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Performative National Cultures: Hybridity, Blurred Boundaries, and Agency in

Untouchable and Brick Lane

by

Abby A. McMonagle

A thesis submitted to the Department of English for the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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April 21, 2010

Performative National Cultures: Hybridity, Blurred Boundaries, and Agency in

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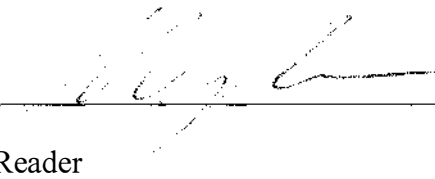
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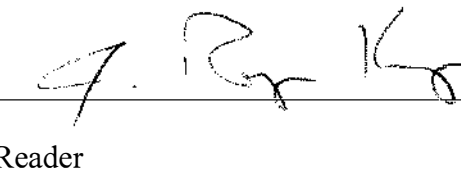
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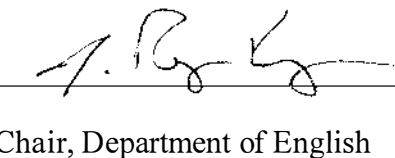
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Table of Contents

Introduction: A Post-Colonial and Butlerian Performativity Framework	1
Chapter 1: <i>Untouchable</i> 's Multivalent and Performative National Cultures	19
Chapter 2: Performative Hybrid National Cultures in <i>Brick Lane</i>	57
Conclusion: Application to Current Issues of National Culture and "Britishness"	103
Works Cited:	110

Abstract

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* unite through the complex examination of nation and culture that they both perform. By utilizing post-colonial and cultural theories, as well as Judith Butler's notion of performativity, it is possible to thoroughly study Ali and Anand's portrayal of national culture through their characters and writing. Since these novels focus on characters that experience immigration to Britain or colonization by the British, Ali and Anand employ the opportunities provided by such experiences, which include immigrant and colonized characters that change their collection of cultural practices and then are contrasted with other characters in similar positions, to emphasize the hybrid national cultures of their characters and novels. These characters' national cultures are revealed to be performative as they make passionate attachments to identification categories, perform the normative practices mechanically, and desire the privileged national culture's attributes, but are still able to rearticulate their national cultural identity within the preexisting signification system. Thus, Ali and Anand highlight the performative construction of national culture by drawing attention to the performances of the hybrid national cultural identities that they portray in and through their novels. These insights that are gained from the juxtaposition of Ali and Anand's writing also trace what has or has not changed about the function of national culture and how the definition of "Britishness" has evolved to expose that this category is in constant flux.

Introduction: A Post-Colonial and Butlerian Performativity Framework

Rationale for an Analysis of National Culture in *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane*:

While Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) might seem like distinctly different texts because of their differing time periods and settings, they unite through the particularly complex examination of nation and culture that they both perform. Since these novels focus on characters that experience immigration to Britain or colonization by the British and are born from these historical contexts, there is a plethora of criticism about them that addresses nation and culture.¹ Many critics, such as Ian Almond and Michael Perfect, examine the nation and culture within these texts, but their arguments focus on issues like the effects of Anand's attempt to make his novel more Indian and the purpose of stereotypical representations in *Brick Lane*. These examinations and others all address national culture in some way, but what these novels reveal about the development and performance of national culture also needs to be examined. Thus, as I closely read these novels through the lens of their political and historical frameworks, what becomes most striking is how these texts portray hybrid national cultures that function similarly to how Judith Butler views drag as functioning in her theory of performativity. That is to say, Ali and Anand offer a view of the performative construction of national culture under the conditions of colonialism and

¹ Such criticism includes the work of Ian Almond, Ben Connisbee Baer, Jessica Berman, Jane Hiddleston, and Michael Perfect. The more specific connections between these critics and my analysis will be addressed in the following chapters.

immigration by drawing attention to the performances of the hybrid national cultural identities that they portray in and through *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane*.

Ali and Anand's perspective on national culture is undeniably intertwined with theories of post-colonialism and Butlerian performativity. Therefore, my discussion of *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane* demands a theoretical framework that addresses the post-colonial and Butlerian concepts at play. This exploration of these criticisms will offer a new lens through which to examine these texts and their role in the discussion of national culture, while allowing the Butlerian and post-colonial theories to deepen and reinforce my argument that the hybrid cultures portrayed in Anand's *Untouchable* and Ali's *Brick Lane* call attention to the specifically performative status of national cultures.

Post-Colonialism and the Production of National Culture through Performativity:

Post-colonial theory incisively traces the creation and definition of national culture through a discussion of the nation, imperialism, and colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha's formative article "DissemiNation" offers support for this connection as he argues that the repetition of cultural practices recreates parts of the nation (292). The term "national culture" speaks to this relationship between cultural practices and the nation, which allows the arguments about the construction and performance of the nation to pertain to national culture as well.² Consequently, a framework of post-

² Although I use the terms nation and national culture in order to show the connectivity between the terms, they also are their own separate entities. When I speak of the nation, I mean the territorial, administrative space, while national culture is the characteristics, practices, beliefs, etc. either associated with that space or those used to define the space of a nation.

colonial criticism is necessary in order to understand the constructed and performative status of national cultures as they are represented through the experiences of a colonized person and immigrants in *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane*.

There are some overarching connections among the suppositions of Stuart Hall, Timothy Brennan, and Homi K. Bhabha that aid in the examination done here. Although Hall is a cultural studies writer and Brennan and Bhabha are post-colonial theorists, they are all preoccupied with issues of nationalism and the nation. Most notably, all three critics unite in the belief that the nation and its subsequent nationalism are categories that are human constructs. In “New Ethnicities,” Hall defends his argument through the exploration of race and racial experience, which he claims is often one of the defining characteristics in the creation of a nation and its national culture. Throughout “DissemiNation,” Bhabha looks to the signification of culture and nation-space to demonstrate the construction of the nation. Lastly, Brennan uses his piece “The National Longing for Form” as a forum to explore evidence that the nation is constructed. However different their foci are, Bhabha, Brennan, and Hall agree that these concepts are constructed by humans or the systems they create. Furthermore, these theorists point to the diversity of subjects’ experiences, regardless of race, place of birth, current home, etc., in order to investigate how the nation and nationalism are constructed, and how the nation operates. Consequently, the theories of Hall, Brennan, and Bhabha all provide a strong framework of interrelated ideas for any study of national culture.

Even with these shared concerns, there are basic components specific to each theorist that are important to highlight since these characteristics help solidify their connections. One such pertinent component occurs in “New Ethnicities” when Hall argues there is no “essential black subject because the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in formation with other categories and divisions, and are constantly crossed by categories of class, gender and ethnicity” (225). National culture is always articulated within human constructs that are persistently changing and are contingent upon other constructs. Therefore, national culture, like race, includes diverse³ positions, experiences, and identities. The argument here is that race and nation are not unproblematically linked nor does a certain definition of race automatically point to a specific nation to which the subject belongs.

In “DissemiNation,” Bhabha contends that the social imagination creates nation, culture, and community. According to Bhabha, this construction through imagination yields a national culture that “comes to be articulated as a dialectic of various temporalities – modern, colonial, and postcolonial ‘native’” (303). Because there is a struggle among different time periods and the definitions of the nation in these temporalities, the nation is articulated in oscillating and competing modes. Since Bhabha is working within post-structuralist ideas about language, he also argues that the nation is a repeated performance because it is made through the signification system of language. In signification systems, Bhabha posits, there is always distance between the signifier and the signified. Consequently, a construction

³ What I mean by diversity here is the variety of definitions that exists, or in other words definitions that are not concrete and static.

within this system allows subjects to create the nation through the repetition of cultural practices, which yields diverse definitions of national culture. Although the concept of diversity can be rather vague, this use of diversity is rather concrete: a diverse definition of national culture is simply one with signifiatory slippage. Because this reiteration allows for national cultures that are inexact, open to mutation, and sometimes unstable, this slippage can be described as a definition that is in constant movement and can never be pinned down. As Bhabha argues, “the signs of cultural difference cannot then be unitary or individual forms of identity because their continual implication in other symbolic systems always leaves them ‘incomplete’ or open to cultural translation” (313). In other words, national culture is never absolutely defined to the minutest detail because it is always moving within the signification system of which it is a part. This facet of national culture will be further discussed when I explore its relationship to Butlerian performativity.

In “The National Longing for Form,” Timothy Brennan also makes some assertions that have the same goals as Bhabha and Hall, but are unique and worth discussing. While exploring the nation, Brennan refers to the “myths of nations,” which he considered to be the “charter for present-day social order, retrospective patterns of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief” (45). Since the nation serves the purpose of uniting disparate elements, it is an invented construct and its invention occurs through the skill of humans. Brennan supports his argument about the definition and creation of the myths of nations by looking to history. He focuses on colonialism and post-World War II European relations in order to argue

that nations that are colonizing powers and nations that have been colonized were constructed simultaneously in contrast to each other. At one point, Brennan quotes Gordon Lewis' supposition of "colonialism in reverse," which also underscores the role of immigration and colonization in the performance of national culture in the (former) colonial center (47). "Colonialism in reverse" occurs when the peoples of former European colonies immigrate to former colonial centers. This result of colonialism offers a new perspective of what it means to be British, since those who they once controlled now live in Britain. Brennan also looks to literature to map the creation of or at least the birth of the term "the nation," as he argues that "European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature – the novel" (49). The novel became a forum for creating the definition of the nation, as it provided a space and need to discuss and define these terms, while also setting one nation apart for another. Nonetheless, Brennan argues that the traditions associated with a particular nation are invented and imposed by political and ideological apparatus.

Bhabha and Brennan's arguments about the experiences of minorities, such as immigrants and the colonized, also point to the performative status of national culture. Because Brennan and Bhabha demonstrate that an examination of minority and immigrant subjects can help determine how the nation and national culture are created, their theories will be particularly relevant to this study and will be further explored in the sections about *Brick Lane* and *Untouchable*. As Bhabha asserts, "minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of living in the midst of the pedagogical

representations of the fullness of life” (307). Immigration and colonization complicate the concepts of nation and nationalism by challenging a unitary or absolute classification of each. Bhabha also contends that migration creates a void of homelessness or nationlessness that occurs as a result of experiences like immigration and colonization (291). In order to fill this void, the immigrant or the colonized must recreate the nation through the same repetitive practices that created it in the first place. By performing cultural practices, subjects can attempt to fill this void in the recreation of national culture. This reiteration occurs because “nationalism is the trope for belonging, bordering, and commitment” (Brennan 47). In other words, immigrants and the colonized seem most affected by the comfort of the nation because they desire to end the feeling of “not belonging.” This desire supports the argument that national culture exists as a result of performance because it is partly based on each subject’s choice to repeat the necessary practices that will allow them to belong.

When Brennan speaks of the “myths of nations” and how they are constructed to unite and control people, he points strongly to the national cultural performances of immigrants and colonized peoples. As these new entrants to Britain “carve out large territories within the [English] language for themselves,” they demonstrate the ability to manipulate national culture (Brennan 48). Colonialism in reverse occurs as the mere presence and citizenship of immigrants from a British colony to Great Britain challenge what it means to be British. When these immigrants make a home for themselves in society, (i.e. the workforce, government, and national culture), the

definition of “Britishness” is changed. Furthermore, the ability of such “non-natives” to play a role in the national culture demonstrates that the of Britain’s national culture is also contingent upon the minorities or the once colonized.

Investigating national culture through the lenses offered by Bhabha, Brennan, and Hall has made it possible and viable to view national culture as performative. What is most beneficial to this analysis of national culture is Judith Butler’s performativity theory. In “Subjection, Resistance, and Resignification” Butler outlines the play of subjection and agency in a way that allows subjects to have some control over their performance, and this model can be applied to national culture. Butler maintains that the practices that make us gendered subjects also create resistance. Gender is both constricting and enabling because social existence occurs through submission to a signification system already established. This submission, to Butler, is when the power of subjection is acted on an individual in domination and that which activates or forms the subject (84). In other words, it is through subjection that subjects exist. The performance of any subject, although Butler speaks of gendered identities, is constricting since in order to become a subject, one must model social norms deemed to be part of his/her subjecthood. Consequently, the subject’s existence and actions are regulated.

However, Butler also argues that subjection is a process by which one gains autonomy. Since the unconscious resists normalizing or the act of conforming to the regulations of a subject, this normalizing cannot fully form the subject. Butler points to Foucault as she posits that “the psyche [which includes the unconscious] is

precisely what exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity, to become a coherent subject” (86). On the other hand, the interiority of the subject, which is created by performativity, falls victim to the regularization needed to become a subject. Therefore, the subject must submit to the social norms associated with the subjecthood he/she hopes to become a part of by constantly repeating the regulatory normative practices and by forming passionate attachments to identification categories. At the same time, Butler also asserts that these repetitive practices and passionate attachments create room to challenge the norms of a subject. She contends that “repetition creates a non-space of subversion and the possibility of re-embodying the subjectivating norm that can redirect normativity” (99). Repetition will never fully embody or become the subject desired. Consequently, repetition creates an existence that can challenge the norm.

Butler also addresses the agency of a subject through her analysis of passionate attachments. According to Butler, the passionate attachments to identification categories that create subjection also allow a subject to be mutable. Gill Jagger points out this complexity in her investigation of Butlerian performativity, “Performativity, Subjection, and the Possibility of Agency.” Passionate attachments are psychic regulations that are based on social and historical contexts. As Jagger articulates, “the power that forms the psyche is social, which means it is open to resistance and change” (99). Such a formation allows for the transformation of the norms themselves and varied adherence to them. Consequently, the social norms necessary for the regulation of a subject are not static features. The subject enacts a

complex existence of being regulated through the submission to a subjecthood and being socially constructed at the same time. Although one must adhere to a subjecthood, this is an adherence to something created by society. Thus, psychic attachments are “durable, but not immutable” (Jagger 90).

Although Butlerian performativity is the theory of gender performance, this perspective can be used to study national culture. First of all, performativity is based on constructed identity classifications. In the case of Butler’s critical approach, it is gender that is constructed. Similarly, post-colonial analyses of national culture investigate the ways in which national cultural identities are constructed. Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate how gender and national culture are conversant in their modes of existence in order to assert that performativity is a useful and feasible model of how the construction of national culture takes place. Moreover, this examination of hybrid national cultures acts much like Butler’s discussion of drag. Butler argues that “in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself” (2498). Hybrid cultures do just that: they highlight the performative nature of national cultures by drawing attention to the performance of signifying norms that create this identification category.

Since the performance of national culture supported by Bhabha, Hall, and Brennan points to regulation and autonomy for subjects that have submitted to national cultural identities, Butler’s performativity is again particularly pertinent. During subjection, subjects of the national cultural framework are first restricted by an outside force and then by themselves, just as gendered subjects are. Butler best

describes the restrictions of subjection by asserting that “a subject produced and regulated are one” and “an identity acts as a soul that imprisons the body” (84, 86). When a subject assumes a national cultural identity through performance, then he/she has restricted his/her existence, just as a subject assuming a gendered identity would. This perspective accurately describes the acquisition of a national cultural classification as the subject would need to adhere to the pre-established codes. Furthermore, the analysis of national culture within *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane* will also explore passionate attachments to identification categories, as defined by Butler, and how the status of these attachments make national culture mutable.

Butler’s assertion that subjects have agency may make it seem as if subjection is entirely empowering, but the autonomy a subject has in his/her performance is limited simply because the categorizations to which a subject adheres are pre-established. This means that whatever transformations occur within national cultural performances as a result of performativity must happen within boundaries and categories that preexist the subject. The power of the subject exists because the subject is able to resist through the resignification of national culture. That is to say, the subject has the ability to alter, however minutely, the signifying performance. Agency, then, is limited, but it exists nonetheless. Butler recognizes this complex incongruity when she states that “resistance is unable to rearticulate the dominant terms of productive power” (89). Adhering to norms is not the sole contributor to the formation of a national subject, but subjects can only articulate a boundary-challenging national culture by moving within the terms established by the dominant

power. Nevertheless, any rearticulation, even within the pre-established signification systems, challenges attempts to make identity categories absolute and static. When any subject “inhabits social categories outside the intended way, the meaning of these categories are challenged” (Jagger 104). Due to the experiences created by immigration and colonization, such as contact with multiple performances of national cultures and the combination of national cultures to varying levels of success, immigration and colonization force opportunities for this form of resistance to arise.

Catherine Rottenberg’s article “*Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire*” offers a model that demonstrates how performativity can be used to examine identity categories other than gender, including those of national culture. In this article, Rottenberg examines Nella Larsen’s *Passing* to argue that racial passing necessitates an investigation of the complexities and contradictions of race as a category. Similarly, the study of national culture being done here asserts that immigration and colonization makes it necessary to examine the intricacies and inconsistencies of current national cultural classifications. More specifically, Rottenberg points out how racial passing challenges the concept of unitary identity. Too often racial identity is classified in unit-based, categorical terms, such as black or white. Such a division is inaccurate according to Rottenberg because the hegemony of race “is never complete [because] there are always counter-discourses and alternative norms circulating within any given society” (492). Like race, national culture is often defined as if it fits into unitary identities, but experiences of immigration and colonization force an investigation of national culture that searches for contradictions to the binary method.

Certain representations of immigration and colonization in literature must do the same.

To support her argument about the performative nature of race, Rottenberg uses *Passing* to demonstrate that the regulatory ideals of race produce a mode of performativity. Since race is created through the repeated naming of the subject, particularly the naming of either what one is or what one is not, race “can be conceived as performative reiteration” (491). Once a subject is named within a racial category, he/she must perform the regulatory ideals associated with that category in order to function in the society that demands this unitary form of identity. Subjects that are created through repeated naming engage in this unitary racial identity because they feel drawn to an artificial unity that is created by norms and regulatory ideals, just as those who repeat national cultural norms do. I would assert that just as each participating subject incessantly attempts to “mime and inhabit authoritative and hegemonic ideals” for race identities, subjects do the same to become a member of a national culture (Rottenberg 492). Significantly, Rottenberg also asserts that racial identities are split between this compelled identification and “desire-to-be.” While “gender collapses identification and ‘desire-to-be,’ race compels some subjects to identify as ‘black,’ but privilege attributes associated with ‘whiteness’” (498). National culture seems to operate under a similar structure as subjects are compelled to identify with a specific national cultural identity, but certain subjects, such as immigrants and minorities, may desire attributes of other national cultural identities because the power structure teaches them to privilege this identity.

Rottenberg also explores how agency can exist for racial identifications through terms that can be applied to national cultural performances. Rottenberg goes so far as to examine Homi K. Bhabha's theories, particularly his arguments about the ambivalence of colonialism caused by mimicry, to support her arguments. Colonial presence, in the traditional sense and in the realm of reverse colonialism, is ambivalent because it is always divided between how it appears to be original and the repetitive articulation of difference (496). This ambivalence allows a subject to repeat or perform any cultural identity with which he/she desires to engage. Like gender norms, racial and national cultural norms operate by compelling subjects to assume or identify with certain identity categories. Immigration and colonization complicate this process by offering opportunities for subjects to be compelled to perform a variety of national cultural identities, while such subjects also strive for the privileged attributes. As a result, these "fractured and competing ideals create space for subjects to perform differently," as Rottenberg incisively puts it (506). Thus, national cultural identities are performative, but subjects are split between identification and the desire to obtain attributes of the privileged national culture.

The Performative National Cultures of and in *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane*:

Although the performative national cultures in these novels will be explored more thoroughly in later chapters, it is pertinent to outline why this study is worthwhile. Since Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is a colonial text and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is an example of post-colonial, multiethnic, immigrant literature,

they demonstrate an interesting map of national culture that spans British decolonization, which includes what has and has not changed about the function of national culture over the course of much of the 20th century. More importantly, the works of Ali and Anand portray varying national cultural performances and modes of development in order to prove that this category is, in fact, malleable. This study is also worthwhile because the hybrid national cultures of *Untouchable* draw attention to the performative status of all national cultures by playing upon the distinction between the attributes associated with the colonizing nation and those associated with the colonized nation. National culture performativity is also made evident as *Brick Lane*'s hybrid national cultures play upon the distinction between characteristics associated with the nation emigrated from and those of the nation to which one has immigrated.

Demonstrative of this argument are characters such as Bakha and Nazneen, who prove that national culture can contain a variety of practices associated with different locales, religions, etc. Additionally, these characters and others emphasize that national cultural practices can be different from person to person, even when they have immigration or caste to unite them. When Bakha interacts with his father and peers, the reader learns what behavior, dress, and work practices are contained within the national cultures of many untouchables, and how Bakha's collection of practices challenges those around him. The same experiences exist in *Brick Lane*. As Nazneen, Razia, Chanu and Karim interact with each other and other Bangladeshi immigrants, the contrast of varying national cultural identities becomes evident. Both

novels consequently assert that experiences of immigration and colonization help to reinforce national culture's malleability. Furthermore, the variable cultural performances of protagonists such as Bakha and Nazneen, and minor characters such as Razia and Chanu, challenge any simplistic or singular understanding of "Britishness." For example, Bakha's ability to mimic some characteristics typically deemed British, such as dress and social mobility, and *Brick Lane*'s contention of a multicultural Britain support Rottenberg's argument that as subjects incessantly attempt to embody norms, a "continuous dissonance" is created that undermines those norms (505). Additionally, as subjects like Bakha assert a national cultural identity, they are split between identification and desire. Bakha identifies as "Indian," as Chanu identifies with "Bangladeshi," but both characters desire to be "British." Therefore, the category of British does not exist without Bangladeshi or Indian, which creates a new construct of the definition of "Britishness."

Untouchable and *Brick Lane* also reveal connections between post-colonial theories of national culture and performativity as they exhibit the actual recreation of national culture in the world of the characters, while also demonstrating the performative reiteration of national culture as national narratives themselves. Characters demonstrate the performative nature of national culture by repeating norms that include dress, social status, social interactions, gender roles, types of employments, etc. These forms of performance and mimicry indicate the connection to Judith Butler's theory of performativity because the performance of national culture occurs through subjection. As Bakha, Nazneen, and other characters that are

experiencing immigration or colonization become national cultural subjects, they are submitting to the regulatory norms of these identity categories. This subjection, however, is both constricting and enabling, as Butler asserts. While the characters are restricted by their national cultural roles, their experiences of immigration and colonization demonstrate their agency to play with the roles delegated to them and performed around them when their performances of national culture change to include new practices. Through this agency, the hybrid national cultures of these novels again emphasize that national cultures are performative.

Not only do these novels demonstrate national cultural performativity within them, Ali and Anand's novels also are performative themselves. To trace *Untouchable's* performance of national culture, one only need look at Anand's life. His own experiences in India with the caste system create a liminality on the part of author that makes the performativity of national culture visible. Furthermore, the fluctuating representations of the British colonial presence and the Indian caste system support the same arguments. Pursuing a similar line of inquiry for the conditions of Ali's authorship supplies evidence that *Brick Lane* is also its own performance of national culture, which we see particularly in the backlash Ali received from certain members of the Muslim and Bangladeshi communities and her own experiences with national in-betweenness. Similarly, as Ali allows her female characters to only experience financial independence in modes that are restricted by gender and ethnicity, the novel demonstrates national culture performativity. The

connection between these novels and Butlerian performativity is doubly present through the characters of the novels and the novels themselves.

Brick Lane and *Untouchable* clearly allow for a study of national culture that explores this identification category's complexities. The hybrid national cultures of these novels in particular allow us to close examine national cultural performativity. What will follow, then, is an examination that focuses on the national cultural performances that are made thematic through dress, social behaviors, gender roles, and career choices, and how these texts also offer a multiplicity of national cultural and ethnic performances in a single locality. This unfolding allows us to examine how national culture develops and is performed through a portrait that spans decolonization. In addition, the pairing of a colonial novel with an immigrant, British text makes it possible to question how these mechanisms of performativity work under different structures and contexts because of the varying performances of national culture for the hegemony, minority, and a combination of both present in the texts. Lastly, Butlerian performativity makes it possible to examine subjection into a national culture identity in order to reveal the restriction and agency possible in this classification system.

Chapter 1: *Untouchable*'s Multivalent and Performative National Cultures

Untouchable's Creation and Performance of National Culture

Mulk Raj Anand opens *Untouchable* with the following description: "The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them" (9). With this first sentence Anand lays the groundwork for defining his characters' existence and the environment in which they live. The contrast of the town and the cantonment reveals Anand's intent to highlight one of the continual conflicts facing India at this time: India's native people versus British control and Western values. Furthermore, through Anand's choice the existence of an often unconsidered population of India, the untouchables, is acknowledged. The understanding of these intricate existences and those that are regularly overlooked exposes the complexities of national culture within *Untouchable*, and, most importantly, forces the reader to acknowledge that the untouchables can be connected to India and Britain's role in India, but also separate from them because "Indian" becomes a multi-faceted signifier.

Since *Untouchable* is told as Bakha's experience, this protagonist's journey becomes partly representative of the other untouchables in the novel, even if he is quite different from some of his peers and caste members. Therefore, Bakha becomes the cornerstone for examining an existence of connection to, but separation from, India and Britain. Anand's opening description of the novel's setting demonstrates

how the outcastes of India, particularly Bakha, exist under the influence of non-outcaste Indians, represented by the town, and the British, represented by the cantonment, but again are separate from both. The neighborhood Bakha lives within highlights the complexities and contradiction created by the relationship between Britain and India during this time of colonization. At the same time, Anand's locale also emphasizes the paradoxes created by the interactions of outcaste and non-outcaste Indians in his setting.

Furthermore, this existence of living in-between that Anand stresses makes the setting of *Untouchable* perfect for "reading between the borderlines of nation-space to see how people are constructed," as Bhabha posits in "DissemiNation" (297). The experiences of Bakha, and consequently the untouchables of India, are revealed to be intricate because of how these characters come to be subjects, the subjects they become, and the performances of national culture that Anand describes. The multifarious borders that Anand creates make it possible to explore how the untouchables are separate from other castes and the British presence, but still connected to them. Bakha does not fall into simple classifications of British or Indian and white or Indian, and consequently, his performance of national culture cannot be understood by an appeal to binarized definitions. Instead, Bakha demonstrates that national culture can contain a variety of practices that include some that are connected to the British presence around him, such as dress, and some associated with India, such as caste-regulated jobs. Anand makes this complexity possible through his definition of the untouchable existence, the locale he uses as a setting,

Bakha's desire to live like the British through objects and behaviors, and the contrast of Bakha to other Indians. By extension, an exploration of these portions of the novel also highlights the performative nature of national culture through the performances of the colonized in Anand's work. There are a variety of reasons why it is useful to examine the national cultures of *Untouchable* through Judith Butler's notion of performativity. These include how Anand describes Bakha as making passionate attachments to his identification category, but then only repeating the norms mechanically, how Bakha is split between identification and desire, how the representations of British and Indian forces are not binary, and the fact that Anand writes from a place of in-between. Therefore, what will be seen is that *Untouchable's* hybrid national cultures emphasize the performative construction of national cultures, just as drag does for gender in Butlerian performativity.

Many critics have focused on the intricacy of Anand's setting and what it means for his characters, his novel, and the novel's place within literary and political spheres. Therefore, it is important to define where my argument is situated in comparison to critics such as Ian Almond, Ben Conisbee Baer, and Jessica Berman, who have scrutinized many of the same facets of Anand and his writing. For example, in "On Re-Orientalizing the Indian Novel: A Case Study of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*," Ian Almond contrasts Anand's work with Mistry's novel in order to explore how Anand re-orientalizes his writing, or in other words attempts to make his writing more Indian and less Western. Almond uses Anand's *Untouchable* and his process of writing it as a critical lens through which to view

Mistry's piece, which he calls the "grandchild" of *Untouchable* (214). Although the relationship between the two novels is not pertinent to this examination, one of Almond's relevant assertions is that when Anand worked to "Indianize [*Untouchable's*] language and content," he actually just made the novel more Western (214). At the core of Almond's assertion is a musing of what and how national cultures are performed in the text and by the writer, which is an essential question of this study. Since Almond argues that "the British and the caste-system are revealed to be the key perpetrators of the protagonists' sufferings" and that this novel appears to be an example of "writing for the centre," it is from here my argument will diverge (204, 216). From this place, it is possible to explore how the national cultures of and in this novel reveal that this identificatory category can be dynamic and mutable, particularly through the non-dualistic or hybrid national cultures of Anand's characters. Another article that offers a point of reference is Baer's "Shit Writing: Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, the Image of Gandhi, and the Progressive Writers' Association." Through this work, Baer explores the "profoundly paradoxical" representation of colonialism within Anand's text, while he also posits that, through *Untouchable*, Anand has aims to "carry the periphery to the metropolis so as to inscribe and make visible the unknown" (578, 577). Baer does so by tracing some of Anand's life, particularly his work with the Progressive Writer's Association, and also by critically reading *Untouchable*. Undoubtedly, Anand's novel has made an often unseen or ignored portion of India his focus, and certainly the representation of colonialism is complicated as it appears to be both perpetrator and savior. My

study will also ask, though, what this new focus and complicated representation reveal about national culture. Lastly, like Baer and Almond, Jessica Berman looks to merge Anand's life, literarily and politically, with his writing in "Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand, and the Question of Engagement." Berman traces Anand's connections to James Joyce in order to explore how his "long career as a social activist and writer of engagé fiction [...] points to a path between Joyce's experimental prose and the politically engaged novels of Anand" (466). It is precisely the engaged nature of Anand's *Untouchable*, seen through the setting and conflicts he utilizes, that creates an environment ideal for examining the performative status of national culture. While Berman uses this feature of Anand and his writing to make connections to Joyce, this same component is part of what drives my questions about national culture. Thus, my analysis will assert that *Untouchable* reveals national culture to be malleable and performative through Bakha's performances that evolve to contrast those around him, his mechanical repetition of the practices associated with his passionate attachments, complex representations of British and Indian forces, and Anand's own experiences with national liminality.

Untouchable's Refutation of Binary Conceptions of National Culture

Anand carefully contrasts Bakha's untouchable neighborhood and the world outside of it by describing Bakha as moving from the "odorous, smoky world of refuse" into the "open, radiant world of the sun" (33). Bakha's home, which is literally smoky from the burning hearths of the untouchables and figuratively from

the conflicts between Britain and India that are represented by the town and cantonment, is emphasized as being different from the nearby city. The variations between the environments Bakha must navigate and the experiences he has in both provide opportunities for Bakha to perform a changing national culture, which denies binary notions of national culture, such as colonizer/colonized and British/Indian. Therefore, Anand utilizes the setting of his novel and his character's experience to contrast the collection of practices within Bakha's national cultural identity with those of other untouchables, revealing that national culture is flexible.

The work of Bhabha in "DissemiNation" is essential to the exploration of this argument. Just as Bhabha asserts that it is the repetition of cultural practices that creates the nation, it is these practices, customs, and norms that will be examined in order to explore the definition of national culture in this novel (292). By contrasting Bakha with other untouchables and Indians of other castes, Anand reveals that Bakha avoids many of the practices and customs that other untouchables and non-outcaste Indians adhere to in order to fit into the constructed category of "Indian." One norm that Anand utilizes as a mode through which Bakha is able to vary national culture is dress. Significantly, Anand describes Bakha as being able to

sacrifice a great many comforts for the sake of what he called 'fashun,' by which he understood to be the art of wearing trousers, breeches, coat, puttees, boots, etc., as worn by the British and Indian soldiers in India. 'You lover of your mother,' his father had once abusively said to him, 'take a quilt, spread a bedding on a string bed, and throw away the blanket of the *gora* white men;

you will die of cold in that thin cloth.’ But Bakha was a child of modern India. The clear cut styles of European dress had impressed his naïve mind. This stark simplicity had furrowed his Indian consciousness and cut deep new lines where all the consideration which made India evolve a skirty costume as best fitted for the human body, lay dormant. (10)

Bakha refuses this loose, loin-cloth-like clothing, probably a lungi or dhoti⁴, and in turn refuses a practice that many other untouchables and higher caste Indians include in their national cultural identity. He instead chooses to dress in the styles of the British soldiers whenever he can lay his hands on such items. Although Indian soldiers in the British army would also have worn a version of this military dress, this contrast immediately sets Bakha apart from other untouchables as he steers away from the norms of his signification through his dress choices. He is of the same social and religious class, the same familial status, and the same profession, so logically, Bakha is an untouchable, but he does not fit neatly into that category. As “a child of modern India,” Bakha is the product of all that comes with modern India, including British colonial presence (10). Bakha does not always dress, act, or use the items of his untouchable counterparts. Since Bakha has distanced himself from his caste, his current practices seem to suggest a denial of his caste. Such a rejection also

⁴ Although Anand never names the more “traditional dress” worn by the other outcastes, a lungi and dhoti are two possibilities. A dhoti is a “long loincloth traditionally worn in southern Asia by Hindu men [which is] wrapped around the hips and thighs with one end, brought between the legs, tucked into the waistband, [and resembles] baggy, knee-length trousers” (“Dhoti”). A lungi is “a length of cloth wrapped around the lower half of the body” (“India”). Neither would have been particularly tailored, and more than likely the untouchables around Bakha would have worn what they could acquire the easiest.

represents an avoidance of certain national cultural practices because Bakha does not repeat the norm of adhering to the Indian caste system. Again, as Bhabha argues in “DissemiNation,” the repetition of cultural practices creates the nation; therefore, when Bakha refuses to do so, he is not repeating the necessary norms for a national culture of India that adheres to the caste system (292).

While Bakha reveals that the practices of a national culture can vary through what he does not do or wear, descriptions of Bakha’s social existence and thoughts also reveal that the components of his national culture do not mirror the national culture practiced by other untouchables. Since the caste system is associated with Hinduism, a major religion of India, it becomes necessary to explore how Bakha does or does not demonstrate characteristics associated with his caste. A profession has been reserved for Bakha because a caste is “any of the ranked, hereditary, endogamous social groups, often linked with occupation” (“Caste”). Due to the purity rankings that make up the hierarchy of the caste system, Bakha is an untouchable so he must be a latrine cleaner and sweeper. Recursively, Bakha is an untouchable since he has been born within a category that will be in constant contact with pollutants. These pollutants include “blood, menstrual flow, saliva, human feces, dung, leather, dirt, and hair” (“India”). Bakha will come in contact with all of these items because he is an untouchable, and all of these make Bakha an untouchable by caste definition.

According to those who adhere to the caste system, Bakha is meant to be a latrine cleaner and sweeper, and consequently he must be infinitely dirty. Those who

see identities as absolute according to religious, cultural, and national beliefs do not see Bakha as having any opportunity to be otherwise. Bakha, though, is considered by some higher caste Indians to be “a bit superior to his job,” since he seems “intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule uncouth and unclean” (Anand 16). Even though Bakha faces abuse from higher-caste Indians later in the novel, Anand creates some ambiguity regarding the norms of untouchability. Bakha, then, reveals that his national cultural identity contains practices that challenge his caste position. Bakha feels the combat created by his refusal to repeat certain practices, but he still believes,

he had outgrown his surroundings and he hated the thought of being in the neighborhood of his mud-house. Somewhere in him he felt he could never get away from it, but to the greater part of him the place did not exist. It had been effaced clean off the map of his being. (Anand 100)

Like the higher-caste Indians who notice that Bakha’s behavior does not match the practices they believe in asserting, Bakha feels he does not quite fit where he should belong. More significantly, Bakha’s position as an outcaste does not encompass his self-definition and perhaps India has also outgrown the caste system. The contrast of how Bakha views his own existence, how some higher-caste Indians view it, and what these same Indians expect Bakha to reveal demonstrate that through Bakha, binary terms of national culture, in this case, caste/outcaste, can be disputed. Again Bhabha’s work becomes pivotal in this discussion of national culture. Because “cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies

of identification,” Bakha instead reveals that the practices, behaviors, or norms of signification can vary in a national culture (313). The environment in which Bakha lives is pregnant with cultural differences that stem from the constant contact with British and Indian influences, as well as varying caste practices. Therefore, new forms of meaning for national culture are developed, and national culture’s definition is clearly never fixed.

Anand continues his demonstration of how the practices that create a national culture can differ through Bakha’s obsession with the objects, values, and behaviors that he himself views as British. Bakha appears to find more value in the practices he witnesses among the British as he gravitates toward them and acknowledges that he wishes to make most of these practices his own. Thus, as Bakha begins to view the British as “superior people” and fights to demonstrate these characteristics in himself, *Untouchable* reveals national culture cannot be defined through a binary opposition based upon nationality or locality. Bakha exposes the de-naturalization of Indian culture, or the denial of a binary understanding of national culture, through his behavior after living in the British barracks with his uncle. During this time, Bakha sees how the British live, dress, drink their tea, and interact, and Bakha “soon became possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life” (Anand 11). His overpowering urge leads him to view many of the national cultural practices that his Indian counterparts execute, in higher castes and his own, as base and undesirable. Additionally, Bakha deems the practices and behaviors he associates with the British as that for which he should strive, which Rottenberg would consider to be part of the

“desire-to-be.” Bakha, consequently, changes the way he drinks tea, how he relieves himself, and even the way he views other Indians and untouchables. For example, Anand writes:

Ever since he had worked in the British barracks Bakha had been ashamed of the Indian way of performing ablutions, all that gargling and spitting, because he knew the Tommies disliked it. He remembered so well the Tommies’ familiar abuse of the natives: ‘*Kala admi zamin par hagne wala*’ (black man, you who relieve yourself on the ground). But he himself had been ashamed at the sight of Tommies running naked to their tub baths. (18)

After his interactions with the British, Bakha begins to see the Indian way of releasing bodily waste as “disgraceful” (18). This passage exposes that Bakha strives to relieve himself with modesty as the British do, and judges other Indians for relieving themselves in the streets or without privacy. Bakha seems to describe this change as his attempt to give up the cultural practices that he associates with Indian national culture for those of Britain. However, when this shift happens in Bakha, so does a shift in the norms of the national cultural identity to which he adheres.

Because national culture is mutable, Bakha is able to change the way he relieves himself and his opinion of certain behaviors, which demonstrates that Indian national culture’s practices are never fixed. Consequently, it appears that one can use colonial oppression for one’s own cultural and social gain, as Bakha does, and national cultural identities are again seen as mutable. Contact with British soldiers has altered Bakha’s national cultural practices, but he is still an untouchable in India who lives

within the caste system and the norms he denies. Furthermore, Bakha still holds onto some of the values he had accepted since birth. While he judges the British way of dealing with excrement as the “right way,” he cannot bring himself to feel that the immodesty of how the British bathe is acceptable. Although Bakha would argue he is demonstrating characteristics of the British and Indian national cultures, what is really illuminated is that Indian national culture is a collection of practices that cannot be contained within a neat list, and what is “British” can be described by those who are not British, even though it is never fixed. As a result, the practices that Bhabha says are repeated to form the nation and its national culture are, in fact, alterable.

Anand persists in using Bakha to demonstrate how Indian national culture is a collection of customs that is constantly moving and changing, as the protagonist hopes to live more and more like the British around him. While drinking tea with his family,

[Bakha’s] tongue is slightly burnt with the small sips because he did not, as his father did, blow in the tea to cool it. This was another of the things he had learned at the British barracks from the Tommies. His uncle had said that the goras didn’t enjoy the full flavor of the tea because they did not blow on it. But Bakha considered that both his uncle’s and father’s spattering sips were natu habits. He would have told his father that the sahibs didn’t do that. But he was too respectful by habit to suggest such a thing, although, of course, for himself he accepted the custom of the English Tommies and followed it implicitly. (32)

Although Bakha speaks in the dualistic terms of British versus Indian tea-drinking practices, this narration reveals a challenge to Bakha's dualistic understanding of national culture. Although Bakha endeavors to behave like the British do, the respect he has learned through the customs of Indian national culture prevents him from highlighting this fact for his father. Bakha's performance of national culture reveals that national culture can change, and more importantly can contain divergent components. Even though Bakha acknowledges that his sign of respect is simply a habit, he has ceased all forms of "Indian" signification. Therefore, Bakha proves that national culture is not inherent, but is instead changeable.

Contact with the British barracks also changes Bakha's view of his life's possibilities, which substantiates that *Untouchable* denies national culture as a binary concept. When Bakha wishes to go to school in order to be like the sahibs, Bakha's father tells him that "schools were meant for babus, not for the lowly sweepers" (Anand 39). Even after Bakha cries and begs to go to school, his father does not acknowledge the unfairness of the situation nor does he seek to comfort Bakha. Bakha's father simply states that it is not possible and continues to abuse Bakha in order to force him into his position as an untouchable. Bakha is different, though, simply by thinking about and asking for an education. Not only does Bakha want an education, but he feels, to some degree, that it is a possibility for him. Asking aloud for an education demonstrates Bakha's belief that he might be able to be educated and become a sahib. Moreover, when Bakha is told he cannot go to school "he hadn't quite understood the reason for that" (Anand 39). Bakha does not understand because

he legitimately believed he might be able to go to school. It is “his uncle at the British barracks [who] had told him when he first expressed the wish to be a sahib that he would have to go to school if he wanted to be one” (Anand 39). Bakha did not gain this dream until he had interacted with the British at the barracks, and it was the uncle with constant interaction with British men who associates such success with an education. Contact with people who do not adhere to such a caste system helps Bakha challenge the permanence of these restrictions, but unfortunately, Bakha must operate within the world he lives. While he might desire things outside his untouchability, Bakha will still sometimes fall victim to what Timothy Brennan calls “invented and imposed traditions,” such as caste restrictions (47). Nonetheless, Bakha reveals that Indian national culture can contain these practices that are regulated in the hopes of unifying people within a nation-space while also containing practices that challenge these very norms.

Although some of the cultural practices of India have more power over Bakha and force him to give up his dream of going to school, Anand makes sure that the reader sees that Indian national culture is not dependent upon strict adherence to the caste system. When Bakha does not continue trying to go to school, but “several times he had felt the impulse to study on his own [because] life at the Tommies’ barracks had fired his imagination,” he appears to submit to the characteristics that create his identificatory category, but he also demonstrates agency when he attempts

to school himself (Anand 39).⁵ When Anand makes it clear that Bakha's hope for an education comes from being in the British soldiers' barracks, the compilation of norms that form Indian national culture is revealed to be indefinable. To emphasize this point, Anand writes: "recently [Bakha] had actually gone and bought a first primer of English" (39). Bakha's performance of Indian national culture, then, includes effects of British occupation, such as the language and a challenge to caste restrictions, among other components. Even though Mahatma Gandhi's movements and Muslims' lack of adherence are also resistance to the caste system, Bakha clearly emphasizes that his is connected to his interactions with the British. Therefore, Bakha reveals agency when he changes his experience by expressing different characteristics of national culture. Although Bakha's self-education is not particularly successful, he still desires it and tries to achieve it. Consequently, Bakha demonstrates that even if the construction of national culture is limited, it is not concretely defined or immutable.

One last way that Anand's novel proves that national culture is a collection of practices that are impossible to pin down is through Bakha's obsession with British objects. Bhabha points out that "colonials, post-colonials, migrants, and minorities [...] are the marks of shifting boundaries," which is a group that Bakha falls entirely within (315). Anand supports this supposition as Bakha not only desires to live a British man's life and to have the same possibilities, but he also reveres British objects, while denying the value of some Indian articles, just as Rottenberg posits for

⁵ This battle will be focused on more heavily in the later section that examines *Untouchable* through the terms of Butlerian performativity, but it is worth highlighting now.

racial subjects in her race performativity theory. As mentioned previously, Bakha desires British dress and accessories in particular. When Bakha refuses to dress as other Indians do, and instead wears trousers and boots, he demonstrates that national culture is not a concrete category with stagnant characteristics. Instead, Bakha deconstructs singular “Indianness” to reveal that an Indian national cultural identity can include practicing norms such as British dress for some Indians, but not for others. Anand continues this path as Bakha seeks to acquire what seem to be inconsequential British objects, but are in fact essential to his challenge of dualistic ideas of national culture. The objects he associates with the British and desires for himself range from cigarettes to hats. Whatever the object, though, Bakha sees it as a tool to “remove all base taint of Indianness” (Anand 12). For example, after Bakha watches his sister struggle with lighting a fire for tea within their shack of a home, Bakha feels defeated and attempts to escape by “going out of doors [to sit] down on the edge of a broken cane chair of European design which he had been able to acquire in pursuance of his ambition to live like an Englishman” (Anand 22). In Bakha’s eyes, acquiring a chair of the Western world, even if it is a broken one, helps him perform a national culture that includes British objects. Interestingly, though, this chair is placed outside of Bakha’s basic, dirty hut in the outcaste colony, which creates a contrast that reveals the complexities of national culture. Bakha is able to perform a different collection of practices through objects like the chair, but where he lives and how he lives does not change. Consequently, Bakha reveals that he is able to change the performances of his national cultural identity through things, but certain

realities did not change.⁶ Indian national culture has no essential definition, but instead an imperfect combination of values and experiences. Thus, through his own decisions and actions, Bakha reveals that the norms of national identities are a varied and sometimes conflicting collection.

Performativity and National Culture in *Untouchable*

It is clear through Bakha's existence and experiences that national culture is alterable. This take on the cultures of nations is evident through Bakha's hybrid national culture, which is highlighted by his differences from other outcastes and other Indians, his ability to move around within the expectations of Indian national culture, and his desire to acquire and his success at absorbing some characteristics associated with Britain. What has yet to be explored, though, is how these features of Anand's *Untouchable* demonstrate that national culture can be defined in terms of performativity as described by Judith Butler. At its core, Butler's theory of performativity and this novel's portrayal of national culture are connected because Butlerian performativity begins with the idea that gender is constructed and not regulated by Nature, which *Untouchable* demonstrates about national culture. Consequently, two key points of Butlerian performativity are evident in this text: her take on subjection and agency, which is evident through Bakha's immobility in his living conditions and his struggles between hereditary fate and self-determination.

⁶ Bakha's immobility within Indian society reveals a complexity regarding the agency in the performance of national culture and subjection. This topic will be discussed in a later section, but at this moment, Bakha's performance reveals that Indian national culture can contain British components.

Bakha submits to social norms in order to become a subject, just as Butler asserts gendered subjects are created through adherence to social norms. This happens as he yields to some of the expectations of his caste, such as cleaning the latrines, refraining from entering certain locales, announcing his presence in crowded areas, and so on. In terms of Butlerian performativity, Bakha is making passionate attachments to identification categories, or in other words the unconscious is making attachments to subjection in order to become a subject (Butler 76). By consistently repeating norms, such as the ones mentioned previously, Bakha is forming attachments to his identity and the category to which he has been assigned through birth. Anand shows these attachments through Bakha's performance of habitual practices associated with untouchability and his thoughts regarding these actions. Because Bakha was born as an untouchable, he must be a latrine cleaner, and because he is a latrine cleaner, he must be an untouchable. Therefore, he must submit to this category's associated practices. Bakha despises having to clean the excrement of others out of the latrines and he abhors the abuse he receives when it is time for him to clean. However, when he submits to this expectation, "he [rushes] along with considerable skill and alacrity from one door-less latrine to another, cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol, [seeming] as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep-bedded river" (Anand 16). This description reveals that Bakha is able to participate in the activities that he must and that he is able to attach himself to the identity given to him, but it also reveals that it is a complex attachment. Bakha rushes easily through his task, without revealing the disdain the reader knows he has. Bakha

repeatedly states that he wishes to be like an educated sahib, not an outcaste, but these desires do not show through as he completes his job. Thus, he does it almost as if he is on autopilot because he is performing. Bakha has attached himself to this category, but it has not inhabited him.

As an untouchable, Bakha must form passionate attachments to his identity as a street sweeper in addition to his role as a latrine cleaner. This category of a sweeper untouchable has practices associated with it that Bakha must perform, including announcing his presence and refraining from touching others. When Bakha wanders through the town sweeping, he is caught up by the noise and sight of the market place. During this time Bakha seems to forget his position as he does not continually announce his presence. When he stops to enjoy the jalebis he is able to purchase, Bakha is drawn to someone visible through window. As he stares “absorbed and un-self-conscious,” he is sworn at, chastised, dehumanized, and even threatened by the man who accidentally touched him (Anand 46). Bakha’s response reveals his passionate attachment to this identity:

Bakha’s mouth was open. But he couldn’t utter a single word. He was about to apologise. He has already joined his hands instinctively. Now he bent his forehead over them, and he mumbled something. (Anand 47)

Through Anand’s description it is clear that Bakha knows what he must do as an untouchable and he does it, but he does it *mechanically*. He does not ponder what his next move should be; Bakha’s body moves to the proper, humble stance on his own. In “*Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire*,” Catherine Rottenberg discusses racial

passing in terms of performativity. Although her argument focuses on race, the same underlying concepts exist in this discussion of national culture. Rottenberg argues that “race performativity compels subjects to perform according to fictitious unities” (493). Bakha is compelled to perform this physical apology because he adheres, to some extent, to the identity unified by the repetition of such practices. However, while his actions reveal his submission to this category or his identification, his attachment is not whole-hearted. Interestingly, Bakha is not able to speak an apology once in the bodily position expected of his caste by those who adhere to the caste system. Perhaps, he does not utter an admission of guilt because his body has succumbed to this characteristic of his caste identification, but his mind has not. Bakha, however, does not fully participate in the sort of interaction a national culture that includes strict adherence to the caste system would demand when he does not speak. Because Bakha’s actions do not encompass all of the practices that other Indians expect, his attachment appears complex. Moreover, his multifaceted attachments accentuate how national cultural subjects are often split between identification and Rottenberg’s “desire-to-be.” Because certain subjects are compelled to identify with a certain identity and are also “encouraged to privilege and thus desire attributes” of a different subjecthood, Bakha performs such attachments, albeit rather mechanically, but he also desires British attributes (Rottenberg 498). As a result, it is possible to see national culture as having the ability to be altered. Once Bakha escapes from the angry mob, Anand again demonstrates his complex attachment when “a little later he slowed down, and quite automatically he began to

shout: ‘*Posh* keep away, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming!’” (51). Anand very carefully describes Bakha’s calling as happening “automatically.” Bakha surrenders to these expectations, but only when they are demanded of him or they happen without cognition. This is clearly a passionate attachment, which Butler calls for in her performativity theory. However, this attachment, like the others that Bakha has and will demonstrate, is not simply enacted.

Even after Bakha is abused for accidentally touching a higher-caste Indian, he does not always call his announcement as he walks through town. When a shopkeeper of higher castes realizes that Bakha is a sweeper because of the basket and broom he carries, he gives Bakha “a stern look of disapproval and [asks] him to move on” (Anand 56). Bakha immediately “lifted his face and pushing ahead called ‘*Posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming’ to the throng of buyers” (Anand 56). What is interesting in this interaction is the repeated contrast between how Bakha has formed a passionate attachment to his identity and the ways in which it does not encompass him. Bakha demonstrates an attachment simply by announcing his presence and carrying the tools of his trade: a broom and basket, which are demanded behaviors that are the result of Bakha’s subjection. On the other hand, Bakha again demonstrates that he does not always perform the practices associated with these attachments successfully since this interaction occurs after the intense abuse he receives for not announcing his presence. If Bakha were going to completely surrender to his national cultural identity or already had, now would be the ideal time

to show it. But until the shopkeeper silently admonishes Bakha, he does not remember or choose to alert the other citizens. That is because “norms are not static entities, but incorporated and interpreted features of existence” (Jagger 110). Bakha does eventually demonstrate his attachment to his identity category, but he does not do so consistently nor does he do it voluntarily. Consequently, Bakha reveals that the norms of his national culture are dynamic since he is able to interpret them through his complex attachments.

Because Butler argues that these psychic regulations are formed through social and historical contexts, they change as society and history do, and consequently, the repetition of norms that make a subject create a “non-place of subversion” (90). Not only does repetition fail to create the same identity exactly, but the repetition of norms that evolve as their contexts do also allows for rebellion. Bakha demonstrates the ability for subversion as he attains values and objections commonly from his interactions with and observations of the British, such as a denial of certain portions of the caste system and changes in his dress. Additionally, when Bakha repeats the norms of his passionate attachments inconsistently and mechanically, he demonstrates his ability to rebel. These opportunities for subversion are further solidified because the norms of all identification categories are connected to changing contexts. The setting in which Anand writes demonstrates a time of great change in Indian society. For better or for worse, the British social and political presence and control in India at this time offers a vehicle of change. Anand’s acknowledgment of the threads of Indian independence through Gandhi’s presence in

the novel also reveals the prevalence of change in this novel. In the same previously mentioned article, Rottenberg asserts that “the fractured and competing nature of ideals circulating in society seems to open a space for subjects to perform differently” (506). Even though Rottenberg is speaking of complex and conflicting racial ideologies, the setting of *Untouchable* creates a space for complex and conflicting national cultural ideals to do the same. In the environment created by Anand, national culture is clearly performed because Bakha first makes the passionate attachments that are a part of his forced identification, and then repeats the norms associated with them in a world of fractured ideals, which allows him room to alter his performance of national culture, and consequently perform differently. At the same time, however, Bakha is split between identification and Rottenberg’s “desire-to-be.” Although Rottenberg speaks of raced subjects who identify as black but desire to obtain the traits of the privileged race, white, this split can be applied to national cultural subjects like Bakha. Bakha again underscores the performative construction of national culture as he identifies as Indian, which is seen through his passionate attachments, but desires to be white, which is seen through his obsession with British things and values.

Also demonstrative of national cultural performativity in Anand’s *Untouchable* is how the characters only have limited agency in their performances of national culture. Because Butler argues that subjectivity is simultaneously repressive and empowering since it forces a subject to adhere to norms in order to exist and these categories are not immutable, Bakha is certainly constricted, but his existence

also gives him power. For example, although Bakha is able to acquire British goods like the chair, he is not able to change his actual living conditions or locale. He has the agency, like that Butler speaks of, to buy and value the cane chair, but this agency exists only through the pre-established systems of dominant power. Therefore, the agency Bakha has regarding his national culture is limited solely to the rearticulation of norms that have already been created. A similar example of limited agency occurs when Bakha becomes a consumer because a Muslim shopkeeper and a candy seller are willing to sell goods to him. The in-betweenness of Bakha's subjecthood and his limited agency are evident when both sellers purify Bakha's money before "[flinging] a packet of 'Red-Lamp' cigarettes at Bakha, as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog" or giving him the candy (Anand 42). Bakha has the ability act as a consumer to purchase goods sold by those who do not adhere to the caste system, but he still must participate in the norms of his identity as an untouchable. Bakha does not have the agency to change those. Bakha never escapes to a subjecthood that is completely separate from these identificatory categories, which is seen by how he must be humble when acting as a consumer and when the shopkeepers purify his money. Nonetheless, *Untouchable* demonstrates the performative nature of national culture through Bakha's ability to consume and how he uses those items.

The Novel's Performance of National Culture

Although the world created by Anand in *Untouchable* definitely demonstrates that national culture is created through performance and is mutable, the novel itself

posits the same arguments. That is to say, the novel *Untouchable* is itself a performance of national culture. Anand's novel becomes a performance because the author demonstrates varying national cultural performances through his own life and also impregnates the writing with challenges to certain perspectives on the origins of national culture. Additionally, there are many components in the writing of *Untouchable* that represent how the novel is its own performance of national culture. This evidence includes the novel's shifting treatment of India from barbaric to self-preserving, the way the novel reveals the British presence as a superior force and the perpetrator of destruction, and the novel's use of Gandhi in discussions about different forms of nationalism and government.

Mulk Raj Anand's own experiences with multiple national definitions first point to the novel as performance, and this is not lost on some critics of this text. In his preface to *Untouchable*, E.M. Forster writes:

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have know enough about his troubles. And no Untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position. (vii)

Within the first few pages of the forward and before Anand's writing has actually begun, Forster lays the groundwork for the complexity of Anand's existence and unwittingly reveals how that indicates the novel's performative characteristics. First

of all, Forster acknowledges that Anand's position within Indian society does not fit the dualistic categories of "in" or "out." Forster describes Anand as an Indian who observes "from the outside." In other words, Anand is an insider as a native member of the country, but he was still an outsider in some way. This existence highlights the performative construction of national culture because, according to Forster, Anand is not automatically an insider of Indian national culture, even though he is a native. Thus, Anand's writings about India and national culture(s), specifically *Untouchable*, would represent this complicated view and experience.

Forster also uses a detailed description of Anand's position to reinforce that he is the best writer for this text. The "ideal position" that Forster speaks of is a member of the Kshatriyá caste that does not place stock in the idea of caste pollution. As a member of this caste who has these opinions, Anand was able to play with the sweepers when he was a child and gain insights into their plight. But at the same time, Anand was also able to experience India within a position that was somewhat privileged and without the struggles that Bakha experiences. His location within society made it possible for Anand to fully understand the perspective of higher castes, while also being able to tell the story of Bakha as a truthful and accurate description of an untouchable's life. In order to do so, Anand must have a perspective gained from his national culture that allowed him to see complexities within the opinions of the higher castes in order to refrain from completely vilifying them *and* a perspective of the oppressed untouchables. Suresht Renjen Bald also offers an argument for the assistance Anand's position offers him in the writing of

this text. Bald argues that Anand's father's "feeble rebellion against caste," in which he rejected his caste occupation and joined the army, "set Mulk Raj on a revolutionary course" (476). Forster and Bald acknowledge that in order to have both perspectives Anand would need to be intimately connected to two different castes, and have ideas that challenge the traditional caste system.

Although Forster helpfully examines Anand's location within Indian national culture, he does not fully acknowledge Anand's complex position within Indian-British relations. Other critics such as H. Moore Williams and N. Radhakrishnan have argued that Anand's position became his tragic flaw as a writer. Given that Anand was connected to India through birth and to Britain through the time he spent there during his education, "his failure to disentangle art from propaganda" hampered his career (Williams 5). Radhakrishnan also points to this dilemma when he asserts, "the Indo-Anglian novelist is unsure of his ground" (46). While this study acknowledges Anand's complex position, which is also pointed out by these critics, what Williams and Radhakrishnan do not focus their attention on and what Forster is missing is that Anand paints a picture of the British presence in India that is both supportive and judgmental. This is possible because Anand had strong connections to Britain. Having been born in Peshawar in 1905, which is now part of Pakistan, but educated in London and Cambridge, Anand undoubtedly has deep connections to Britain and India. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that since Anand's hometown is now part of Pakistan and he feasibly would have grown up in a mixed Hindu-Muslim area, national borders, and consequently the boundaries of national

culture, can change. Because Indian partition followed Indian independence, this understanding emphasizes that what is defined as “India” in *Untouchable* is partly defined by British colonialism. If national culture were concrete it would be possible to pin down Anand’s national culture into a fixed definition. However, Anand’s performances of national culture are not exclusively anything; they are complex, competing, and incomplete. This is first simply shown through the writing of the novel as it is written in English and reveals characteristics of Western modernism, such as his narration style. More strongly, though, this performance of national culture with a myriad of characteristics comes through in Anand’s writing as a result of his treatment of British and Indian forces.

On one hand, Anand seems to be using *Untouchable* as a forum for demonstrating that Britain is the savior for the barbaric world of India. After Bakha has experienced a horrific day of abuse, has learned that his sister had been violated by a holy man, and has been disowned by his father, it is a British missionary that comes to his rescue. Anand does not choose to have another Indian offer Bakha comfort, but a man symbolic of British presence. Colonel Hutchinson, who was the “chief of the local Salvation Army [and] never very far from the outcastes’ colony,” notices that Bakha is sad and attempts to help him through Christian teachings (Anand 121). While it is certainly arguable that Colonel Hutchinson’s attempt at converting Bakha reveals his ethnocentric beliefs, it is momentous that Anand chooses a British character to be kind at this moment. The lack of an Indian presence appears to contrast the ability of the British and Indian forces to save and help Bakha.

Through this artistic choice, British values are deemed as kind and giving versus the condemnatory and damaging values of India that Bakha encountered earlier in the day.

Anand also has Bakha acknowledge what seems to be a superiority of British life through his own opinions in the novel. As mentioned earlier, Bakha equates the British with possibilities, education, and success. When Bakha speaks of the British barracks he says that they “represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born” (Anand 78). With this belief that he can escape the trappings and oppression of Indian society, Bakha makes a British man the possible hero in his situation. To further support this point, Anand makes sure that Bakha continues to seek anything British. Dress, accessories, material goods, and an education become Bakha’s main goals in life. Furthermore, the reader is left viewing his success at these acquisitions as another step toward his escape. Anand has again contrasted the values associated with the national cultures of India and British in a way that seems to point to the barbaric notions of the former and the saving qualities of the latter.

While this could seem to be a simple representation of British and Indian influences in India, Anand is sure to complicate this hero/villain dichotomy. Outside of the character of Bakha, Anand allows some characters to describe the British presence as self-interested and oppressive. Although Colonel Hutchinson is kind to Bakha when he feels defeated, this British missionary certainly acts out of his own desire to “save” the heathen people of India. Additionally, Colonel Hutchinson’s

wife, for example, represents the racism of many British men and women living in India. As she scolds her husband for wasting his time with “the blackies,” the idea that the British are the progressive open-minded members of India is challenged (Anand 132). Anand also uses men talking on the street in order to demonstrate negative perspectives of British presence in India. As Bakha overhears some Indian citizens talking, he may not understand what they say but the meaning is not lost on the reader. According to one of these men, Britain “is passing through terrible convulsions, politically, economically, and industrially” (Anand 138). Since this man does not see the British as epitome of perfection as Bakha does, he blames their struggles on their lack of morals and unlimited gratification of their senses. The British are seen as narcissistic, faulted, and gluttonous by this man. When Anand uses some of his characters to express these negative opinions, he is varying the definition of Britain within his text in order to remove them from the simplistic, dualistic definitions of good and evil. Therefore, the novel appears to be performative as a result of these varying perspectives.

The presence of Gandhi is the final component in complicating the performances of Indian and British national culture in Anand’s novel. Although Bakha views the British as the savior of India, or at least for himself, throughout the majority of the text, Gandhi also begins to take on this role for Bakha. When Gandhi speaks to Indian citizens he speaks not only of self-determination and the escape from foreign oppression, but also of the faults of his own nation that must be eradicated. Before Gandhi even speaks Anand shows the visibility of his unifying power, making

it not the British who will lead India to success, but an Indian. When news of Gandhi's visit is shared, Bakha acknowledges that "the word 'Mahatma' was like a magical magnet to which he, like all the other people around him, rushed blindly" (Anand 136). Through Anand's words, it is clear that Gandhi could unite Indians strongly enough to challenge the divisions that have made the British able to conquer the country. Describing him as a magnet is what Anand uses to argue that through Gandhi, India could fight against oppression of any form and lead the country to grand achievements. No longer is Britain the sole representation of a liberator.

Anand makes Gandhi's role in this text further complicated by having him also acknowledge the faults of both India and Britain. During his speech to Indian citizens, Gandhi acknowledges that Indians, like the British, have "for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest for our iniquity" (Anand 146). By drawing a line of comparison between India and Britain about the suppression of the Indian people, neither country is the only one who has caused harm, which means that Indians are not solely victims. It is a complicated existence to be both a victim and the perpetrator of the crime committed. Simple, dualistic, and immovable definitions have been destroyed, whether they are of identities or national cultures.

Although Gandhi paints a negative portrayal of Indian values through his polemic against the Hindu caste system, he is sure to point out that the way to escape this disease is not through British national culture, but through revising the national culture of India. When Anand focuses on the portion of Gandhi's speech in which he

points to the tenants of Hinduism as the evidence that the oppression created through the caste system is sinful, he is using a religion of India to do so (147). Since religion is entwined with national culture and Hinduism is a prevalent religion in India, Gandhi is arguing that the values of India's own national culture can save them; the values of another nation are not necessary, as Bakha originally believed.

Undoubtedly, though, the positive characteristics of the British national culture that Bakha recognizes, such as support for original thought and the ability for self-improvement, could also be helpful in the liberation of India from subjugation. Yet again, India and Britain are seen as having features identified as Indian and British that are useful to India emancipation, which points to a performative national culture.

The many levels of Gandhi's role in this novel solidify the novel's very own performance of national culture in a more overarching way as well. Although Gandhi had become a symbol of Indian independence and the end of colonial oppression, during the time this novel was written and is supposed to be taking place, 1933 and 1935 respectively, Gandhi's focus had somewhat shifted. Ben Conisbee Baer offers a helpful outline of this time period in "Shit Writing," through which he points to the Gandhi-Irwin pact of 1931 as the cause of this shift since he deems it "the mysterious compromise [in which] Gandhi called off the powerful Civil Disobedience campaign which had held the promise of wresting real concessions from the British" (576).

While many Indians and others questioned this compromise, it may point to a performance on Gandhi's part. By conceding to the British the end of his outwardly

revolutionary action, Gandhi gained the opportunity to help his fellow Indians in other ways. During the rally scene in *Untouchable*, Gandhi says:

The British Government sought to pursue a policy of divide and rule in giving to our brethren of the depressed classes separate electorates in the Councils that will be created under the new constitution. I do not believe that the bureaucracy is sincere in its efforts to elaborate the new constitution. But it is one of the conditions under which I have been released from gaol that I shall not carry on any propaganda against the government. So I shall not refer to that matter. I shall only speak about the so-called "Untouchables," whom the government tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them separate legal and political status. (Anand 146)

In this speech Gandhi's supposed shift is evident but also complicated. He reveals that he was released from jail because he agreed to stop spreading his revolutionary "propaganda." Interestingly, Gandhi reveals the reason for his release by stating his arguments against the British government. He also accuses the British political presence of being a cause in the plight of the untouchables. Gandhi, then, is performing submission to the national cultural expectations of Britain by verbally acknowledging his suppression of his independence goals. But on the other hand, Gandhi also remains committed to his political cause by stressing the British villainy in India. Although the acknowledgement of the need for independence is juxtaposed with his refusal to continue that campaign, it exists nonetheless. Some may see this

as a betrayal on Gandhi's part, but what it could more deeply be seen as is a performance created in order to reach a goal. By stating a denial of independence propaganda, Gandhi was able to continue speaking to his people. Thus, this freedom made it possible for Gandhi to offer a veiled criticism of British colonial presence and continue his fight for the rights of untouchables, during which he uses performance as a strategy to achieve these goals. Consequently, the nation and national culture are asserted through complex strategies.

The greater movement that Gandhi's rally in the novel represents also engages with the forms of national culture that are performative in the novel. There are many examples of India's complex relationship with Britain in *Untouchable*, and the majority of these models come through the interactions of individual Indian characters, particularly Anand's portrayal of the British through the eyes of Bakha. As discussed thoroughly earlier, Bakha successfully seeks many British objects and values, even if they do not fit his identity as an Indian or an untouchable, because he views many of them as superior to India's. Consequently, the British are in some ways viewed as a savior through the character of Colonel Hutchinson. The objects, values, and help from British characters all point to the British presence that Gandhi seems to submit to and fight against. Perhaps, then, Bakha's performance of national culture through these characteristics is the same as what Gandhi is doing when he agrees to stop speaking out against British rule. Bakha's discomfort with some of the British behaviors and negative British characters also suggests that the novel performs the political situation represented by Gandhi. When Bakha mentions his

inability to accept British characteristics such as comfort with nudity while bathing and when his Hindu respect surpasses his urge to correct his father's tea drinking, Anand could be offering the same disguised critique of some British-identified practices that Gandhi gives in his speech. In addition, Colonel Hutchinson's ethnocentric desire to "save the savages" and his wife's racist beliefs could also be a covert way of drawing attention to British failings. These actions and exchanges perform national culture in a way similar to Gandhi's performance of British and Indian national culture. Therefore, the national cultures represented by the political conflict are performed via Bakha, Colonel Hutchinson, and his wife.

While some could argue that Gandhi's compromise in order to escape imprisonment demonstrates confused loyalties, Bakha experiences a conflict that could point to the same confusion. Although Bakha has sought a life as a British man in order to better his situation, this plan becomes challenged when he hears Gandhi speak. Thus, the novel performs national culture through Bakha and Gandhi's seemingly contradictory thoughts and actions. As Gandhi speaks out against the pollution of untouchability, Bakha rejoices. Gandhi is fighting for his rights, specifically his right to live without abuse. Bakha appears to shift his ideas of salvation from the British to the Indians, since Gandhi makes it seem possible. Immediately after, however, Anand describes Bakha as overhearing a discussion about toilets, the idea of which immediately entralls Bakha. Bakha then seems to see salvation in Gandhi's word *and* the Western excrement machine. Anand writes:

‘I shall go on doing what Gandhi says.’ ‘But shall I never be able to leave the latrines?’ came the disturbing thought. ‘But I can. Did that poet not say there is a machine which can do my work?’ (Anand 157)

Through Bakha’s thoughts it is clear that escape from his current situation seems possible to him. Moreover, Bakha seems to combine Indian and British national cultural practices. He will continue to follow the ideas of Gandhi, an Indian himself and a representative of Indian independence, but Bakha will also look to Western machines for assistance. Bakha deems technological advances held by the British and the thoughts of an Indian revolutionary as valuable and necessary in the achievement of his goals. Therefore, Bakha’s national culture in the form of his beliefs seems to be an amalgamation of British and Indian ideals. Bakha is performing an indefinite, non-dualistic definition of national culture in order to achieve what he desires. This behavior clearly mirrors the political situation represented by Gandhi, as the leader himself also performed national culture characteristics to realize his objectives.

Without a doubt, these complicated performances of national culture within the novel and within the writer’s life demonstrate that national culture is neither simply nor concretely defined. Even though Anand’s novel focuses more heavily on the national cultures of minorities and the colonized, this text demonstrates the performative status of national culture. Some of these national cultural identifications have more power simply because they are the dominant identities, while non-traditional performances such as Bakha’s have less power. Furthermore, these components prove that national culture is mutable since Anand is able to take on

varying perspectives simultaneously, while doing the same in the world of his novel. What is left to be addressed, then, is how this points to the novel's examples of performative national culture. First of all, as Butlerian performativity asserts, Anand and his novel become subjects when he submits to and when he makes his novel submit to a signification system that already exists. Anand and his text do this when his characters represent traditional forms of national culture, which include representations of national culture that are simple and dualistic. Anand does this through choices such as Bakha being the victim and the British being his escape. In order to maintain this existence as a subject, Anand needs to make sure his subject repeatedly performs this role, which he does through Bakha's interactions with other Indians and British men and his opinions of both nations.

The novel demonstrates the performative status of national culture when this subjecthood allows for limited change to the existence of the subject. Since the norms that make the subject are socially constructed, it is "open to resistance and change" (Jagger 99). The setting that Anand uses is a time of great social change for India because of political forces, foreign influence, and technological advances in play at that time. Therefore, within his novel the social existence to which a subject must adhere through performance is changing. This means that the definition of the subject is alterable. Anand does just that in his novel, as it acts as a detractor to Britain's glory, an acknowledger of India's faults, a supporter of some British values, and a call to India's ability for independence. Anand's novel is changing throughout the plot because subjection itself is mutable due to its origin in the social.

Untouchable becomes a performance of national culture when it demonstrates how a subject's definition changes as society changes, which is further supported by Anand's varying focuses on Bakha's understanding and perspective.

What further points to *Untouchable*'s acknowledgement of national cultural performativity is the limited agency that Anand's text demonstrates. Butler argues that the signification system that creates the social norms used in subjection exists before the subject does. Therefore, a subject does not have the agency to create completely new social norms, behaviors, values, etc. All a subject can do is vary his/her performance by combining these already-existing customs, and this is exactly what Anand's novel does. His characters combine customs of British national culture, such as dress, with norms of Indian national culture, such as religion. Bakha does not leave his outcaste colony and start an entirely new belief system. He simply combines what he knows with what he sees. *Untouchable* does the same as the British presence is represented as negative and positive for India, and when India is described as able to save itself or destroy itself. No new national culture is created without the influences of the norms that have already been created within the signification system of the world. Therefore, *Untouchable* performs values of British practices and Indian practices in a new combination, which points to performativity.

Chapter 2: Performative Hybrid National Cultures in *Brick Lane*

Examining National Culture and Performativity in *Brick Lane*

Timothy Brennan asserts that “nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fiction in which imaginative literature (the novel) plays a decisive role” (48). Reading Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* with this idea of the nation in mind provides the opportunity to explore ideas about the nation and the development of national culture through her novel. Because Ali’s characters are immigrants from Bangladesh or the children of immigrants born in Britain, a kind of citizen that is not frequently examined by authors of fiction is the focus of the novel. Throughout *Brick Lane*, Ali uses the complicated existences of immigrants, such as the protagonist Nazneen, Chanu, Razia, Dr. Azad and his wife, and the children of these new citizens of Britain to address the different modes of national cultural development, such as those reliant on the acquisition of territory and those based on needs. Not only do her characters have experiences that interrogate definitions of national culture, complex relationships of race and racism, and multi-cultured existences, they also acknowledge these issues themselves. Nazneen’s husband, Chanu, says:

behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper tragedy. ... I’m talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity and heritage. I’m talking about the children who don’t know what their identity is.

I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrible struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. (Ali 88)

As adults who grew up in Bangladesh and then immigrated to Britain, Nazneen, her husband Chanu, and other supporting characters offer an intricate perspective on what it means to be one who emigrates from a non-Western nation to a Western country in the contemporary world. Some immigrants, like Chanu, fear a tragedy in which immigrants lose ties to their home, as eating habits and gender roles change. Equally tragic, according to Chanu, are children who lack intimacy with the traditions of the home country. Other immigrants, like Dr. Azad's wife, feel differently. She responds to Chanu's lament with:

Crap! ... Why do you make it so complicated? Assimilation this, alienation that! Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like Westerners. Fact: that is no bad thing. (Ali 88-89)

With this disagreement, Ali immediately asserts the existence of hybrid national cultures that vary among immigrants and their children. Additionally, Ali lays the groundwork for utilizing the experiences of her characters to explore different models of development, some of which appear to be more successful methods than others in terms of functioning in Britain. All of these features of Ali's novel point to a definition of national culture that is always evolving, and must be defined in terms of performativity, which is exemplified by the experiences of these characters.

Many critics have explored how Ali transparently addresses national culture, its hybridization, and its development in a multicultural Britain, but the works of Jane Hiddleston and Michael Perfect offer particularly helpful frameworks and points of contrast for this study. Hiddleston interrogates the issues of national culture presented in Ali's novel in "Shapes and Shadows: (Un)Veiling the Immigrant in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*." For example, she asserts that while Ali attempts "to give form to the hazy figures that flicker behind the surface of persistent stereotypes and misconceptions," the fictional discourse of *Brick Lane* actually "masks [a solid image of the Bangladeshi immigrant] as much as it reveals" (58). Like Hiddleston, who traces the controversy and the criticism of Ali's novel by those who believe *Brick Lane* includes stereotypical representations only, I seek to explore what Ali's characters and her writing reveal about the intentions of her representation. However, while Hiddleston believes *Brick Lane*'s "sketched outlines trace 'shapes and shadows,' provisional forms, rather than determinate individuals or inconvertible truths," this study will explore how this is not a fault of Ali's writing, as Hiddleston seems to argue (58). In fact, I assert that is just what she seeks to prove: no individual or national culture is ever fixed. What will be demonstrated here is that Ali unveils that national culture can have a variety of hybrid forms and can be performed in different ways. Like Hiddleston, Michael Perfect focuses on *Brick Lane*'s stereotypical representations of immigrants in his article "The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*." Perfect argues, contrary to Hiddleston, that "the major concern of the novel is not the destabilization of

stereotypes but the celebration of the potential for adaptation in both individuals and societies” (109). Perfect, who actually writes in response to Hiddleston, traces the response of other critics, Hasina’s letters, and Ali’s inspiration, Naila Kabeer’s *The Power to Choose*, in order to make his arguments. According to Perfect, though, Ali “employs stereotypes [through these components of her writing] in counterpoint to its narrative of empowerment” (119). Undeniably, Ali asserts that individuals can adapt through hybridization, but it is also possible to explore what such adaptations mean about national culture. Thus, this examination will look at many of the same components of *Brick Lane* that Hiddleston and Perfect explore, however the focus will be what the examples of hybridization and modes of development reveal about national culture. The characters and their experiences of Ali’s novel not only demonstrate that there can be many hybrid forms of national culture, but they also expose that there are varying forms of national cultural development. Furthermore, these features of Ali’s writing demonstrate that the performative construction of national culture is most evident in the hybrid cultures of this novel.

Ali’s Hybrid National Cultures

At the core of Ali’s novel is her characters’ hybridization and development as members of national cultures. While there are a plethora of examples that reveal these components, it is worthwhile to look at the moments of hybridization and development in comparison to each other. Because the boundaries of national culture are “liminal and ambivalent,” as Bhabha astutely puts it, what becomes evident is that

Ali's characters demonstrate models of national cultural production in accordance with such indistinct boundaries and borders (300). This variety of models stems from the various ways each character constructs a national culture through performed elements. While Nazneen, Razia, Chanu, and Karim all put together performed elements of national culture in different ways, there appear to be some overarching connections between characters of the same gender. Most significantly, Nazneen and Razia's national cultural development does not change in order to be more successful within British society, but instead their hybridity occurs on an *ad hoc* basis in order to help them take care of their families and selves. The men of Ali's novel, on the other hand, construct national cultures as they seek to establish their positions in British society, since they experience Rottenberg's "desire-to-be." Specifically, Chanu and Karim combine performed elements of national culture through a territorial model, wherein they seek to establish a literal and figurative space of their own. Not only does Ali offer these different models, she seems to assert that a territorial formation of national culture, which mimics the imperialism that first linked Britain and Bangladesh, is unsuccessful. National cultures that hybridize as needed and without ties to a specific location are much more successful. Nonetheless, all four of these characters help Ali demonstrate new representations of what it means to be British and Bangladeshi.

Before Ali demonstrates hybrid national culture through her characters, she is sure to emphasize that her setting is also a hybrid of Southeast-Asian and British elements. Since *Brick Lane* takes place in an area of London with a large immigrant

population, Tower Hamlets, and the vast majority of the characters are Bangladeshi immigrants or their children, there is a prevalent sense of in-betweenness. Ali's representation of hybridity demonstrates that "it is from the liminality of national culture that the figure of the people emerges in the narrative ambivalence of disjunctive times and meanings" (Bhabha 304). For example, "the sign screwed to the brickwork [of Nazneen's apartment building] was in stiff English capitals and the curlicues beneath were Bengali" (Ali 6). With that description Ali sets apart the two nations through their languages and their writing. Britain appears stiff, sterile, and immovable; Bangladesh is fluid and artistic. Although Ali juxtaposes these as antitheses, the placement of the sign demonstrates that this area contains hybrids of Bangladeshi and British influences, and this collage of practices is emphasized through Ali's characters.

Not only does Chanu demonstrate a multivalent national cultural experience, Ali also uses him to represent a character whose national cultural development is the result of his desire to establish himself both as a Bangladeshi man and British citizen. Interestingly, Ali is sure to point out that Chanu contemplates national culture. When Chanu expresses his difficulties with upward mobility in his career, he begins by discussing another employee who he feels has received better treatment than he has. Chanu states:

Wilkie is not exactly underclass. He has a job, so technically I would say no, he is not. But that is the mindset. This is what I am studying the subsection 'Race, Ethnicity, and Identity.' It is part of the sociology module. Of course,

when I have my Open University degree then nobody can question my credentials. Although, Dhaka University is one of the best in the world, these people here are by and large ignorant. (Ali 24-25)

Although Chanu may seem to simply be complaining about his struggles at work and in Britain, there are actually much more complex issues at work. The course for which Chanu is studying the race, ethnicity, and identity article clearly acts as the means through which Chanu can address the hybrid nature of his national culture. This is likely a careful choice on the part of Ali because “minority discourse speaks betwixt and between times and places” (Bhabha 309). Chanu’s hybrid collection of national cultural elements began before he moved to Britain, as he received a degree in English literature from Dhaka University. Chanu valued elements of British national culture, such as language and literature, before his immigration, and as such he is intellectually “between places,” as Bhabha would argue. Once in Britain, Chanu begins to believe that his Bangladeshi education does not hold the same weight with the British as it does for him, nor will it gain him the respect he had believed it would. Consequently, Chanu attempts to acquire British certificates and prides himself on his evolved educational learning as he desires the attributes of the privileged “British,” and through which it becomes clear that national culture is a collection of practices that is never finalized. Furthermore, this emphasizes that through Chanu, Ali’s writing reveals a model of national cultural development for male characters that is explicitly connected to establishing a territorial space within the hierarchy of his workplace.

Also demonstrative of Chanu's malleable national culture is his acquisition of cultural capital in the form of things and an education, all of which he deems tickets to success in his new home. This component of Ali's novel reveals how the development of Chanu's national culture is affected by the conflict he faces as he tries to identify his place in British society and as he experiences the split between identification and desire that subjects with racial identities experience, according to Rottenberg. Chanu explores this portion of his national cultural development when he explains,

When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane, I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the civil service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. ... And then I found out things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice of their heads. (Ali 21)

Chanu believed that he would be able to establish himself within a place of success and respect in Britain because he was an educated man from Bangladesh, not a parasite-laden commoner. However, his understanding of success changes as he struggles at his British civil service position, begins seeking certificates from Britain, and consequently desires to be other than he is. The driving force, then, behind Chanu's combination of national cultural practices is the conflicts he faces as he tries

to move successfully among the “Wilkie’s” and other non-immigrant citizens of Britain. In other words, as he navigates the world outside Tower Hamlets, the boundaries of British and Bangladeshi culture begin to blur. Chanu’s life is revealed to include a Bangladeshi education in English literature, a British bureaucratic administration job, and a desire to acquire certificates and an education in Britain in order to be successful. The formation of Chanu’s national culture challenges ideas of the fixed nature of this category through the collage of components that Ali allows Chanu to express. This same feature of Chanu’s national culture points to the territorial model Chanu follows in order to establish his national culture.

Chanu’s actions continue to blur definitions of British and Bangladeshi national culture as he hoards furniture. When he collects more furniture than there is floor space, these actions become part of his complex drive to establish a literal “place” for himself in Britain, which he attempts to obtain by acquiring a miscellaneous collection of items. When Nazneen navigates their cramped living room, Ali provides the following description:

There was a lot of furniture, more than Nazneen had seen in one room before. Even if you took all of the furniture in the compound, from every auntie and uncle’s ghar, it would not match up to this one room. ... Nobody in Gouirpir had anything like it. There were plates on the wall, attached by hooks and wires, which were not for eating from but for display only. Some wires were rimmed in gold paint. “Gold leaf,” Chanu called it. His certificates were framed and mixed with the plates. (Ali 9)

Although Nazneen speaks of her own family's means in Bangladesh at this point, Ali makes it clear that Nazneen associates the concept of a few possessions with the majority of Bangladesh, and she cannot think of one other person that has so many pieces of furniture. Chanu, however, clearly values the ownership of multiple items, even though he is from Bangladesh. Because Chanu's national culture is a hybrid, he is hoarding things in a way that would not have been possible in Bangladesh simply because many of these items would not have been available. Although living in Britain allows him to collect so many items, he stakes his territory in a way that is a failure; it is too much. Moreover, this hybridization appears to be connected to Chanu's desire to establish himself among British citizens who are not immigrants from Tower Hamlets, and whom Chanu sees as the successful, powerful majority or the privileged national cultural identity. Therefore, Chanu values these objects in the hopes that they will make him equal to any Wilkie or Mr. Dalloway. If Chanu can just acquire enough home furnishings he will be successful and respected, either because he has them or because he can make money off of them since "when he had fixed [a chair] he was going to sell it" (Ali 52). The possibility that Chanu sees in this chair and other furniture he obtains demonstrates his complex existence (Ali 61). The boundaries of national culture are revealed to be imprecise because Chanu is a British resident from Bangladesh whose own practices contain some witnessed in each country. Through Chanu, Ali exhibits a model for national cultural development in which establishing a personal territory creates a belonging that is not quite right.

Although Karim was born in Britain, his parents are Bangladeshi immigrants and he has grown up within Tower Hamlets surrounded by other Bangladeshi immigrants, their children, and their traditions. Karim, like Chanu, exposes a model for national cultural development that is heavily affected by those who claim to be more “British” than he, by his desire stake a claim in Britain, and his desire to be considered “British” by others. According to Bhabha, “cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies for identification” (313). Therefore, Ali utilizes Karim to expose cultural differences or highlight his hybridization through his strategies that include pledging to complex loyalties and allegiances. When Nazneen speaks of “our country,” meaning Bangladesh, Karim quickly answers with “This is my country,” meaning Britain (Ali 172). Even though he lives within a Bangladeshi immigrant community, Karim identifies the nation of his birth as his home. At the same time, he actively leads the Bengal Tigers in defending “Muslim rights and culture” (Ali 196). In other words, Karim identifies as both British and Muslim. Because Karim is a British citizen from birth, these complex loyalties not only point to the hybridization of Karim’s national culture, but that what it means to be British is changing. For example, Islam is not only a practice of the immigrants, but also British-born citizens, just as a Bangladeshi ancestry does not guarantee sole loyalty to Bangladesh. “Britishness,” then, includes such hybrids as the one that Karim represents.

Ali’s blatant discussion of Karim’s hybridization also points to a complex construction of a national cultural identity that is based on the place he endeavors to

inhabit within Britain and the world. When Karim first enters Nazneen's life, Ali makes him the vehicle for Nazneen's acquisition of current event information. After Karim begins the Bengal Tigers, Nazneen becomes aware that this group focuses on issues plaguing Muslims from around the world and Tower Hamlets. When Karim begins to lament the struggles he is having with organizing the Bengal Tigers, he also reveals part of why his performance of national culture includes this group. Karim tells Nazneen,

When I was at school, we used to be chased home every day. People getting beaten up the whole time. Then we got together, turned the tables. One of us got touched, they all paid for it. We went everywhere together, we started a fight, and we got a reputation. (Ali 213)

Karim seeks to unite Muslims for the same reason he united with other bullied classmates: to protect each other and carve out a place in Britain where they can be safe, successful, and independent. Now, though, Karim is not trying to fight bullies, but other British citizens who are prejudiced against Bangladeshi people and Islam, including the opposing group called Lion Hearts. Because "colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities ... are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation," this discomfort caused by the shifting boundaries of Britain that immigrants suggest often creates conflict for the "white" or self-identified "native British" (Bhabha 315). This is exactly what Karim struggled against as a child and continues to struggle against as an adult with the Lion Hearts (Bhabha 315). Consequently, Karim jockey for authority and territory as this group

speaks out against Islam through leaflets and attempting to organize marches. For example, one of the Lion Heart leaflets speaks out against “multicultural murder,” in which they provide the following description:

in domestic science your daughter will learn how to make a kebab, or fry a bhaji. For his history lesson your son will be studying Africa or India or some other dark and distant land. English people, he will learn, are Wicked Colonialists. (Ali 205, original emphasis)

It is these ideas and the people who hold such beliefs that Karim wishes to combat. Thus, when Karim learns that the Lion Hearts plan to “March against the Mullahs,” he plans to unite the Bengal Tigers in order to establish Tower Hamlets as “Bengal Tigers’ territory” (Ali 338). Karim throws himself into organizing the march, revealing that practicing Islam is one of the components of Karim’s national culture. In addition, when Karim discusses his school bullying memory and his desire to protect the Muslim community of London, he is also demonstrating why his performance of national culture includes a drive to unify Muslims, in addition to a connection to British nationhood. Like Chanu, Karim’s interactions with non-immigrant, non-Bangladeshi citizens have caused a development of national culture that focuses on Karim’s ability to forge his place and role in Britain. Additionally, the development of his national culture also seeks to establish the places or roles of other Muslims and Bangladeshis. Karim lives in Britain and even identifies himself as British, but he seeks to prove that he can also be a Muslim man with Bangladeshi ancestry who owns a space in Britain. Ali, then, not only emphasizes that her

characters experience hybridization and that they express varying forms of national culture, but she also exposes that for characters like Chanu and Karim the development of national culture occurs through what I am calling territorial modes of national culture formations, wherein being a part of a national culture is about claiming and holding a literal and figurative space for oneself.

Through the character Razia, Ali is able to offer yet another model of national cultural development, but this time it is through a female character. Like Chanu and Karim, Razia experiences hybridization while also demonstrating that national culture is malleable. Razia, however, demonstrates a different collection of performed elements of national culture than the previously discussed male characters. Furthermore, Razia demonstrates a model of national cultural production that is not preoccupied with establishing a place in British society or the world, which seems to protect her from being as influenced by Rottenberg's "desire-to-be." Through Razia, Ali creates a complex national cultural identity that is certainly affected by contact with British citizens, but her contact is minimal which means her desire to change her national cultural practices is not as influenced by her desire for the privileged attributes, and thus, her hybridity happens situationally, or as her children or herself need it. Ali is able to blatantly discuss Razia's hybridity mainly through the practices related to clothing and gender roles. Razia's contact with and use of other styles of dress points to her ability to express a national culture that includes a variety of practices from Western dress traditions and some of those belonging to Southeast Asia. Razia performs this complicated existence as she wears "black lace-up shoes,

wide and thick soled” with her sari (Ali 14). Through such descriptions, Ali appears to be deliberately connecting and comparing British and Bangladeshi clothing in order to highlight Razia’s hybrid performances and offer a new form of national cultural development. This complexity continues as the narrator describes the folds of Razia’s sari as being “never right: too bunched, too loose, too far to the side, too low or too high” (Ali 33). Eventually Razia gives up saris altogether for tracksuits and trousers, but she still wears her head scarf. Thus, Ali paints a portrait of a national culture that puts together Muslim head covering with Western dress customs. Through her clothing, Razia combines characteristics of multiple national cultures to make a new performance of her own.

Although Ali uses blatant examples of a multifaceted national culture like Razia’s “Union Jack top over shalwaar pants” outfit, these dress choices reveal more than her hybridity (Ali 185). Undeniably, characters like Razia prove that cultural difference must be understood as “the process of cultural interception formed in the perplexity of living, in the disjunctive, liminal space of national society” (Bhabha 312). However, Ali clearly uses dress to highlight hybrid national cultures in order to explore how her female characters develop national culture so they can provide for themselves and their families and make choices for themselves. Razia’s actions, particularly within or against the norms of dress for Bangladeshi women, also demonstrate the flexibility of national culture. As she continues to act outside what is expected among some of the other Bangladeshi immigrants, Razia shocks them and receives their judgment. When Razia cuts off her long hair, she is not trying to fit in;

she simply got “fed up with it, all the brushing and brushing” (Ali 54). It is clearly not a minor change for the community of Tower Hamlets, however, since even Chanu responds. When talking to Nazneen he compares Razia to Mrs. Islam: “Mrs. Islam is what you call a respectable type. ... Razia, on the other hand, I would not call a respectable type. ... Razia cuts her hair like a tramp” (Ali 63). Although Chanu seems to imagine a traditional, normative Bangladeshi national culture that does not include cutting hair, what really is revealed is that national culture of people from Bangladesh contains a collection of practices that is always changing. Through this interaction, Ali supports Bhabha’s argument that national cultural “hybridity is never simply a question of the admixture of pre-given identities or essences” (Bhabha 314). Instead, the hybridity of these characters’ national culture demonstrates that this category is a collection of practices acquired by experience, proximity, choice, and necessity. As a result, Razia’s national culture can include practices of modesty, independence, and practicality. Consequently, any national culture cannot be viewed in dualistic terms, but rather it must be seen as a collection of practices that are never pinned down. These characteristics of national culture do not develop because Razia seeks her own territory among other British citizens like Chanu and Karim, but they do affect how she is viewed by some of the Tower Hamlets community members, and they do affect her status in that society.

Ali uses changes in Razia’s physical appearance as a stepping stone in the development of national culture witnessed through this character. Eventually after Razia denies wearing a sari and expresses independence through her appearance, she

tells Nazneen that she wants to get a job. At first Nazneen tries to talk her out of it by repeating a conversation she had with Mrs. Islam about another woman who had gotten a job and shamed her whole family by doing so. Ali exposes the varying manifestations of national culture as this conversation between Nazneen and Razia continues with

Razia snorted. 'Is that what Mrs. Islam says? Let her say what she likes, it will not stop me.'

'What about the community? She will not be the only one.'

'Will the community feed me? Will it buy footballs for my son?' (Ali 74)

With this Razia refuses to succumb to the belief about a woman's place that both Nazneen and Mrs. Islam hold, as she uses the British class system to challenge such ideas about gender. Thus, Razia, Nazneen, and Mrs. Islam, who share similar experiences as Bangladeshi women who have immigrated to Britain, prove that they can express combinations of national cultural practices that can contradict each other. Moreover, Ali is able to emphasize through Razia that when her female characters hybridize their national culture, it happens on an *ad hoc* basis. These women do not need a particular place or territory, but they do seek to provide for their families. Because Razia's national culture evolves as needed, Razia gets a job once her husband dies, much to the dismay of certain community members. Clearly, Ali portrays a hybrid national culture through Razia, but just as obviously, she does so in order to demonstrate a model of national cultural development based on situational needs for her female characters.

Nazneen's immigrant experience in London also offers an opportune vehicle for demonstrating the liminal and hybrid national cultures that are created. When Nazneen first marries Chanu and moves to London, Chanu considers her an "unspoilt girl from the village" (Ali 10). At this point, Nazneen has accepted the role that has been created by the expectations of her father and her life in Bangladesh. Unlike her sister Hasina, she agrees to the marriage her father has arranged for her and settles into a life as wife and homemaker. But early on in the novel, Ali complicates the definition of Nazneen as a two-dimensional, "unspoilt girls from the village" by revealing her national culture to be a collage. As a girl "from the village" in the warm climate of Bangladesh, Nazneen had never been exposed to sports like ice skating. When it is on television for a whole week, presumably because it is the Olympics, she forgoes housework and watches it. Ali carefully describes this scene:

While she sat, she was no longer a collection of the hopes and random thoughts, petty anxieties, and selfish wants that made her, but was whole and pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with white light, glory. (27)

Interestingly, Nazneen acknowledges this change from the person she was before that was a collection of things to the "after" self that is "whole." In other words, the "old Nazneen" lived according to national cultural values that defined her familial and social role as homemaker without her own interests. Once she is in London and experiencing new things like ice skating, Nazneen develops her own interests, desires, and passion. Thus, the "whole" self is a result of the combination of elements and

experiences, not a strict adherence to a singular model of identification. When Nazneen becomes “whole,” her performance of national culture has become hybrid. Since signs of cultural difference experience “continual implication in other symbolic systems,” cultural differences are always “‘incomplete’ or open to cultural translation” (Bhabha 313). Therefore, the hybridity of Nazneen’s national culture is never fixed or determinate. Although Nazneen is still a wife with duties at home, her national culture can evolve to include interests that have developed as a result of her contact with Western sports.

This “new Nazneen” resurfaces again when she is home alone one day. Although Chanu has told Nazneen that she should not leave the apartment because the community will judge even though he does not mind if she does, Nazneen goes exploring anyway. For the first time, Nazneen wanders alone to Brick Lane, the long street of shops and restaurants near Tower Hamlets. As she continues to travel further and further from home, she eventually gets lost. When a man can see her distress he tries to speak with her and offer help, but Nazneen does not understand and simply says, “Sorry.” After this interchange,

in spite of the rain, and the wind which whipped at her face, and in spite of the pain in her ankle and her arm, and her bladder, and in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid, she began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something. (Ali 42)

Because national culture can continually gather and discard practices, Nazneen's has developed to include independence and rebellion, and she even finds pleasure in it. Prior to this burst of independence, the narrator describes Nazneen as "sublimated" in the sense that she had denied her desires for socially acceptable practices and desires, but now she is a Bangladeshi immigrant living in Britain who can speak bits of English, travel on her own, and make decisions without the permission of her husband or father (Ali 27). Through these actions, Ali paints Nazneen as developing a national cultural identity that is not fixed, by a hybrid based on her experiences in Britain and in Bangladesh.

Once Nazneen has this experience she begins to see the possibilities contained within her. Nazneen then cultivates her own self-determination, and wants to gloat in front of Chanu. When Chanu refuses to bring her sister Hasina to London and demeans Nazneen for having such a silly idea, she thinks:

Anything is possible. ... Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile, probably around the whole of London, although I did not see the edge of it. And to get home again I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked directions. See what I can do! (Ali 45)

Although Nazneen's national cultural practices still include submitting to her husband, which is demonstrated when she does not outwardly argue with Chanu, the extent to which she submits to him has changed. When Nazneen explores Brick Lane on her own, speaks English to a stranger, uses a pub's bathroom, and disagrees with

Chanu's decision about Hasina, Nazneen demonstrates that the national culture of a female Bangladeshi immigrant can contain practices of agency and independence. This self-determination will be later addressed, when I explore the performativity of national culture, but what is pertinent here is how Nazneen's demonstrations of power reveal a mutable national culture, while also challenging the stereotype of the submissive Muslim woman in an unexpected way. When Nazneen's national culture evolves to include the previously mentioned practices, this clearly happens in an *ad hoc* fashion and like Razia's development does not seem as influenced by "desire-to-be." Again, if Nazneen felt the need to establish a place for herself because of a constant interaction with self-proclaimed "natives" in systems of power, she probably would feel the same desire to obtain traits of the "British," but Nazneen needed to speak English to that man so he would leave her alone, and she needed to enter a pub in order to relieve herself. Nazneen's national cultural development does not occur based on territorial, but simply situational, needs and desires.

Nazneen's non-essential national culture is also evident through her demonstrations of agency. As Nazneen grows increasingly attracted to Karim, the practices of her national culture continue to change. Nazneen begins to recognize the opportunities for a hybrid national culture as she contemplates that

if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass places on Bishopsgate and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl

with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny, tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would—how could she not?—skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. (Ali 228)

Nazneen sees that changing her outward appearance could lead to greater changes in her life that would stem from what she imagines as being more “fully Western.” If she is able to change the things that she has and wears, which means changing the practices of her national cultural identification, then her life would change. She would be able to move freely around the world, making her own choices, while ice skating and falling in love if she simply could change her outward appearance.

Although Nazneen imagines becoming more Western through her outward appearance, Nazneen actually performs a hybrid national cultural identity that is changed on an *ad hoc* basis. While Nazneen’s national culture does not hybridize by changing the things she wears, it does change through the things she does. The same day she realizes that there are ways to change her life she begins her affair with Karim. Although Nazneen’s national culture contains practices associated with Bangladesh, such as dress, religion, and familial role, she has added a use of agency she has not known previously. Thus, Nazneen makes decisions for herself, chooses her fate, and begins an extramarital affair. This development of her national cultural identity does not reveal a desire to establish her own territory, nor do Nazneen’s actions reveal that national culture must be established through rank and authority.

The hybridization of Nazneen's national culture occurs through her desires and needs during situations, just as Razia's does.

Later decisions made by Nazneen, such as ending her affair with Karim and working as a seamstress outside of her home, also reveal Ali's argument that national culture is mutable, while at the same time demonstrating an *ad hoc* model for national cultural development. Once Chanu has officially decided to move back to Bangladesh and has purchased the tickets, Nazneen's agency is revealed when she does not simply accept his decision. As Nazneen contemplates this move,

Her first thought was that she would go to Dhaka with her husband and her children. It would be the right thing to do, and she would be with Hasina again. Doubts assailed her on both sides. The children would be miserable. Shahana would never adjust. What would happen to Chanu in Dhaka? If his dreams fell apart, what net would catch them all? How would they live? How would they eat? (Ali 340)

Not only does Nazneen think about what Chanu decides, she also contemplates what the right thing would be for her daughters and herself. Chanu's decision does not automatically dictate the well-being of all; this is something that she must discover and make happen. In the end, Nazneen chooses to stay in London, while Chanu goes back to Dhaka. Even Nazneen acknowledges this change in herself, as she thinks, "*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me*" (Ali 339, original emphasis). The independence that she exhibits through this choice not only points to Ali's display of hybrid national cultures, but it also reveals the same model of national

cultural development that Razia portrays. Nazneen is not establishing her own “territory.” Instead, her national culture evolves because the situation she is in demands it. In order to take care of her daughters and herself the best way she can, Nazneen hybridizes her national culture to include deciding her fate.

While these examples of hybridization offer the ability to explore the different models of national cultural development, this same feature of *Brick Lane* allows Ali to make a further argument about the success of these different modes of producing/practicing national culture by immigrants. Neither Karim nor Chanu, who try to develop their national culture by acquiring territory or a place in Britain, are ever successful. Defining national culture in these terms imagines Britain as static and imagines that one need only fit into a preexisting and fixed structure, which causes constant conflict with the self-named “native” British who view Karim and Chanu as different. Because, as Bhabha argues, the nation is “*internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples,” characters like Chanu and Karim continually struggle against others who also want a territorial possession of their own in Britain (299, original emphasis).

For these reasons, Chanu and Karim are never fully able to define their space, feel fulfilled, or reach their desire to be “British.” Chanu never gets a promotion from Mr. Dalloway, he never gets his new degree, and his mobile library never gets off the ground. In other words, Chanu is never able to claim his territory in his new home. After Chanu is unable to become a “Big Man,” or a man who is successful and respected, he goes back to Bangladesh out of necessity (Ali 402). Because Chanu’s

mode of national cultural production is not successful, he “can’t stay” (Ali 402). Equally unsuccessful is Karim’s model. Karim is never able to claim his territory in Tower Hamlets or take complete authority within the Bengal Tigers since many members jockey for control and the Questioner challenges Karim directly. When he is finally able to organize the Bengal Tigers into a march against the Lion Hearts, the march erupts into race riots. Instead of combating who they came there for, the Muslims in the march begin fighting each other. Karim realizes his failure when he says, “It’s not even *about* anything anymore. It’s just about what it is about. Put anything in front of them now and they’ll fight it” (Ali 400, original emphasis). According to Karim, instead of fighting what matters, prejudice and oppression, they are fighting what does not matter. He has failed at establishing himself as a leader, and like Chanu, Karim is unable to claim his territory through the hybridization of his national culture, and so he goes back to Bangladesh. Ali, then, clearly refutes a territorial, imperialist model of defining “belonging” because developing a national culture in such terms is not successful for her male characters.

On the other hand, Ali seems to be arguing that some production methods are more successful through her female characters. Razia and Nazneen, who define where they belong and who they are through an *ad hoc* model, are successful. Not only do Nazneen and Razia stay in London, they do so without their husbands. Razia’s husband dies and Nazneen’s leaves, but the women stay and flourish. Ali’s female characters have developed their national culture by learning English, asserting independence, and even working outside the home, but all of these changes have

happened because they were necessary. Razia and Nazneen do not have the same difficulties as Chanu and Karim because they do not battle the self-identified “real British,” nor do they succumb to the “desire-to-be” that is undeniably a part of national cultural identities as they form their national cultural identifications. Nazneen and Razia still live in a nation with such conflicts, of course, but their strategy for development does not pit them against other citizens who see them as different and who Razia and Nazneen see as different. This model is clearly more successful because Razia takes over Fusion Fashions and creates a profitable business for herself and other women of Tower Hamlets. As Razia, Nazneen, and a few other women sew Southeast Asian-inspired clothing, they support themselves and their children. These women did not choose to work outside of their home because they wanted to assert territorial claim in Britain, they did it because it was necessary. Through these characters Ali makes it clear that the development of a hybrid national culture can be successful for people who do not need a particular place to establish a definition of themselves.

Hybridity and the Challenge to “Britishness”

Although the majority of *Brick Lane* focuses on the hybridization of the national culture of Bangladeshi immigrants and their children, it is necessary to remember that this novel was written in English, written by a British citizen, and marketed in Britain and the United States, not only to Bangladeshis, but also to the general reading public. By writing about experiences had in Britain for a wide

audience that includes the British public, Ali is clearly reinforcing an understanding of Britain as multicultural. Consequently, it is not just how Bangladeshi immigrants change that is asserted in the novel, but also how the boundaries of “Britishness” have been reconfigured by the presence of immigrants and their children. This novel was not marketed solely to Bangladeshi immigrants living in Tower Hamlets, which would have pointed to an acceptance of that group as separate from Britain. Instead, it is a novel that highlights the multicultural nature of Britain for its multicultural inhabitants.

In the “National Longing for Form,” Brennan explores Tom Narin’s arguments about nationalism’s “chameleon content” (45). According to Brennan, what Narin speaks of is nationalism’s “ability to rouse unlike peoples in dramatically unlike conditions in an impassioned chorus of voluntary co-operation and sacrifice” (45). Throughout *Brick Lane*, Ali spotlights these “unlike peoples and unlike conditions,” just as the marketing of this novel does, since British national identification comes from the changing definition of “Britishness” that Ali reveals through descriptions of her setting. As Nazneen wanders through her new home for the first time alone, her surroundings are incisively described. Ali writes:

The shops were lit up still. Leather shops, dress shops, sari shops, shops that sold fish and chips and samosas and pizza and a little bit of everything from around the world. Newsagents, hardware shops, grocers, shops that sold alcohol, shops whose windows were stacked with stools and slippers and

cassette tapes and seemed to sell nothing but were always full of men in panjabi pajama, smoking and stroking their beards. (77)

This community is neither solely British nor solely Bangladeshi as shops sell Southeast-Asian women's clothing and food to men who are wearing garb from the same area of the world. Even though Southeast-Asian things are the dominant elements of this area, British things exist with them. This description also reveals that Brick Lane is not simply an unsullied or independent microcosm of Bangladesh. Brick Lane does not only exist within a British city; British things exist within it. Sold side-by-side with the samosas are fish and chips, a dish undeniably British. At the same time, this community also reveals that Britain now contains these things and practices. It thus becomes neither British nor Southeast Asian, but both. Britain is not defined solely in opposition to Southeast Asia, but is itself a heterogeneous formation. Those who live there, then, have a complicated existence in this in-between and overlapping world.

It is not just the hybrid setting that asserts that Britain is this mixture of many practices, traditions, and values that nationalism seeks to unite. The previously mentioned hybrid national cultures of Karim, Chanu, Nazneen, and Razia also reconfigure what it means to be British. All of these characters live in Britain and are a part of Britain, which means their practices and experiences, such as Islam, saris, and dal, are all part of Britain as well. Even more effective in exploring Ali's argument for an evolving definition of British are the children of some of these immigrants, particularly Shahana, Nazneen and Chanu's daughter, and Dr. Azad's

daughter, who remains nameless. When Nazneen and Chanu first meet Dr. Azad's family, they are shocked by his daughter's appearance. According to the narrator:

She had inherited her mother's sturdy legs, but her skirt was shorter by a good few inches. She spoke in English. Nazneen caught the words *pub* and *money*. ... The girl chewed gum. She twiddled the stud on her nostril, like a spot she was about to squeeze. Her hair was discolored by the same rusty substance that streaked her mother's head. ... The girl tucked the money into her blouse pocket. "Salaam aleikhum," she said. (Ali 87)

Although Dr. Azad's daughter could accurately be seen as another example of how a Bangladeshi character has a hybrid national culture, it can also be argued that Ali explores "Britishness" through this same character. As a British-born citizen, born to immigrants from Bangladesh, Dr. Azad's daughter represents that British can include such an existence. In addition, she speaks in English in order to ask for money for a pub from her Bangladeshi immigrant parents, which is shocking behavior to Chanu and Nazneen. Not only does the definition of British contain pubs and English, but it also contains immigrant parents, their children, their traditions, and any hybrid collection of practices.

Nazneen and Chanu's daughter, Shahana, is another character that Ali uses to explore hybrid national cultures and the struggles immigrant parents have with the changes their children assert. Like Dr. Azad's daughter, Shahana also reveals the complex definition of British that Ali acknowledges. When the reader first meets Shahana, she is constantly battling with Chanu because she refuses the traditions,

history, and values that he associates with Bangladesh. Chanu struggles with his daughter because

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back home. (Ali 144)

Shahana refuses to eat, dress, write, read, study, etc. in any form associated with Bangladesh because she believes that Britain is her home, and logically she is right. Although she was born to Bangladeshi parents, she was born in Britain. When Chanu takes his wife and daughters on a mini-holiday to see the sights of London outside Tower Hamlets, another tourist, who offers to take their picture, asks where they are from. Chanu replies that they are from Bangladesh, but “Shahana [rolls] her eyes [and says] ‘I’m from London’” (Ali 244). This conversation obviously represents a hybrid national cultural identity, but it also demonstrates the complexity of “Britishness.” Shahana is from London, which means she is British. Therefore, the boundaries of “Britishness” now contain immigrants, their children, and hybrid existences. For example, in the picture taken by the tourist that asked where they were from, Shahana is wearing a salwaar kameez. A British citizen living in London is wearing a traditional Southeast-Asian dress. Shahana, then, helps Ali assert that

Britain itself and what it means to be British also contain this collage of customs, values, and experiences, which she attempts to make clear to all of the British and American reading public.

Performative National Culture in *Brick Lane*

Brick Lane irrefutably demonstrates that national culture is, in fact, adaptable and constructed because of the hybrid existences and environments it portrays. As Ali's immigrant characters and their children struggle and explore their own performance of national culture and often create an identity that contains a continually changing collection of practices, Ali asserts that national culture is not fixed. Through the varying models of national cultural development and varying hybrid performances, it becomes possible to explore national culture through the lens of Judith Butler's performativity. As with Anand's *Untouchable*, a core tenet unites Butlerian performativity and *Brick Lane*. Just as *Brick Lane* demonstrates that national culture is constructed, Butlerian performativity begins with the idea the gender is constructed as subjects collect practices. It is Butler's arguments about subjection and agency in the construction of identificatory categories that are integral to Ali's national cultural performances, just as it is with the national cultural performances of *Untouchable*. These two issues become evident through Nazneen's subjection and then through Nazneen's use of agency to resist her fate. Although other characters, like Chanu, help demonstrate the performative nature of national culture, Nazneen's journey highlights this issue most successfully.

At first, Nazneen submits to social norms in order to obtain a social identity, just as Butler would assert. While her sister Hasina challenges norms and her given identification by marrying for love, Nazneen succumbs to the arranged marriage chosen by her father. When he tells her he has chosen her husband, Nazneen says, “Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma” (Ali 5). Nazneen knows what is expected of her and she accepts it in order to become a subject. When she articulates her submission to her father’s will, she performs her subjecthood, but she also separates herself from it as she acknowledges that she is not immediately a good wife. Once she marries Chanu and moves to London, her subjection continues. Since Nazneen has submitted to the societal norms associated with her position, she must repeatedly perform them in order to remain a subject, which Ali describes through the following passage:

Life made its pattern around and beneath and through her. Nazneen cleaned and cooked and washed. She made breakfast for Chanu and looked on as he ate, collected his pens and put them in his briefcase, watched him from the window as he stepped like a bandleader across the courtyard to the bus stop on the far side of the estate. Then she ate standing up at the sink and washed the dishes. She made the bed and tidied the flat, washed socks and pants in the sink and larger items in the bath. In the afternoons she cooked and ate as she cooked. (26)

Through this description it is clear that Nazneen’s repetition of expected social practices is merely habitual to her. She accepts her subjection and understands what

comes with it: cleaning, cooking, caring, etc. Additionally, since Ali emphasizes action words, it appears that Nazneen is what she does. Nazneen even repeats these roles, and repeats who she is, regularly as she must in order to be a subject, but the repetition does not encompass her nor does it define her. It merely goes “around and beneath and through her.” She has passionately attached herself to this identification category, but it does not encompass her.

Nazneen must also form passionate attachments to her role as a dutiful, submissive, and modest wife. Associated with this role are household duties like those mentioned previously, but she must also walk a few steps behind Chanu in public, do as he wishes, remain in her apartment if he is not with her, and so on. Nazneen does these things, at least for a little while, which also demonstrates a passionate attachment to this identification category, and consequently subjection. Nazneen, however, does them knowingly and consciously, not because they are an inherent part of her. When Chanu is oscillating between going back to Bangladesh and staying in London, “Nazneen knew her part, had learned it long ago, [...] and sat quietly, waiting for the feeling to pass” (Ali 146). By knowing her part, Nazneen acknowledges that she is willing to repeat the practices necessary to continue her identity as a wife to Chanu. But Nazneen sits quietly, allowing Chanu to (not) make decisions because this portion of her subjecthood has become mechanical to her. Ali acknowledges these passionate attachments, as she describes Nazneen’s life:

Regular prayer, regular housework, regular visits with Razia. She told her mind to be still. She told her heart, *Do not beat with fear, do not beat with*

desire. Sometimes she managed it, when she stopped thinking of her sister. If she wanted something, she asked her husband. (Ali 35, original emphasis)

Nazneen understands what her subjection and passionate attachments entail: submission to her husband, gratefulness for what she has, and piety. She is sure to repeat all of those tasks frequently, which Ali emphasizes through the repetition of the word “regular,” which helps to make the norms become consistent practice. Nazneen, though, must remind herself to repeat these norms. More importantly, Nazneen must talk her heart into being content with all of this. Since Nazneen participates in these social practices, she appears to have become a complete, definite subject, but in truth Nazneen struggles with embodying this role. Therefore, these passionate attachments and their associated subjecthood seem open to change.

Brick Lane's Nazneen also helps bring the performative status of national culture to light through the subversions she carries out. Since Butler argues that the identification categories associated with a subject are formed in social and historical contexts, they change as society and history change (Butler 90). When Nazneen repeats these norms, a place of subversion is created. Nazneen demonstrates the ability for subversion as the values of her national culture become hybrid. Although Nazneen repeats the norms of her passionate attachments, she also demonstrates the ability she has for rebellion. Nazneen quietly revolts against her husband's unwillingness to help her sister when she begins to explore the neighborhood without his permission, when she engages in an extramarital affair, and when she decides to stay in London without Chanu. These challenges to her original identification

category are possible because of its connection to society. Ali creates a setting in which great change is bound to happen as a result of immigration and the clash of British and Bangladeshi cultures that ensues. As immigrants new to Britain, Ali's characters must interact with citizens with hybrid national cultures that vary indefinitely, and as a result they are bound to explore national culture identities. Consequently, Tower Hamlets becomes the ideal locale for this examination and exploration. National culture is clearly performative because although Nazneen makes passionate attachments, and then repeats the norms associated with them, she reveals her ability to alter her performance of national culture. As a result, a place of subversion is created.

Although the repetition of norms enables a space for subversion, Ali's characters have limited agency, also as Butler would argue, since subjection is both limiting and empowering, or at least agency forming. Characters like Nazneen are controlled once they become subjects and submit to psychic regulations. For Nazneen, she becomes limited by her role as wife and mother in a Muslim and Bangladeshi neighborhood. Within these subjecthoods, though, Nazneen finds agency. When Chanu refuses to help bring her sister to London, Nazneen becomes discontented. In fact, "her heart was ablaze with mutiny" (Ali 45). Because Nazneen has formed passionate attachments to her subjecthood through her subjection, she continues to do her duties as a wife and mother, even after Chanu denies her the one thing she really wants. However, as Nazneen repeats these practices she is able to demonstrate some agency in the form of rebellion. After Chanu says no,

Nazneen dropped [his] promotion from her prayers. The next day she chopped two fiery red chilies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer. The razor slipped when she cut his corns. His files got mixed up while she tidied. All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within. (Ali 45)

Nazneen revolts against Chanu, but she does it through her identification category. She continues to clean, cook, and wait on Chanu, but she performs imperfectly. Hence, she undermines her role as a wife. Nazneen wants to refuse to accept Chanu's answer, but she cannot. Her identification category will not allow it. But she has seen that she is capable of navigating Brick Lane and Tower Hamlets alone, and Nazneen has realized, however, that there are other ways to assert her independence. Through her hybrid national culture she rebels by refusing to do her household duties well. Even though Nazneen is able to utilize some agency in these decisions, she is still limited to rearticulating the characteristics of the category already in place. Nazneen is never able to become a subject that is not connected to these repeated practices; she is only able to rearticulate herself within a British and Bangladeshi context.

The strongest example of Nazneen's limited agency is when she begins to challenge the idea that she should simply leave her life to fate. Ali lays the groundwork for this contrast early on when the reader learns that "As Nazneen grew she heard many time this story of How You Were Left to Your Fate" (Ali 4). In this

story, Ali paints Nazneen as a child and then a woman whose life was predestined. When she was born premature and weak, Nazneen's mother did not get her medical help; she left her to her fate. When Nazneen's father chose her husband, she decided it was her fate and did as she was told. Eventually, as Nazneen's culture evolves because situations demand it, she gains some understanding that perhaps not all of her life is decided by fate. Thus, Nazneen also demonstrates Butler's limited agency through her relationship with Karim. When the relationship between them continues to grow, it becomes more than intimacy to Nazneen. Nazneen acknowledges that

she had submitted to her father and married her husband; she had submitted to her husband. And now she gave herself up to a power greater than these two, and she felt herself helpless before it. When the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. (Ali 247)

Nazneen no longer feels that her actions and her life have been decided by fate. Even though she tries to deny it, Nazneen herself has chosen this path through her own power. Nazneen's national culture now includes Islam and a denial of an omnipotent fate. Interestingly, Nazneen is not able to completely embrace this new-found understanding of personal power, and consequently, she is not able to create a new subjecthood. This is seen when Karim, ironically, reinforces this limitation when he calls Nazneen "the real thing [...] a girl from the village" (Ali 321). Despite the fact that Nazneen views herself as expressing a hybrid and complex collection of customs, she is still defined by the categories to which she has submitted. Nazneen is

only able to rearticulate the characteristics of her national cultural identity and those of people with whom she interacts. The fact that Nazneen has control over how she performs these things, though, reveals that national culture is performative.

In many ways, Nazneen has a hereditary fate like Bakha of *Untouchable*. For Nazneen, this fate seems to be simply to submit to fate or the will of God, as Bakha's is to submit to his caste. When Nazneen completely breaks away from this she further demonstrates the limited agency entailed by Butlerian performativity. For a while Nazneen was unsure of what her fate would be. Would they return to Bangladesh? If Chanu did go back, would she go with him? Would she marry Karim if she stayed? As she is making "onion bhajis for the children, who would eat them smothered in tomato ketchup," Nazneen realizes that "*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one*" (Ali 339, original emphasis). The task that she is completing when she has this revelation is particularly telling. Her own children are signifying a mutable performed national culture as they eat Bangladeshi food with a British twist. It is this complexity that allows Nazneen to see her agency. Once Nazneen decides this is true, she demonstrates her agency, not fate, makes her life. She ends her relationship with Karim, not because she is going to stay with Chanu, but because she believes she can create a successful life for herself and her daughters on her own. She also decides that she must stay in London with her daughters while Chanu returns. As Nazneen is eating rice and dal with her daughters, she tells them "[s]taying or going, it's up to us three" (Ali 404). With this action and this statement, Nazneen has officially broken the hold fate had on her. Consequently,

she had refused the submissive portion of her subjecthood, and now performs a national culture that does not include a blind faith in fate. Nazneen is not, however, a completely “free” person. This statement comes when Nazneen is cooking and eating traditionally Bangladeshi food, which she enjoys and values. She will remain married to Chanu, will continue living in Tower Hamlets, and will continue repeating some of the practices associated with being a Bangladeshi, Muslim, immigrant, wife, and mother in other ways. Nazneen has the agency to deny fate, but she is still limited within the categories she encompasses. Therefore, national culture is performative.

The Novel as its own Performance of National Culture

While it is acceptable to simply explore the ways in which *Brick Lane* has characters and a setting that demonstrate the performative nature of national culture, it is equally important to look at the novel as its own performance of national culture outside of the fictional world created within it. The novel’s performance of national culture is first evident through Ali’s own hybrid identities. The protests Ali faced for writing this novel and other public responses help to reinforce this point. It is not just Ali’s existence that positions the novel into a place of performance. Many facets of Ali’s writings also reveal the novel is its own form of national cultural performance. The contrasting views of Bangladeshi and British society, as well as the limited agency that Ali allows her characters to have, help to make the novel a performance of national culture.

Because Ali herself does not fit neatly into dualistic definitions of national culture, her own performances of and connections to this category display the novel's performance of national culture. Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, but raised in Britain. Through those simple facts, Ali's complex national cultural identity is revealed. Ali acknowledges this conflict in her October 2007 article for the *Guardian* called "The Outrage Economy." In this article, written before the release of the movie based upon *Brick Lane* and after the press' obsession with the protests of those who view the novel as stereotypical and/or disrespectful, Ali unpacks the question of authenticity. Ali reveals that "it appears that some people object to my having written about a Bangladeshi housewife who speaks hardly any English when I myself am reasonably fluent in the language" (419). Those protestors to this aspect of the novel are asserting that Ali could not write an accurate representation of a woman like Nazneen because she herself has not experienced the same things. Ali argues that "this writer is not now, nor ever has been, her heroine Nazneen" (420). Ali is not Nazneen, nor is she any of the other characters. They are fictional characters whose existence is not contingent upon an author with the same experiences. The power to create these characters is possible, though, because Ali sits in a place of complex, performed national culture and is able to represent the same in her novel. Ali admits:

Brick Lane is in many ways a typical first novel, drawing in concerns and ideas that were shaped by my childhood. For instance, there is a lot of me in Shahana, the rebellious teenage daughter. ... Why did I write about Nazneen? I think, but cannot be sure, that the source was my mother. My mother is

white and grew up in England. Her journey was the opposite of Nazneen's moving to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) to marry, knowing little of the culture and religion, speaking not a word of the language. When I was a child, she often told me about the experience of social and cultural dislocation. I thought about it a lot. (420)

Ali's own experiences with being born and growing up in two different places and knowing of her mother's own national cultural struggles made *Brick Lane* possible. Ali saw all of her characters' experiences and struggles from another place, though. She herself did not have an arranged marriage or live under the roof of two Bangladeshi immigrants. But she did learn about the in-between experiences that come from immigration and hybrid national cultures, as one attempts to learn the practices, religion, and language of his/her new home. And Ali did experience rebellious teen angst. Ali's location of understanding without being in the same exact positions and experiences reveals that her own national culture is one that is made up of multiple characteristics and is then performed. Thus, when Ali brings her characters and world to fruition she is performing this national culture.

Since those who protest against Ali's *Brick Lane* object to the representation she creates of Bangladeshi culture and the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets, they inadvertently highlight the debates regarding national culture in contemporary, multi-ethnic Britain. Soon after *Brick Lane* was released as both a novel and, later, a movie, many London newspapers, like the *Guardian*, pointed out how "*Brick Lane* was condemned by some residents of east London for its 'insulting

and shameful' depiction of the large Bangladeshi Muslim population who lives there" (Jack 1). Ali herself points to these hostilities, when she quotes a protest organizer as saying, "Infidelity happens in every society, that does not mean that the whole of that society should be portrayed in such a negative way" (421). These protestors operate under the guise that they are simply and solely offended by Ali's characters, their actions, and her actions as a Bangladeshi-British writer. The truth of the matter is that they see Ali, her novel, and her characters as acting as the representatives for the whole of the Bangladeshi immigrant community. They assume that Ali is reinforcing stereotypes that women are suppressed, men are controlling, and eventually women will reveal their immorality by lying or cheating. Such a belief seems to stem from the idea that all subjects under the same identification category of a national culture must have the same experiences. Thus, Ali must be judging and persecuting the Bangladeshi immigrant population in its entirety. What these protestors fail to realize is that by simply feeling that this is an inaccurate portrayal of this kind of life and community they are proving that *Brick Lane* does not speak of the "one," "true" national culture of these people. Since there are those who feel differently and have had different experiences, Ali's portrayal is simply one of the many national cultural performances possible. Additionally, they are challenging a *fictional text*. Ali is not writing an autobiographical work or even a nonfiction piece based on research. Therefore, *Brick Lane* offers a performance of national culture in which a woman who has immigrated from Bangladesh learns through her experiences in Britain, both

with the British and other Bangladeshi immigrants, that she has an ability to be independent because of her own agency.

Further supporting the assertion that *Brick Lane* is performing a national culture are the differing perspectives on the opposing national cultures that Ali allows her characters to have. For example, Britain and the practices Ali's characters witness there are described through both positive and negative lenses. At points, through characters like Chanu, Britain and its culture seem to have great opportunity and possibility. At the same time, through Chanu still, Britain and its culture seem to stifle the possibilities of immigrants. Chanu speaks about believing "anything is possible so everything [he] wanted was possible" when he first came to Britain (Ali 311). He also describes himself as Westernized in order to contrast himself from the "peasant" immigrants who do not change their ways (Ali 30). When the practices of Chanu's national culture include Western values, Chanu believes he will be successful. However, Chanu is disappointed in this national culture at the same time. Although Chanu is dedicated to his job and believes he works hard, he is never able to receive a promotion from Mr. Dalloway. Eventually, Chanu becomes disheartened and "thinks he will get the promotion, but it will take him longer than any white man. [...] If he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem" (Ali 53). Chanu ends up quitting, only later becoming a chauffeur for Kempton Kars, a "typical" immigrant job. With this contrast, Ali does not allow Britain to be solely the suppressor or the superior force. Ali paints Britain as being intricate and variable

through a performance of a national culture that offers some opportunities, but denies some at the same time.

Through differing perspectives of traditions associated with Bangladesh in a British novel, Ali is also successful at performing national culture in her novel. Mrs. Islam is undeniably the negative portrayal of a national culture that contains certain Bangladeshi practices. Because she is the neighborhood scold who also lends money to desperate Bangladeshi at exorbitantly high interest rates, Mrs. Islam, in conjunction with Nazneen's infidelity, Chanu's stupidity, etc. could make it seem as if Ali is portraying Bangladeshi immigrants as liars, cheaters, and fools. Ali is careful not to make the definition of Bangladesh so simplistic, though. Through Nazneen and Razia's dedication to do what is right for the children, particularly when Nazneen stays in London and Razia helps her son break his drug addiction it is evident that a performance of national culture that includes Bangladeshi values could include a dedicated and loving motherhood. Furthermore, Ali is careful not to victimize those who have been in arranged marriages while glorifying those who chose a love marriage. While Hasina's love marriage turns into a union of abuse that she eventually escapes, only to become a destitute, shamed woman, Nazneen believes,

Abba did not choose so badly. [Chanu] was not a bad man. There were many bad men in the world, but this was not one of them. She could love him. Perhaps she did already. She thought she did. And if she didn't, she soon would because she now understood what he was, and why. Love would follow. (Ali 94)

Since Ali is demonstrating that it is possible to change national culture as it is performed, her characters have different experiences with different hybrid national cultures. While Hasina has negative experiences with Bangladeshi practices in the form of domestic abuse and the inability to be self-sufficient without being shameful, Nazneen experiences the opposite. Through Nazneen's arranged marriage, a traditional norm of an identification category associated with Bangladesh, she finds love and happiness. It may not be the kind of affection that creates a "love marriage," but she appreciates and cares for Chanu, and Nazneen has a much more stable and healthy life in her arranged marriage than Hasina does. Therefore, certain customs of Bangladesh that are included in the national culture of Ali's characters are neither heathen nor do they deliver complete bliss. Since Ali reveals it to be something in-between, both of these things, and neither, her novel performs national culture.

Lastly, Ali's text demonstrates a limited agency that reveals a Butlerian performance of national culture, which points to performativity. As mentioned previously Butler asserts that a subject does not have the agency to create a completely new subjecthood or national culture. The subject exists because the signification system existed previously and created the norms. Therefore, a subject does not have the agency to create completely new social norms, behaviors, values, etc. One of the final scenes of *Brick Lane* demonstrates this aspect of performativity as Nazneen and Razia are only able to vary their performance of national culture through combining customs that already exist. Once Nazneen has decided her own path by denying fate and after Chanu has left and she has stayed, she begins working

with Razia in her own sewing business, Fusion Fashions. In a move that seems almost to be a contrived example of performative national culture, Ali allows these women to demonstrate agency since they are now working outside the home, but still restricts them within their gender and ethnic roles. The success of these women is still based upon their ability to do a household skill: sewing. Ali's protagonist and her friends did not become bankers or real estate agents; they became independent by using a skill that was expected of them and using it outside the home. Furthermore, Ali has them sew "trousers [that] sat low on the hips, without a waistband, and [a] bodice [that] cuts above the belly button" in which "the detail indicated gold and diamanté dhakba work and the ends of the dupatta were beaded in a cobweb design" (Ali 404). Ali is performing national culture through her novel because her characters are only allowed to extend agency within the boundaries of their expected subjecthood. These women are sewing traditional Bangladeshi outfits with a British twist, which means their national culture includes British and Bangladeshi practices. In this sense, even though Ali has chosen to demonstrate merged national cultural performances through these articles of clothing, she is still representing limited agency on behalf of her characters. Consequently, her novel highlights the performative status of national culture.

Conclusion: Application to Current Issues of National Culture and the Definition of
“Britishness”

The connections between *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane* offer an interesting lens through which to examine recent controversy surrounding the Brick Lane area. As the Tower Hamlets council has attempted to place giant arches in the shape of Muslim headscarves, or hijabs, at the ends of Brick Lane, this plan has faced opposition for a variety of reasons. In Audrey Gillan’s *Guardian* piece, “Brick Lane Plan for Hijab Gates Angers Residents,” she asserts that many inhabitants of Tower Hamlets justifiably argue that these “hijab arches” would be a waste of money, are stereotypical representations of Muslim women, and would exclude the Tower Hamlets population that does not observe the wearing of hijabs or is not Muslim. Although these are valid points, it is equally important to explore the significance of attempting to highlight a blatantly multicultural portion of London through a symbol that is clearly multicultural in itself. It now becomes pertinent to ask what it means to the definition of “Britishness” that a symbol of multiculturalism is seen as a possible tourist attraction, even though this symbol does not entirely encompass British national culture. Significantly, the juxtaposition of Ali and Anand’s novels offer an interesting answer.

Before it is possible to really ponder what these novels can tell us about the blurring boundaries of “Britishness” as seen through the plan to build the arches, a discussion of why Anand’s *Untouchable* and Ali’s *Brick Lane* can connect in the first

place is irrefutably relevant. One feature that makes the novels compare to, contrast with, and answer each other is that both Ali and Anand utilize their characters and settings to explore national culture, particularly its malleability and performativity. The mutable nature of national culture becomes evident as characters construct their own national cultural identity by putting together an assortment of different practices and values that vary from character to character. For Anand, it is Bakha who reveals that the national culture of an Indian untouchable can include British clothing *and* positioning within the caste system. In *Brick Lane*, Ali blatantly creates Razia, Nazneen, Karim, and Chanu in order to demonstrate varying national cultural identities and diverse modes of national cultural development.

Equally supportive of why there is a worthwhile comparison between these two pieces is the fact that both writers assert an understanding of national culture that allows for an examination through the lens of Butlerian performativity. As the hybrid national cultures of these novels highlight that national cultural identifications are not fixed or definite, it also becomes clear that the characters in *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane* are performing their national cultures. Bakha and Nazneen both make passionate attachments to their identification categories, but they do so mechanically. Furthermore, both Nazneen and Bakha demonstrate limited agency as they are only able to move within the categories already established. Since these novels draw attention to the performative characteristics of their hybrid national cultures, Anand and Ali more importantly reveal that all national cultures are, in fact, performative through their writing.

Although there are clearly many reasons why it is feasible to examine these novels side by side, it is truly more important to think about what can be gathered from the examination of a colonial novel in relationship to a contemporary, multicultural novel and how this knowledge can be applied to current events like the Tower Hamlets “hijab arches.” One must ask if Ali answers any of the questions posed by Anand, and if anything has changed across the time span between these novels. What becomes most evident through these questions is the contrast between how the colonizer’s national culture is viewed in *Untouchable* and how it is treated in *Brick Lane*. Within Anand’s text, national culture is only examined among the colonized characters. Consequently, the colonizer seems to have an assumed identity, and a definite, stable national culture. Anand does not focus on how the colonizer performs national cultures made up of different elements, but instead focuses on a colonized character, Bakha, that performs a national cultural identity open to change. Conversely, through Ali’s work the former colonizer is put under the microscope. The mirror that was used to examine the national cultural identities of the colonized is now turned back on the former colonizer. In *Brick Lane*, the status of the colonizer is no longer a given; it is no longer stable. As Ali explores the experiences of Nazneen, Razia, Chanu, and Karim, it is clear that not only is the national culture of Bangladeshi immigrants malleable, but the definition of British is also in constant flux.

If we are to use this understanding outside of the novel, it becomes possible to argue that the national cultures of Britain can contain the fish and chips of which Ali

writes, the saris that her characters wear, and arches in the shape of headscarves. Through immigrant characters such as Nazneen and Razia, the colonial dynamics of Gordon Lewis' "colonialism in reverse," clearly destabilize the definition of the former colonizer, which is also what is apparent through the arches proposed by the Tower Hamlets council. Like protestors of Ali's novel, those who argue that the "hijab arches" are "misconceived" and "excluding" worry that such a symbol will inaccurately represent a whole area and all of its inhabitants (Gillan). In other words, a sculpture shaped like Muslim headscarves must speak only of a national culture belonging to those that are Muslim and those that observe this tradition. Since the area surrounding Brick Lane has been the home of Huguenots and Jews, in addition to Bangladeshis, and since not all of the Muslim population that lives in Tower Hamlets observes the hijab practice, those who are against the arches have some basis for that argument.

Brick Lane and *Untouchable* guide us to the understanding that the definitions of national culture, including those of Britain, are in constant flux, however. National cultural identities of Britain have changed to include Islamic practices, Jewish traditions, and Southeast-Asian norms, among an endless possibility of attributes that exist partly because of colonization and immigration. Nazneen, Razia, and their British-born children demonstrate this evolution as they became an undeniable part of what it means to be British. Furthermore, these fictional characters draw attention to the role of immigrants and their children in contemporary Britain. These characters do not represent every immigrant experience of Britain, nor should they, but they do

acknowledge the possibility of such an experience existing in British national culture. Hijabs do represent Britain as do a lot of other symbols, such as yarmulkes, crucifixes, pubs, the works of William Shakespeare, and Rama statues. Speaking against such symbols ignores the diversity of the national culture of Britain. Although “Locals have said [the Tower Hamlets council] risk ghettoising a community that considers itself tolerant and diverse,” this would only occur if people continue to believe that such a symbol can solely exclude (Gillan). In reality it can include as it is a part of the definition of greater “Britishness.”

While it is true that the “hijab arches” could reveal the diversity of national cultural identities in Britain, such meaning can only be extrapolated if symbols for the many facets of national cultural identities are highlighted. “Britishness” does include Muslim head-covering practices, but it also includes the many kinds of traditions, practices, and symbols mentioned earlier. If “the cultural trail [of which the arches would be a part] through the area is aimed at celebrating the various migrant communities – including Huguenots, Jews and now Bangladeshis – that have settled there across hundreds of years,” then all of these facets of what it means to British, and others, should be represented (Gillan). One could argue that only then would the national cultural identities of Britain be truly represented. However, such a completion could never happen since national cultures are performative and constantly changing, as this study of *Untouchable* and *Brick Lane* has shown. Thus, those who wish to articulate the characteristics of Britain’s national cultural identities through artwork, landmarks, and architecture could never paint a complete picture.

Perhaps, then, Kia Abdullah has a portion of the right idea in “Don’t Brand Brick Lane,” when she asserts that the council should not bother to find a more appropriate symbol, since “in the current economic climate, plans to spend copious amounts of money on unnecessary branding exercises should simply be abandoned,” even if she does not include all of the reasons why such a plan should be forgotten.

Not only do these novels and that current movement acknowledge a multicultural Britain that *Untouchable* does not recognize, it appears to be a desirable evolution. Anand and Ali’s assertion of flexible national cultural identifications mirrors the significance of the proposed arches since they emphasize a multicultural Britain through the utilization of a symbol more widely associated with its immigrant population, which the council wants to build in order to lure tourists. The point of such a tourist destination is to draw people to visit places that show what they want to see: the true essence of Britain, or what they perceive it to be. In that sense, the Tower Hamlets council seeks to commodify the “exotic” immigrant community by capitalizing on a symbol of this population. Lutfer Rahman emphasizes this point in “These are Not 'Hijab Gates' – They Represent the Whole Community” when he argues that “the cultural trail and other improvements are intended to help boost the local economy – before the 2012 London Olympics – by attracting even more visitors to Brick Lane, currently a tourist hotspot.” Thus, such a monument reveals that Britain includes Muslim headscarves, just as the opposition reveals that it includes those who disagree with such observances.

Significantly and perhaps most interestingly, the analysis of the “hijab arches” controversy that is made possible through this exploration of the performative national cultures in these two novels appears to reveal an overall failure in colonization. “Britishness” now includes so many national cultural identities, in part because of colonization and post-colonization. In an effort to spread “Britishness” everywhere, in an effort to assert the definition of “Britishness” through conquest, Britain was in fact turned on its head once the people of its former colonies began to immigrate to Britain. The category of British is clearly continuously changing, forming, and diversifying, just as the categories of Indian and Bangladeshi are also revealed to be constantly shifting through Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Anand’s *Untouchable*.

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