics, where nation states have witnessed both the passing of conservative rulers as well as "radical dissidents." The spiritual sanctum of society is not impervious to the reformations made to the attitudes towards education and perceptions of social change.

Nineteenth century "bhadralok" who sought to modernize Bengali society reinterpreted religious texts in the light of "rational-utilitarian" principals. Therefore they sought to establish a balance where a new world order would contain both rational principals influenced by the Enlightenment as well as retaining old traditions. This would culminate into a standard that was regarded superior to traditional culture as well as Imperial. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim describes his father's surprise upon his arrival to England:

He'd never seen the English in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen, and barmen. He'd never seen an Englishman stuffing bread into his mouth with his fingers, and no one had told him that the English didn't wash regularly because the water was so cold- if they had water at all. And when Dad tried to discuss Byron in local pubs no one warned him that not every Englishman could read...

Similarly, Ashoke judges the unkempt appearance of his landlord who is also a professor, “Rickshaw drivers dress better than professors here...”. Education is therefore a class privilege, which is reflected in the mannerisms and lifestyle of the “bhadralok,” explaining Ashima’s dismay at having to buy furniture from yard sales. The term ‘bhadralok’ as defined by Mukherjee is a social class, “a common position along some continuum of the economy, enjoyed a style of life in common and was conscious of its existence as a class organized to further its ends.” In *The Namesake* the Ganguly family does not associate with their white peers of the same social class and academic standing. On the night of Sonia’s birth, they choose to call upon their fellow Bengali friend first instead of their white neighbors (who were residing in the same building) to look after Gogol. Similarly decision making is dependent on the consensus of their Bengali friends, “each step, each acquisition, no matter how small.” To extend Chatterjee’s theory, in the migrant community the diaspora becomes the “ghar” or the internalized space of Bengali ideals and culture, and the outside world is the “bahir” or all things American and white. Similarly, Indian immigrants in America are identified under various categorizations, as “F-1 students” or “resident aliens” depending on the types of visa used to gain entry, also signify the transience of their presence, and India is a home that they shall one day return to.

It is therefore interesting to observe in the film version how Ashima, in her grief, opens all the doors of her house – as though the loss of her husband simultaneously results in the loss of her identity as a wife, and therefore a Bengali woman, which dissolves the significance of barriers between the bifurcated spaces. Ashima decides to sell the house where she had raised her children in, and move back to India to pursue music that had been halted after her marriage, choosing to not have a “home”, spending six months of her life in India and six months in America. Ashima also becomes comfortable having her white friend Sally, at her house at

Ashoke's wake, but Maxine remains out of place and foreign. Furthermore Ashima accepts Sonia's relationship with Ben, unlike previously where Maxine's presence made her significantly uncomfortable, which had also led Ashoke to go out with his son and explain to him about the origin of his name. Lahiri and Nair therefore conclude the novel and film with the liberation of Ashima, living up to her name¹³

Unlike *The Namesake*, which uses the Indian diaspora as its setting and focal point of the negotiation of identities, *White Teeth* is not written in a similar context. Zadie Smith and Hanif Kureishi, people born from interracial unions examine a culture in their novels that is wholly 'multicultural'. However, Zadie Smith asserts in an interview that she "wasn't trying to write about race. I was trying to write about the country I live in."¹⁴ Despite her claim, the characters in the novel endeavor to locate themselves within the diverse backdrop of London, but perhaps it is despite her claim that writing about ethnic and multicultural groups in the West will inevitably lead to the search of locating oneself within diverse cultures. For Irie, the search for her roots stem from her obvious racial differences. Zadie Smith, whose rise to fame upon the publication of this novel has raised many questions on how to racially define her - would it be right to call her a 'black' writer despite her mixed background? The novel further explores the cross cultural friendships between Alsana, Clara, and Neena and how "England" can also be seen as a neutral space for women striving to exercise their individualities and desires.

In the novel, we learn of the curious marital arrangement between Samad and Alsana; at the time of the War, when Samad was nineteen years of age, his betrothed had not even been born yet. The justification for this fact was based on the genetic tendencies of her bloodline,

¹³ "she who is limitless, without borders."

¹⁴ Jones, Chris. Zadie Smith: Willesden to Whitbred <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1102556.stm>

“Extremely good blood...and as an added bonus, there is a propensity among the women...for really enormous melons.” Although there was no real way of knowing whether the family would even produce a female child, Alsana’s characteristics had been predetermined before her conception. It also reflected the traditional Bengali/Indian thought of the times: a good family of upstanding moral values prevalent at the time will produce good children. However Alsana proves to be the opposite of the Bengali “bhadramahila” ideal, thereby dispelling the myths created around the Bengali woman. Similarly, Clara Bowden, who had always been an awkward teenager due to her buck teeth, embodies the ideal after losing them in an accident and getting false teeth. Written from the view of a Jamaican-British writer, one has to recognize the limitations of writing about Bangladeshi characters, and also perhaps acknowledge these ‘limitations’ to be essential of multicultural writers, which is also in accordance to Salman Rushdie’s argument regarding the “errors” in Saleem Sinai’s narration:

...his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors...But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed. (Rushdie 1991)

Through Clara’s daughter Irie, we examine the impact social realities have on women, and unlike their male counterparts in the novel, the female identity struggle is also her struggle to reclaim her body, that has been taken away by her culture, and replaced with social gendered and sexual norms. The friendship that binds the women together is also one of female exigency as well as agency, through which each individual discovers their triumphs. Neena, Alsana’s “Niece of Shame” learns to embrace her sexuality and has a romantic relationship with a woman. Neena

and Jamila from *The Buddha of Suburbia* are critical voices in the novels, questioning tradition or the prevalent social conditions. Unlike Neena, Jamila is forced to succumb to her father's wishes and marry a man from India, yet she triumphs as she finds a way to reject the notion of marriage whilst still staying married – by rejecting the notion of the wife. Changez, unable to comprehend Jamila, stays with her nevertheless, but is never able to overpower her.

Growing up in a predominantly white society, beauty standards of women are that of “white beauty”. Despite having white blood, Irie is cast differently from her female peers at school and therefore never able to perform her role as a female. The pressure to conform later drives Irie to have her hair straightened, only to have her body reject this “ideal”, causing her hair to come out in clumps. According to Foucault, as explained by Judith Butler, “the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription.”¹⁵ The boundary of the body therefore, according to Butler, becomes a distinction between the “external” and “internal”, a “transvaluation of something originally part of identity and a defiling otherness.” Irie attempts to map out her identity through the boundaries of her body: the color of her skin, the texture of her hair, her Otherness compared to the English society around her. She first attempts to “merge” with the English culture, unaware of the fact that she is a product of merged cultures, that her roots are black as well as white. Ultimately, when she meets Hortense Bowden, Irie discovers herself within her grandmother, and makes the choice to travel to Jamaica.

In contrast to Clara Bowden's interracial relationship to a white man, *East is East* depicts a scenario where George is married to an Englishwoman. As described in the previous chapter, George plays the patriarch in the family, and Ella has no agency within the decision making process within her home, no matter how wrong they may be. Ella's friend Annie who is married

¹⁵ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2002

to a fellow Englishman is, in contrast, more liberated. However when visiting a family in Bradford, we observe Ella's friendship with a fellow British woman also married to a Pakistani, who breaks down following the loss of her daughter after she gets married to a man from Pakistan. The scene closes in on a tender scene where we witness for a moment the helplessness of British women in their marriages.

During moments of anger, George lashes out at Ella and demands that she should be agreeing with him like a proper "Muslim wife", despite the fact that Ella is not Muslim, and does not have a clear understanding of the image of the 'proper Muslim wife.' She dresses in "Indian" jewelry and knee length skirts and blouses, which is seen as an affront to the "authentic" Pakistani families that hail from Bradford. Throughout the movie, she is aware of the fact that George has a wife and children at home in Pakistan, whose position George seems to frequently use as a mild threat. The presence of the "Other" Pakistani wife does not even seem real- she exists in letters written in a different language unknown to Ella. It is only in the sequel where the two women finally meet.

George and the other Pakistani characters in the movie are distinguished by their accent and style of speaking. Oftentimes George, even though understood, is not sympathized with because his thick accent is a reminder that he is not 'one of them'. The female characters in *West is West* are soundless, and their movements become narratives alone as they endure the injustice of George's actions and resolutely stand against him wordlessly. When Ella and Basheera set their rivalries aside and communicate with each other through their own language, they have a profound understanding of each other due to their shared positions as the role of George's wives.

East is East describes the structure of marriage that confines its members into performative roles. These roles, as shown by the movie, forces one to become “culturally enmired subjects” who are forced to negotiate identity constructions. (Butler 1990) Therefore Ella and Basheera, without having to recognize each other’s language and culture, are able to recognize and communicate within the cultural predicates set for them, by the institution of Pakistani marriage.

The feeling of being ‘neither here nor there’ among women is therefore crucial among women in the various processes of self-actualization. Unlike the first chapter, where nationalistic determinants set the course for the histories of men, women occupy a different historical trajectory. Sexual and cultural limitations imposed upon women in their own land become insignificant once they cross the border, and the myth no longer becomes relevant. The “New Woman” has been a prevailing image whose significance has changed since the nineteenth century, and the result of the changing ideals alone lends women their plurality which cannot be controlled even within domestic spaces or territorial borders. Furthermore, marriage is a notion of patriarchy which seeks to reshape the identity and myth of women, as well as to control and subjugate, as evidenced by the Act of 1901. In the roles of Jamila, Neena, Irie, Ashima, and others, the only way to truly liberate the self is to reject the cultural constructions of the self.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism as the byproduct of migration has been a topic that has been largely dealt with. It has been a much hypothesized assumption that one day we shall all be homogenous. However, as reflected in the novels, written across different time spans, culture has never been homogenous, and new conflicts will continue to arise. Similarly, the Imperial power today is vested in America and Islamophobia has now been its primary interest and motivation. However the question, that has been asked by many, still remains: why is it that the 1960s and 1970s have been eras of secularism and sexual and intellectual freedom, but the following decades have seen the rise of conservatism and Islamic fundamentalism? What are the driving forces behind political and social changes in order to create this outcome?

In presenting arguments centering on nationalism by Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee, and juxtaposing them against cultural theories, I had hoped to draw notice to the narrative's origins and its importance in the narrative. Each novel was not written without a history of the character's fathers. As Hanif Kureishi once stated; "I am a sort of English kid, but I was always linked to the empire. Not only am I the child of a mixed marriage, but I always had that history.' History therefore, however flawed and fragmented it may be, is inescapable and the only way we can trace our roots, and in each novel, we realize the conflicts in the characters lives' come about as a result of denying their origins. In *The Namesake*, Gogol begins to overcome his ambiguity by reconnecting with his origins, down to the accident and how he was given the name, and it is this revelation that helps him forge a connection to his family and come to terms with his existence. Furthermore, men and women experience multiculturalism in different ways; for each male there has been a struggle against their fathers to acknowledge their

nationalistic and cultural identity, both of which have violent histories. The violence is translated into their fathers, and subsequently their own lives as they try to battle the social prejudices around them. For the female counterparts, multiculturalism affords them new spaces, unoccupied by ideals, and therefore migration becomes a journey in which they are able to shake off their imposed gendered identities and become the women they want to be.

As I have mentioned in my introduction, postcolonial and migration writing has been generated by writers living in the West; there are no instances of diaspora writing in other parts of the world. Postcolonial writing can also be categorized as being elitist as the writers would have to have access to certain privileges. Multiculturalism and hybridity now embraces Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures as well, with many expats travelling for work. “Temporary” diasporas abroad such as in the Middle East where men and women endeavor to stay for a limited period of time often stay long enough for their children to grow up until they are old enough for universities. Having spent much of their formative years there, they occupy a space in which they belong to neither the West nor the East. Furthermore the loss of primordial ‘homes’ as countries are split up results in a world where ‘home’ is a figment of the imagination, and an archaic concept, and mobilization has become a necessity in an attempt to quell feelings of restlessness; in fact, one may be at liberty to say that the mobile individual is the new ideal citizen as we now live in an era where it is unusual for a person to remain rooted in one place. These facets of multiculturalism present many opportunities for research into identity formations and how it shapes culture.

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