



**Home, Belonging and Multiculturalism in Twenty-First-Century British  
South Asian Fiction**

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## Abstract

This thesis contributes to the literary and cultural debates surrounding multiculturalism and questions of home and identity in contemporary Britain, using the British South Asian novel as a case study. Through close readings of six novels, including *Maps For Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam, *Londonstani* (2006) by Gautam Malkani, *The Year of Runaways* (2015) by Sunjeev Sahota, *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie, *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, and *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) by Guy Gunaratne, the thesis brings theories of multiculturalism, class, and race into conversation with contemporary British South Asian fiction. It re-examines multiculturalism, as represented in the fiction, in light of recent key events that have catalysed its reconfigurations (e.g. 9/11, 7/7, the 2011 England riots and Brexit) alongside conceptual developments of notions of race, class, home and identity. Stuart Hall (1990) suggests that identity is constructed “within, not outside of, representation”, which indicates that literature plays a potentially important role in the public perception of identity (222). The thesis seeks to demonstrate that terms like diaspora, migrancy, hybridity and liminality do not fully capture the experience of multiculturalism as depicted in the selected novels. Whilst the thesis does not fully dismiss these terms, it redirects attention to critical, non-celebratory conceptions of multiculturalism. In so doing, it makes interventions into debates on multiculturalism. It shows how the UK government has tended to present multiculturalism as “a management exercise” (Mishra 2007, 133) through a “series of hesitant moves and recommendations”, which, as Peter Morey argues, it would be “hard to call [...] a multicultural policy” (Morey 2018a, 5). It argues that theories of multiculturalism might become more

coherent if approached from specific theories of race, ethnicity, and class. Such mapping, as Vijay Mishra (2007) advocates, allows us to think more precisely about these theories, so that we can view multiculturalism as “a critical concept” rather than “a management exercise” (133).

The thesis first sets out a theoretical framework by which to explore its central concerns with the modalities of representation of British South Asians in fiction and their engagement with ideas of home and identity that are always already inflected by the complexities of race, class, religion and multiculturalism. It then turns to the historical and socio-political contexts of diverse British South Asian experiences as they are depicted in the fiction. The research employs a mixed-method approach synthesising theories of multiculturalism, race, ethnicity, and class, with close readings of British South Asian fiction written between 2000 and 2020. In the process, this enables a critical re-evaluation of these theories (Gilroy 2004, Mishra 2007, Ahmed 2015).

Finally, the thesis offers new ways of reading the various permutations of British South Asian identity as culturally diverse in contemporary literature produced by British South Asian authors.

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## Introduction

At the heart of twenty-first century British South Asian literature lies a complex interplay between notions of home, belonging, and personal identity. The echoes of the colonial past still resonate in this contemporary context, creating a rich tapestry of cultural upheaval and transformation. However, the exploration of identity in these works is not limited to postcolonial concerns alone. Take, for instance, the adolescent characters in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006), who search for their place in the world amidst a rapidly changing landscape marked by the aftermath of 9/11. Their quest for identity is a compelling journey through various permutations, as they navigate being "rudeboys", "Indian niggas", "rajamuffins", "raggastanis", "Britasians", and "Indobrits". The essence of the characters' quest for identity, along with other characters from the novels examined in this thesis, is frequently driven by concerns related to multiculturalism and shaped by factors such as social class, race, and ethnicity.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the literary and cultural analysis of multiculturalism by examining the representations of home and identity in the twenty-first-century contemporary British South Asian novel from 2000-2020. By exploring the intersections of specific theories of race, ethnicity, and class, the thesis argues that a critical consideration of multiculturalism is more relevant than relying on terms such as diaspora, migrancy, liminality, and hybridity. These terms are somewhat limiting in the context of representing the experience of multiculturalism as depicted in contemporary British South Asian and Muslim fiction. The thesis also addresses current British government policies on multiculturalism since they inflect or are implicitly critiqued within this body of

fiction. I use the following British South Asian novels as case studies: *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam, *Londonstani* (2006) by Gautam Malkani, *The Year of Runaways* (2015) by Sunjeev Sahota, *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie, *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, and *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) by Guy Gunaratne. The ultimate objective of the close readings I make is to examine and critically evaluate the nature of the “multicultural subject” (in this case, an individual from a South Asian minority group), as depicted in these novels, and as it is shaped by a complex mix of ideas of identity and the home of ethnic origin, alongside the current home. The search for a sense of home offers a conceptual framework by which to measure the multicultural subject’s sense of displacement. They may feel far from home and may need to recreate a home in the new geographical and cultural setting. The novels analysed here show that there is a certain amount of risk entailed in adhering too strongly to an outdated and static ideal notion of home that bears with it a longing for the country of origin. Such an unchanging conceptualisation almost certainly prevents a person from acquiring a sense of belonging and agency within the host society. The unchanging conception of home, based on memories and fixed ideals, cannot support or provide a basis for real participation within society and a sense of agency (Rushdie 1991). At the same time, transcending this idealised sense of home involves an almost inevitable sense of loss and readjustment.

It is through the shifting relationship with home (both the home of origin and the current home in a new host country) that the subject’s ever-changing identity is both formed and revealed. For second and third generation South Asians born in Britain, the UK is their home of origin. South Asia may serve as a



reference point if accessible, and although it may be seen as an ancestral home, it does not necessarily reflect contemporary South Asia. The concept of home is complex for these twenty-first-century British South Asians, and while they may consider Britain their original home, their relationship to South Asia is more nuanced. For those with access to it, South Asia may become an additional or secondary home, while for others, it remains an imaginary home. The new sense of self that emerges from identifying with these “homes” can be culturally diverse, allowing the subject to explore various cultures and identities and achieve a sense of belonging.

In this Context, the research questions for the thesis explore the interrelatedness of the search for home and selfhood in contemporary British South Asian fiction. I ask the following questions:

1. Why are notions of home and identity depicted as perpetually transforming in twenty-first-century British South Asian narratives?
2. How can first- or second-generation British South Asians achieve agency and participation in the new society while maintaining their deep-rooted cultural values from their culture of origin?
3. How and why do recent political discourses shaping “multiculturalism” – “neoliberalism,” “globalization,” “national security,” “strategic interests,” “integration,” “assimilation” and “counter terrorism” – obscure racism and its history, and distort cross-cultural dialogue with British South Asians, especially Muslims, in the United Kingdom?
4. To what degree is it possible, within a multicultural conception of society, to move from a transnational, cosmopolitan phase to a genuinely dialogic

interculturalism? How does the irregular process of forming a culturally diverse identity, which rests on uneven and conflicting factors and is based on the intersection of race, religion, and class, impact this transformation?

The methodology is informed by three paradigms: theories and policies of multiculturalism, the relationship between race and class and how they intersect, and close readings of the literary texts. The research is informed by insights of scholars who have studied the ideas of multiculturalism and the experiences of minority groups, including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin, Anshuman A. Mondal, Rehana Ahmed among others. Nevertheless, before delving further into the topic, I will provide an overview of the historical development of state-led multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, in order to establish a framework for current discussions about the subject.

### **A History of State-led Multiculturalism in the U.K.**

Following the Second World War, Britain became increasingly multicultural with the arrival of immigrants from territories across the British Empire, especially the Caribbean and, later, South Asia. The crisis of the Empire in the 1920s, and then heightened decolonization from 1947 onwards, with India gaining independence, together set in motion debates on the concepts of a British multicultural society and Britain's understanding of itself and its position in the world (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, 5).<sup>1</sup> In the face of rapid decolonisation, the post-WWII Attlee

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<sup>1</sup> The crisis of the Empire in the 1920s was a period of unrest and discontent within the British Empire, marked by anti-colonial movements and protests against British rule (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, 5). This period coincided with the aftermath of World War I, which had left Britain economically and socially

administration sought to secure British identity and Britain's position at the summit of the new Commonwealth sphere of influence through legislation (Hansen 2000).

The British Nationality Act 1948 (BNA 1948) is key to this history. It encouraged many subjects from former colonies and the Commonwealth to migrate to Britain, which also led to the formation of a new British citizenship that included subjects who were not citizens of independent states (Hansen 2000, 45–49). This Act resulted in a substantial influx of former colonial subjects. The nature of such reforms triggered public and political resistance within some quarters, leading to race riots, particularly in 1958 when white working-class “Teddy Boys” became extremely hostile towards black people, for example, in Notting Hill (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018; Cousins 2020).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the commitments from both parties (Attlee and Churchill) to anti-racism and the citizenship that the welfare state developed were combined to guarantee no more major restrictions on immigration until 1962 (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018). Between 1962 and 1971, the 1948 BNA had to be revised and reformed (Hansen

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strained. The heightened decolonization that began in 1947, with India gaining independence, further destabilized the Empire and accelerated the process of dismantling colonial rule (Ibid). The combination of these two events, the crisis of the Empire in the 1920s and the decolonization movements that followed, sparked debates about the concept of a British multicultural society and Britain's understanding of itself and its position in the world (Ibid).

<sup>2</sup> The situation was exploited and inflamed by Fascist groups, such as the White Defence League and the Union for British Freedom (Cousins 2020). Sir Oswald Mosely, founder of the pre-war British Union of Fascists, urged disaffected white residents to “keep Britain white” (Ibid).

2000, 5). As a result, new immigration restrictions were introduced to the current system to identify immigrants by place of birth and origin (i.e. race), rather than by citizenship (Joppke 1999, 4). The accumulative impact of legislation in the 1960s reduced the immigration of people of colour from the New Commonwealth (recently decolonised countries), while allowing white people to immigrate from the Old Commonwealth (or the white Commonwealth) (Karatani 2003, 5). Because of the racialised tightening of immigration controls, the Labour Party and the more liberal wing of the Conservative Party imposed an internal race relations regime, enacting the Race Relation Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976.<sup>3</sup> Under the 1965 Race Relations Act, racial discrimination in public places was declared illegal, but it did not apply to employment or housing, two sectors where discrimination was obvious (Brown 2018).

During the mid-1960s, these amendments coincided with a discursive shift within British society from notions of cultural “assimilation”, which motivated minorities to embrace mainstream cultural practices, to “integration”. As Jenkins (1967) shows, the latter advocates “equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an environment of reciprocal tolerance” (267). The new Welfare State, reified by the 1948 National Assistance Act and National Health Act, was considered as the key mechanism for integration and supported by significant

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<sup>3</sup> The 1968 Race Relations Act outlawed discrimination in employment and housing. However, this did not apply to the police force (Ibid). Under the 1976 Race Relations Act, antidiscrimination was extended to include indirect discrimination. However, the police force was finally brought into the scope of race relations legislation with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Brown 2018).

financing and political action that addressed racial, ethnic and religious minorities, exempting them from general laws. Consequently, British multiculturalism is sometimes referred to as the “face of Janus”, with strict controls over foreigners expressed racially, but with considerable protection for cultural diversity (Meer and Modood, 2019).

As a result of the failed attempt to achieve the post-imperial Commonwealth vision shortly after WWII, a political and legal legacy emerged that embedded discourses on race, citizenship and immigration within the desire for a sense of “Britishness” following decolonization. Part of this legacy was the nonpartisanship of British multiculturalism, which was a strategic move that allowed for the effective management of cultural diversity while avoiding any association with political agendas or interests.<sup>4</sup> This was a compromise that the Conservative Party was ready to accept because the party’s leadership during the 1960s and 1970s had been fighting to keep explicitly racist interpretations of conservatism under control. Harold Macmillan’s “One Nation” Conservatism gained popularity by advocating for social welfare through pragmatic authoritarian policies, as noted by Ashcroft and Bevir (2019, 31). It represented a compromise

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<sup>4</sup> The nonpartisanship of British multiculturalism refers to the fact that the policy of multiculturalism in Britain was not associated with any one political party or ideology (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019). It was a widely accepted and embraced approach to managing the cultural diversity of British society (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019) This nonpartisanship was seen as a positive aspect of British multiculturalism because it meant that it was not tied to any particular political agenda or interest (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019). Instead, it was a broad-based policy that was implemented across different political parties and governments, providing stability and continuity in managing cultural diversity in Britain (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019).

between the Conservative Party's traditional elitist views and the necessity to address the concerns of a changing Britain. Despite his progressive stance, Macmillan's government was also responsible for implementing racist policies such as the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which restricted immigration from former British colonies. In this sense, there was no intention of changing the welfare state's core mission, but there was a belief in a view of society based on British exceptionalism, the belief that Britain has a unique and exceptional role to play in the world due to its history, culture, and political institutions (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 31). However, New Commonwealth immigration challenged this notion of society from a historical but not necessarily racial perspective. Some members of the Conservative party, such as Cyril Osborne and Enoch Powell, with his "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, were vociferously assertive in their opposition to the immigration of people of colour, claiming that they could not be adequately assimilated (Ibid.).<sup>5</sup> In the process, such Conservatives obscured the boundary between cultural and ethnic and racial differences, linking immigration debates to racial issues, which influenced arguments about nationality, Britishness and multiculturalism (Ibid.). According to Hansen, While the Conservative Party's leadership historically demonstrated a commitment to anti-racism, their priorities shifted over time, leading them to prioritize maintaining control over certain prejudiced sections within the party. As a result, their anti-

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<sup>5</sup> In this speech, known as "Rivers of Blood" or "the Birmingham speech", Enoch Powell strongly criticized the proposed race relations bill (Race Relations Act 1968) and immigration to the United Kingdom, particularly from the New Commonwealth. The speech made Powell one of the most debated politicians in the country (McLean 2001).

racist stance may have weakened in recent years (Hansen 2000, 119–120). Thus, the Conservative leadership accepted a nonpartisan consensus to keep immigration out of front-bench politics as much as possible, even though this could provide them with a short-term electoral advantage (Ibid.).

An uneasy equilibrium existed among the social democratic legacy and the Labour Party, which contributed to “the bifurcated approach to multiculturalism” (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 31) <sup>6</sup> This meant reconciling considerable anti-racist positions inside the Labour Party with the concerns of the working class and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) that the influx of immigrants might lead to unemployment, erode the power of collective bargaining and lower living standards (Goulbourne 1998, 85; Hansen 2000, 130–31). Despite countless instances of racial discrimination in the workplace, the TUC was explicitly anti-racist. Social democracy had such a considerable effect that Labour consistently supported immigration more than the Conservatives did. In British politics, the merging of the elements of “social democracy” and “conservatism” guaranteed that the cost of limited immigration reform was a strong race-relations act and a high level of cultural diversity (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 32). This consensus was a middle ground between the two major political traditions in Britain, rather than between two parties, with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) also playing a significant role in shaping social democratic

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<sup>6</sup> The social democratic legacy refers to the political ideas and policies that originated from the British Labour Party’s commitment to social democracy, which aims to create a more egalitarian society through policies such as social welfare programs, progressive taxation, and workers’ rights (Patrick, 2016; Ashcroft and Bevir 2019).

policies. Nonetheless, It is important to take into account the racial implications of public discourse surrounding immigration, as well as the potential impact on immigration laws and policies. Ignoring these implications can have significant consequences for how different racial and ethnic groups are perceived and treated within the context of immigration policy.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Thatcher government led to discursive shifts in British multiculturalism. However, the concept was preserved mainly in terms of policy even though support was no longer completely nonpartisan (Hansen 2000, 9; Karatani 2003, 179–185). The 1948 Act, which was finally repealed by the British Nationality Act of 1981, “abolished the status of British subject” (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 32). As a result, a precise definition of British citizenship that corresponded directly to the right to live in Britain was established (Hansen 2000, 213–140; Hampshire 2005, 42–43). The remaining citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies were divided into two different classes, but none were granted the right to live in the United Kingdom. This move marked a significant deviation from the well-established *jus soli* principle that had ensured British citizenship for nearly all individuals born within the United Kingdom. This was now limited to individuals who had at least one parent who was a UK citizen or “settled” in Britain (Karatani 2003, 182–85).

During the 1980s, some aspects of the “integration” approach survived and many laws in favour of minorities were passed by the Thatcher government, extending the Labour Party policy of the 1970s (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 33). Attacks on the welfare state by the Thatcher government weakened some aspects of multiculturalism (*Ibid.*). The Thatcher government implemented a



series of economic policies that aimed to reduce government spending and promote free-market capitalism. As part of this approach, the government made significant cuts to the welfare state, including programs and services that were designed to support minority communities. These cuts had a negative impact on multiculturalism in the UK because they reduced the resources available to support integration and diversity (Ashcroft and Bevir 2019, 31-2). As a result, some aspects of the integration approach survived and laws in favor of minorities were passed, but overall, the weakening of the welfare state had a significant impact on the promotion and support of multiculturalism in the UK during this time. The subsequent Conservative government under John Major continued Thatcher's policies regarding immigration and race relations (Latour 2009). Furthermore, Major's government's rejection of the accusation of "institutional racism" following the murder of Stephen Lawrence had a negative impact on the Conservative Party's image close to the 1997 general election (Ibid.).<sup>7</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, social democracy in the United Kingdom was articulated through activist anti-racism and a greater understanding of differences, and the Labour Party was intrinsically linked with a commitment to multiculturalism. The Labour party developed a strong anti-racism campaign, in which they valued differences, and focused on housing provision and education, which ultimately helped counteract any central government attacks. When New

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Lawrence was a Black British teenager who was stabbed to death by a gang of white youths while he was waiting for a bus on Well Hall Road in London in 1993 (BBC 2018). The case caused media sensation, resulting in cultural shifts in attitudes toward racism and the police, as well as law and police-behavior reforms (Ibid).

Labour was elected in 1997, they made a commitment to devolved government, emphasising multiculturalism and a renewed feeling of citizenship and community (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018). This endorsement led to the publication of the report *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000a), which is sometimes referred to as a “high water mark” of post-war Britain’s multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2019). Parekh argues that multiculturalism calls for the recognition of the need to transcend the appeal for tolerance and include “acceptance, respect and even public affirmation of their differences” (2000a, 1). At the outset of *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000a), which is the resulting publication of the commission Parekh chaired, the findings stress the “equal worth” of all individuals, “irrespective of their colour, gender, ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation”. The report recognizes that “citizens are both individuals and members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities” (Ibid.). It also stresses that “Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities, both a liberal and a multicultural society, and needs to reconcile their sometimes conflicting requirements” (Ibid., 10). However, the public and journalistic responses to this report were overwhelmingly negative. Moreover, events such as the race riots in northern England and 9/11 triggered a re-evaluation of the politics of multiculturalism (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018).<sup>8</sup> In 2001, New Labour began

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<sup>8</sup> The 2001 England riots broke out in northern towns in England such as Oldham (May 2001), Bradford (July 2001), and Harehills (June 2001). The 9/11 attacks occurred on September 11, 2001, when hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. It is worth noting that the 2001 England riots were not related to the 9/11 attacks (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018). Instead, they resulted from domestic tensions between neo-Nazi agitators and local British South Asian youths within the UK (Ashcroft and

to stress that immigrants and minorities should adopt British values, introducing a new citizenship test and tough anti-terrorism legislation, as well as tightening immigration and asylum laws (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, 6). The security measures were connected to assimilatory policies that questionably confused counterterrorism work and community relations, especially within Muslim groups (Meer 2010, 22). The post-2010 Conservative-led government continued these policies and discourses, which culminated in Prime Minister David Cameron pronouncing the failure of the “state doctrine of multiculturalism” and explicitly describing it as a reason for domestic terrorism, advocating “muscular liberalism” instead (Cameron, 2011). More forms of “anti-extremism” legislation followed and immigration restrictions were further tightened.<sup>9</sup> Hence, these changes in the policy of New Labour and subsequent Conservative governments reflected their claims that British multiculturalism was in “crisis”.

Although one may argue that some truth may lie in Cameron’s evaluation, it disregards significant continuities with “traditional” British multiculturalism and obscures its gaps. Overall, post-2001 rhetoric from both political parties

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Bevir, 2018). The riots were widely reported in the UK media and sparked debates about race relations and multiculturalism in the country.

<sup>9</sup> These immigration restrictions include: The Immigration Act 2014, which restricted access to public services for those without legal status and introduced the “right to rent” scheme. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which required public sector workers to report suspected radicalization and imposed duties on universities to prevent radicalization on campus. The Extremism Analysis Unit, set up in 2015 to provide intelligence on extremist threats, but criticized by some for its potentially broad definition of extremism and impact on free speech (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018).

constantly referred to British exceptionalism, which was reminiscent of post-war rhetoric. I would argue that the belief in “unique” British values indicates a retrogressive move from integration towards assimilation. Paradoxically, this form of rhetoric and the debates surrounding immigration often emphasize both anti-racism and the diverse nature of modern Britain. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that the latest developments should be seen as a “rebalancing” of British multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2019). Public debates concerning multiculturalism show a tendency towards nativism, even if there has been more rhetoric than practice up until now. Unquestionably, recent fundamental changes in policies have limited some aspects of state-led British multiculturalism (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2016) and these tendencies in the public and political discourse regarding multiculturalism seem to be reinforced, especially post-Brexit.

In a nation-wide referendum on June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union by a slender majority of 51.9 percent to 48.1 percent. The result of the referendum graphically depicted the fundamental schisms in British society, sentiments toward Europe and concerns in terms of belonging, immigration, race, national identity, inclusion and exclusion. The referendum on British EU membership revealed deep divisions among the public, notably in England, where the vote to leave was highest. According to Lord Ashcroft’s poll (2016), which surveyed the largest number of voters on the day of the referendum, 80% of Leave voters believed that immigration was a negative force with those who identified themselves as “English but not British” voting strongly to Leave (79%). This is significant since Englishness is often correlated with whiteness

(Ware 2001). From this data we can surmise that perceptions of race played a crucial role in the referendum. Indeed, the popular media and much of the scholarly literature claimed that migration and concerns about the referendum were critical factors in the Leave Vote (Goodhart 2016; Swales 2016; Meleady et al. 2017; Sayer 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018). The issue of the social structure and interaction of increasingly diverse areas resulting from immigration has garnered a lot of attention recently. The polarized focus on race, immigration and belonging, which was fuelled by Brexit, is not an uncommon catalyst of anti-migration (Rogaly 2019). To some degree, British immigration policy indicates a long-standing practice of categorizing racialized subjects, as well as colonial agendas to restrict the movements of certain groups (Solomos 2003). There is a tendency for racialized immigrants to be seen as posing a challenge to the dominant population's monopoly on rights to the national identity and belonging concerns that dominated public discourse in the run-up to the EU referendum. There is, similarly, a strong link between fears about societal cohesion and the integration of immigrants. For example, Home Secretary Theresa May declared in 2015 that "when immigration is too high [...] it's impossible to build a cohesive society" (Stone 2017). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, British immigration policy has consistently linked social cohesion with strict immigration policies through legislation (Winder 2004).

Indeed, the general election of 2019 saw a resurgence regarding political involvement, particularly for those of the Conservative Party who represent white working-class voters in traditionally Labour-voting constituencies in the North and Midlands, known as the Red Wall. It is worth noting that this is reminiscent of

moments of extreme anti-migrant politics of the previous century, with Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech serving as an obvious example.<sup>10</sup> The campaigns leading up to the 2019 general election demonstrated a concerted effort to attract members of underserved groups, particularly white working-class voters, by appealing to their "left behind" status. The fact that these voters had historically supported the Labour Party, yet still faced significant economic and social challenges, was seen as an opportunity for other parties to make inroads with this demographic. While some progress had been made in addressing these issues by previous governments, many voters still felt that more needed to be done, and this sentiment was reflected in the election results. The 2019 general election results are remarkable since many regions that had previously been Labour strongholds – the "Red Wall" - gained Conservative majorities; Blyth Valley in the Northeast of England had been held by Labour at every election except for in 1950 when the seat was founded (BBC News 2019). As Ashcroft and Bevir (2018) suggest, the "social cohesion" that the government has been promoting seems to be articulated through the traditional and institutional perspectives that stem from pre-WWII Britain, which means that the current bipartisan call for "British values" could be monocultural, even if it is multiracial in terms of implementation (7). The inclusiveness of "Britishness" of people of colour through a historically conditional form of civic nationalism offers more racial inclusiveness than cultural assimilation, or at least it should if British national

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<sup>10</sup> The red wall is a term coined by James Kanagasooriam in August 2019, referring to a group of constituencies, namely in the Midlands, Northern England and North East Wales, that have historically supported the Labour Party (Lockwood 2020).

identity is to have more substantial elements than “a pastiche of generic liberal-democratic values” (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, 7). However, even such abstract values conflict with some cultural practices of minorities. One can maintain that contemporary British multiculturalism is not “Janus-faced” but a mix of various parts. Concerns stemming from a populist point of view, perhaps regarding the apparent threat of immigration to British national identity, appear to have reinforced public resistance to the concept of multiculturalism (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2016). Indeed, the response of political leaders seems to be tentative regarding “multiculturalism” as a political objective and set of practices (Morey 2018a, 5). The use of the discourse of inclusive British multiculturalism, besides “muscular liberalism”, is indirectly exclusive to some minorities and these contradictions are rarely recognized or resolved (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, 7).<sup>11</sup>

### **Perspectives on Multiculturalism Before Brexit**

In the early 2000s, there was significant academic and policy literature on multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, which can be broadly classified into two main strands. One strand focused on the impact of multicultural policies on segregation and social cohesion, while the other focused on culture and individual identity. Some argued that highlighting cultural differences and promoting a “politics of respect” could harm social cohesion by fostering segregated identities and dividing communities (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Goodhart 2004). Some scholars, such as Trevor Phillips, have argued that emphasizing differences

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<sup>11</sup> Muscular liberalism is a form of liberalism invoked by David Cameron to explain his assertive policymaking towards multiculturalism (Cameron 2011).

between groups can lead to a breakdown in overall social solidarity and trust (Dominic Casciani 2005). Phillips, who was formerly the chair of the UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission, has been critical of multiculturalism and has claimed that Britain is "sleepwalking into segregation" due to cultural differences (Dominic Casciani 2005). However, there is a substantial body of empirical literature that challenges this notion, suggesting that deprivation and inequality have a much greater impact on social trust than cultural differences (Sturgis et al. 2011). Additionally, some researchers argued that claims of increasing segregation among ethnic minority groups were exaggerated and did not accurately reflect residential patterns (Finney and Simpson 2009). Despite these findings, concerns about the impact of diversity persisted in policy debates. Critics argued that multiculturalism fostered the development of separate and disconnected communities, with limited opportunities for meaningful contact and integration due to official support for cultural difference (Brown 2007; Phillips 2005).

Discussions surrounding cohesion and diversity management focused on the importance of dialogue and interaction. The Denham report, which examined community cohesion after the 2001 riots in Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford, built on the work of Cattle (2001) and Ouseley (2001) to underscore the "lack of interchange between members of different racial, cultural and religious communities" (Denham 2001, 3). The report argued that promoting cohesion requires "widespread open debate" and efforts to advance democratic values while addressing disadvantage. Central to this approach is the promotion of a shared framework of core values that are fundamental to modern liberal



democracy, such as tolerance, freedom of speech, respect for the law, and equal political and legal rights (Parekh 2000b 11; Rattansi 2011, 5). While there may be differing opinions about how best to foster respect for these values, some believe that it can evolve naturally through everyday interactions, while others argue that government action is necessary to instill and reinforce them.

There was debate among policymakers in Britain over how best to approach cultural diversity. The argument was that treating all cultures equally could actually undermine support for a common British identity. This approach emphasized pride in the country and its achievements, as well as a commitment to a shared national identity. According to Fletcher (2011), there were different views on how this approach should be implemented. Some saw British identity as replacing diversity, advocating for assimilation, while others viewed allegiance to the nation as just one element among various identities. At one end of the spectrum, some argued that commitment to Britain involved severing minority cultural ties and abandoning one's culture, as exemplified by Conservative MP Norman Tebbit's question, "which side do they cheer for?" (Fletcher 2011, 2). However, others, like former Prime Minister David Cameron, criticized the "doctrine of state multiculturalism" for encouraging different cultures to live separate lives from each other and from the mainstream (Cameron 2011). Cameron advocated for "muscular liberalism" and "pride in local culture," but also stressed that allegiance to British culture did not preclude other identities. As he put it, "I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, but I am a Londoner too" (Cameron 2011). Similarly, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown endorsed British identity and criticized multiculturalism for overemphasizing separateness at the

expense of unity, which he saw as pushing communities apart (Brown 2007). In short, while there were different views on how to balance cultural diversity with national identity in the past, there seemed to be a growing consensus that an integrated, shared identity was key to social cohesiveness in Britain. Some scholars argue that this emphasis on integration and shared identity was promoted for ulterior motives, such as a desire to suppress minority cultures and reinforce the dominance of the white British majority (Gilroy 2004).

During the early 2010s, several policies aimed to reinforce a sense of “Britishness”, such as the modifications made to the Citizenship Test in 2012 to incorporate British history. Additionally, the previous governments’ education program for diversity was discontinued, and a ministerial pledge was made to prioritize “our island’s history” in a comprehensive curriculum review, aimed at putting a stop to “the trashing of our history” (Conservative Party 2010). This policy approach was founded on a fixed idea of national identity and presumed that a unified and cohesive British identity could be narrated. However, this assertion was challenged from two perspectives. Firstly, experts noted that British customs comprised persistent conflicts between class, regional, faith, and other groups, as well as imperialist and racist aspects in the national heritage, in addition to cosmopolitanism, so that the core of Britishness was inherently a matter of debate (Rattansi 2011, 5). Secondly, cultural intermingling was deemed a positive advantage that strengthened national life, and a dialogue between cultures was mutually beneficial (Parekh 2000b, 337). Thus, Britishness was linked to embracing the importance of dialogue, as opposed to adherence to specific traditions.

The second major perspective in the debate was focused on exploring the complex relationship between culture and individual identity. Specifically, this perspective examined how cultural factors influence assumptions about rights and their role in society. According to this perspective, individual identity was believed to be formed within a cultural framework, and it was difficult to imagine individuals functioning in modern society without considering them in terms of cultural categories (Parekh 2000b, 5-6). This argument was one of the core arguments within the politics of recognition. Failing to recognize that people were members of cultural groups undermined their status as individuals and subjected them to the imposition of dominant cultural values, which could damage their personhood (Taylor 1994, 25). Thus, acknowledging the importance of social group implies group rights. In contrast, however, an alternative approach that viewed the relationship between culture and individual identity as more interactive gave more significance to individual agency. This approach recognized that while people's identities were initially shaped within a given culture, they were also open to and aware of other cultural influences, making it impossible to simply attribute identity to culture alone. These perspectives had three main implications for policy.

One of the perspectives that was debated in the past was the liberal approach to multiculturalism, which supported assimilation and viewed identity as a personal attribute independent of society, aligning with classical liberal approaches. This approach allowed individuals the freedom to choose whether to interact with others and join social groups, and saw multiculturalism as oppressive because it assumed that culture, rather than individual choice,

authenticated identity. According to this view, state intervention should be restricted in favour of promoting individual choice, rather than endorsing multicultural identities (Green, Janmaat, and Han 2009, 21). Steven Vertovec (2007) and Christian Joppke (2009) expanded on this argument, claiming that assimilation contradicts multiculturalism, which offers recognition that liberalism denies, leading to increasingly radical and extreme claims-making by minorities, ultimately leading to a crisis point in multiculturalism (Joppke 2009, 469; Vertovec 2007, 32)

A variation of the liberal approach emphasized the role of reason in guiding individual identity formation, with Amartya Sen arguing that people have multiple identities, and it is necessary to recognize the diversity of these identities and the role of choice in determining the relevance of particular identities (Sen 2006, 4). Some scholars also pointed to the emergence of intercultural interaction and engagement, particularly among younger generations in urban areas, leading to the evolution of cultural norms and lifestyles as a result of individual engagement and choice within and between cultures. This organic process was seen to promote greater interaction, the development of convivial and cosmopolitan identities, and the evolution of culture, and while government policies can support this process, it cannot be imposed by the state (Gilroy 2004; Modood 2012; Vertovec 2007).

The third argument in the debate over multiculturalism pertained to the idea that it may have granted a dominant status to a particular ethnic identity (Modood 2007, 110-116). This viewpoint, referred to as essentializing, oversimplified complex cultural issues by reducing them to fixed and reified

identities such as Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, or fundamental Christian. This oversimplification facilitated the promotion of a fictitious sense of unity within a group by ethnopolitical entrepreneurs (Brubaker 2003, 554). However, this approach neglected the diversity and complexity of social phenomena in the formation of ethnic identity (Modood 2007, 150). As Modood argued, many members of minority groups had hyphenated identities that reflected their diverse cultural backgrounds (Modood 2007, 150). Another variant of this approach argued that the reinforcement of cultural difference strengthened the authority of power holders, typically older men, within minority communities (Malik 2009, 12). This limited the freedom of younger members and women to exercise their agency and define themselves, ultimately rendering multiculturalism a cultural straitjacket (Phillips 2009, 14). From this perspective, multiculturalism reinforced power structures rather than buttressed difference and segregation, constrained dialogue and interaction, undermined national identity, or limited conviviality. To protect the rights of more vulnerable members of these communities, the state was urged to act to restrain the authority of these “minorities within minorities” (Phillips 2009, 1).

In the years leading up to Brexit, several significant events occurred that amplified debates surrounding multiculturalism in the UK. Firstly, there was a rise in terrorist attacks by small groups of Muslim extremists, including the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005 and the murder of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013. These attacks caused political concerns about ensuring that all cultural groups upheld core values such as democracy, free speech, and respect for the rule of law. Some argued that multiculturalism as a policy of appeasement was

actually enabling violent extremism (Phillips 2006, 1). Secondly, riots with a strong racial element in Oldham, Burnley, Bradford in 2001, Birmingham in 2005, and the 2011 riots in major cities like London, Birmingham and Liverpool deepened concerns about how well the British polity managed issues of difference and disadvantage. This intensified the debate about whether policies should promote a common British culture or encourage dialogue between separate cultural groups. Thirdly, there were concerns that multiculturalism nurtured white working-class racism in disadvantaged communities because it fostered the fear that scarce social resources were being diverted away from the majority to ethnic minorities (Dench and Gavron 2006; Hewitt 2005). Labour politicians feared losing support from traditional working-class supporters who saw the party as prioritizing ethnic minority interests. As a result, in the most recent general election, they lost this support, particularly in the North East. Politicians from all mainstream parties also anticipated the possibility of the extreme right exploiting opportunities to gain support (Goodwin 2011, 98–99).

### **Brexit: A Retrogressive Move from Integration Towards Assimilation**

Conservative sociopolitical discourse in the United Kingdom involves a controversy over majority versus minority group affiliation, which is an essential aspect of it. In “The Language of Leaving: Brexit, the Second World War, and Cultural Trauma” (2019), Jon Stratton examines the connection between Brexit and the cultural trauma that arose from the Second World War. According to Stratton, the language used to describe Brexit is deeply rooted in the cultural memory of the Second World War, and it discloses a profound sense of loss, grief, and trauma that is associated with leaving the European Union (2019, 241).

Stratton argues that Brexit signifies a desire for a united political, social, and cultural entity driven by xenophobia fuelled by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. This xenophobic rhetoric and laws are a continuation of those promoted by previous Prime Ministers David Cameron and Theresa May, as shown by May's well-known "Go Home" vans, which aimed to discourage illegal immigrants (Stratton, 2019; Jones et al., 2017).

The phrases "taking back control" and "making Britain great again" bandied around during the Leave campaign prior to Brexit tap into the cultural memory of the Second World War and evoke a sense of sacrifice, national unity, and strength associated with that period in British history (Stratton 2019, 242). Stratton argues that the cultural memory of the Second World War is interwoven with Britain's national identity and has influenced the country's interpretation of present-day events, including Brexit. The decision to leave the EU is perceived as a loss of security and a betrayal of the ideals of unity and peace established after the Second World War. The EU is frequently seen as a symbol of stability and security in the aftermath of the war, and leaving it is, therefore, considered a significant loss (Stratton 2019, 242). This sense of loss and grief is reflected in the language used to describe Brexit, and it is part of a more comprehensive pattern of cultural trauma linked to the end of the empire and the decline of Britain's global power (Stratton 2019, 243). Since the EU Referendum in 2016, there were two campaigns, Vote Leave and Remain, and politicians from across the political spectrum supported either campaign. Even some Conservative politicians, such as David Cameron and George Osborne, who were both in the Remain camp, supported staying in the EU. The issue of race and immigration

was certainly a significant factor in the Brexit referendum campaign, and continues to be an important issue in UK politics. Nationalist discourse has become more prevalent, highlighting the continued importance of race as a critical issue in politics, even if it is not always explicitly defined (see Bhambra 2017). While the official campaign for Brexit was led by Vote Leave, notably supported by Boris Johnson, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) was also a leading voice for Leave. From the 2014 European elections onwards, the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, was a significant figure in the conversation about the European Union and received significant media attention. The campaign's motto, "We want our country back: VOTE TO LEAVE ON JUNE 23RD," highlights its strong focus on nationalism. According to Farage, Brexit was a victory for "ordinary people, good people, decent people" (Peck 2016), and evidence that economic issues were secondary, with immigration and Islam being the main concerns (Hall and Maddox 2016). The Leave.EU campaign often utilized extreme right-wing tactics, most notably by displaying a photo of refugees crossing Slovenia from Croatia in 2015, accompanied by the tagline "Breaking Point: the EU has failed us all" (Stewart and Mason 2016). Hence, it was not unexpected to see the far-right backing Farage (Lyons 2016).

For Labour MP Emma Reynolds, the message was clear: "Brexit shows that progressives cannot take white working-class voters for granted" (Mondon and Winter 2019, 513). This perspective was reflected in various academic studies, which attempted to explain the rise of far-right parties by focusing on the idea that white working-class individuals were "left behind". These analyses argued that right-wing populists were able to win over former supporters of the



left and right who were dissatisfied with the main parties” apparent focus on the middle class. Support for Brexit can be found among the “left-behind” working class who are concerned about losing their sense of identity in a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse Britain as promoted by the socially liberal elite (Ford and Goodwin 2017, 10). Similarly, drawing parallels to former UK Prime Minister Theresa May’s infamous remark “if you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere”, Goodhart (2017) believes that increased diversity brought about by uncontrolled migration can pose a threat to the sense of unity in society for those who feel rooted in a specific place, known as the “somewhere,” as opposed to the liberal, middle-class, globalized individuals who do not have a specific sense of place, known as the “anywhere.” In the United States, Vance (2017) argues that in order to understand the support and success of Trump, we must examine the cultural and economic struggles of the white working-class and underclass in rural America. Hochschild (2016) emphasizes the cultural aspect of Trump’s campaign, stating that it provided a solution to the long-standing dilemma faced by white, native-born, heterosexual men who felt “left behind” in terms of race, gender, and sexuality.

However, in “Brexit, Trump and Methodological Whiteness: On the Misrecognition of Race and Class,” (2017) Bhabra explores the intersection of race and class in the context of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump in the United States, highlighting the misrecognition of the role of race and class in these events. Bhabra argues that the ways in which race and class are studied and understood in political discourse are shaped by what he calls “methodological whiteness” (Bhabra 2017, 708). Methodological

whiteness, according to Bhabra, is a term used to describe the dominant analytical frameworks in political science and sociology that prioritize the experiences and perspectives of white people and ignore the intersections of race and class (Bhabra, 2018, 708). He argues that this approach leads to a misrecognition of the ways in which race and class interact and shape political outcomes, such as the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump (Bhabra, 2018, 708). In this sense, the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump were not simply driven by economic concerns, but were also shaped by the racial anxieties and fears of white people (Bhabra 2018, 709). Bhabra (2018) notes that the leave campaign in the Brexit referendum and Trump's presidential campaign both relied heavily on anti-immigrant rhetoric and appeals to white nationalism (709). This anti-immigrant sentiment is rooted in the insecurities and fears of some white people who feel that their place in the social order is threatened by demographic changes and globalization (Bhabra, 2018, 710).

Indeed, "Methodological whiteness" has impacted the social sciences' understanding of both Trump and Brexit by focusing on the supposed legitimate concerns of the "left behind" or those who feel like they are "strangers in their own land" (Bhabra 2017, 218). This analytical approach not only recognizes but also validates the narrative of victimization, loss of citizenship, and nationalism, as well as the racism that underlies it. Hill (2004) argues that recent research on race has increasingly concentrated on the historical limitations that are currently challenging the idea that the white race is dominant in America (5-6). The view that the white working class's opposition to immigration and diversity stems from their feelings of being "left behind" has been widely held. Some critics argue that

the so-called liberal elite's anti-racist stance is seen by these individuals as a dismissal of their democratic voice as "ordinary people." Kaufmann (2017) suggests in his paper "Racial Self-Interest Is Not Racism" that Brexit was a manifestation of the racial self-interest of white people in the working class. Kaufmann believes it is important to avoid labeling this hostility to immigration as racism and instead address it as a discussion of ethno-demographic interests. According to Goodhart (2017), the tendency for the liberal perspective to equate legitimate majority concerns with racism could widen the cultural divide in western democracies. The libertarian right often views Brexit and Donald Trump through the lens of conflating anti-racism with elitism. These perspectives are often backed by claims and defenses of supposed working-class fears about immigration and limitations on freedom of speech, particularly the alleged concept of "political correctness" (Furedi 2016). Similarly, Milo Yiannopoulos (2017) argues that the liberal response to why white working class have abandoned them is often the accusation of racism. This answer is given as a response to criticisms linking Trump, Brexit, and racism, but it reinforces the association. The working class is held solely accountable rather than examining the role of the campaigns, media, and supporters.

In their article "Whiteness, Populism and the Racialisation of the Working Class in the United Kingdom and the United States", Aurelien Mondon and Aaron (2019) examine how the populist discourse radicalizes the working class, representing them as white and "left behind". They explore the role of whiteness in the rise of right-wing populism in both countries. They argue that whiteness has been a significant factor in the racialization of the working class, leading to a

rise in white nationalism and the decline of working-class solidarity (Mondon and Winter 2019, 605). They begin by discussing the impact of globalization and immigration on the working class, noting that the decline in manufacturing and the growth of service-sector jobs has led to economic insecurity and a decline in working-class living standards (Mondon and Winter 2019, 606). This decline has been accompanied by a decline in working-class solidarity, as the working class has become increasingly divided along racial lines. This has created an opening for right-wing populist movements to exploit the fears and anxieties of the working class (Mondon and Winter 2019, 606-7). This division has been exacerbated by the way in which right-wing populist movements have used anti-immigrant rhetoric to appeal to the fears and anxieties of the working class (Mondon and Winter 2019, 608). The centralisation of race in politics, the hiding of class composition, the legitimisation of white identity as a political term, and the normalisation of racism and extremism are the consequences of such constructions (Mondon and Winter 2019).

These discourses ignore the experiences and interests of working-class and Black, Minority Ethnic, and Immigrant groups, and present voting results as a white working-class uprising. This depiction of the “people” or “demos” relies on a limited interpretation of voting results that stigmatizes the working class and promotes a biased ideological agenda that maintains the status quo in terms of race, politics, and economics (Mondon and Winter 2019). This decline in status can also be linked to the idea of a “white response” to civil rights movements, individualism, colorblindness during the Reagan/Thatcher era, anti-Obama campaign, and the belief that white people are in competition with others. The

perception of eroded white privilege suggests an identity crisis with far-reaching implications, including the support base of the populist radical right, known as the “white working-class left behind” (Mondon and Winter 2019). Studies have confirmed the existence of a white backlash and the belief that whites are getting a “raw deal” in Europe and the United States (Cramer 2016, Eckhouse 2018). In the United States, the 2016 election data showed that the belief that the United States is “abandoning its Christian history” was a strong predictor of support for Donald Trump (Whitehead et al. 2018, 5)

Similarly, those who supported Trump felt a sense of “threat to their dominant ethnicity status,” leading them to vote for him (Bonikowski 2017). Studies on Brexit also show that the decision was made by white middle-class voters, not the so-called “white working class” commonly referred to in modern populist literature. This omission is what Bhambra (2017) considers to be “methodological whiteness”. This concept highlights the importance of white identity in supporting the populist extreme right rather than class. While populism is often used to explain political movements in Europe and North America, it fails to capture the racial division created and mobilized by the far-right, which is based on distinguishing between individuals and the Other rather than economic factors. The idea that social work professionals may reject right-wing populism due to their core beliefs and values is a common notion. However, there is evidence suggesting that even among social workers and students, support for right-wing populist beliefs can exist (Radvan and Schäuble 2019). This finding may not be surprising, but it has not been given much attention. Many experts believe that the current social, political, and economic changes require a significant

transformation of social workers' identities (Fazzi, 2015; Milbradt and Wagner, 2017; Fenton 2019; Radvan and Schäuble 2019). Social workers are also faced with changes in their environment, such as depoliticization or the growing positive attitude among young professionals towards welfare restrictions (Brandt et al 2019). The emergence of right-wing populism is a response to the social and economic disparities affecting an ignificant portion of the population. Right-wing populism is successful in countering the arguments and defensive positions taken by both conservative and anti-establishment groups. Although a deeper analysis of the ideological foundations is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is worth noting that conservatism has been seen as a counter to neoliberalism (Lee 2014, 2137), and right-wing populism has been recognized as a threat to anti-establishment movements (Chiaramonte et al. 2020). Additionally, some factions within established left-wing parties, such as Blue Labour in the UK, support conservative views on issues like immigration and security (Bloomfield 2020, 89). Right-wing populism thrives in this context and may signal a new phase in the process of redefining the professional identities of social workers. Such a shift could have a major impact on professional cultures and practices, and it is important to thoroughly examine and understand these changes.

According to Mudde (2007), the prevalence of populist extreme right ideologies in Europe and especially in the United Kingdom is not uncommon. The current trend is the radicalisation of mainstream views. The power of these radical right political parties lies in their ability to shape the political discourse. They focus more on socio-cultural issues such as immigration rather than economic concerns like unemployment. They aim to make their opinions more visible by highlighting

the issues they care about. The populist right has been successful in redefining politics around the themes of national identity, culture, and immigration, presenting themselves as the protectors of the nation against external forces that pose a threat to the state's sovereignty (Bloomfield 2020, 90). The rise of the radical right is based on their ability to portray immigration as a danger to European societies. The progressive parties face a challenging task of balancing the voters' concerns about public safety and order with the right to freedom of movement (Skrzypek 2015 16). The populist parties blame the Left for supporting immigration while disregarding the needs of ordinary citizens. As support for social democratic parties declined due to their pro-immigration stance, some left-wing parties started advocating for welcoming migrants and implementing border control measures to protect national security, identity, and the job market. However, this strategy hasn't been effective because voters tend to support radical right parties that position themselves as the protectors of national identity and prioritise security and order in society.

Immigration and multiculturalism are controversial topics for social democratic parties. These parties were supporters of immigration and multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s, but also favoured limiting labour migration and forced migration. In the early 2000s, particularly during the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown administrations, the Labour Party in the UK promoted policies aimed at increasing labour migration while adopting a more stringent approach towards asylum seekers. Gordon Brown's 2007 speech, "British Jobs for British Workers," echoed the National Front's slogan from the 1970s. Tony Blair and Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi both called for immigration to be

limited or regulated. Following the migration crisis of 2015, some social democratic parties began advocating for a more restrictive approach to immigration. For instance, the head of the Socialist Party in Belgium stated that migration to Europe should be reduced, and the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany declared that Germany cannot accept every asylum seeker. The Danish Social Democrats viewed immigration as a danger to their welfare system (Mudde 2019). In the UK, the Blue Labour faction within the Labour Party endorses anti-immigrant policies (Bloomfield 2020).

According to Boros (2016), the more the political agenda is dominated by the topic of refugees, the more support populist parties will receive, and the more countries they will rise to power in. Despite the Left's efforts, it is the refugees who will ultimately suffer the most from this process. The support of working-class voters for the populist right is not the cause of the decline in social democracy. In the 1950s and 1980s, social democratic parties received over 30% of the vote. With victories in Germany, the UK, and Italy in the 1990s, support for social democracy increased, but started to decline in the 2000s (Benedetto et al. 2019, 4-5). In 2017, the percentage of the vote for social democratic parties in Europe's elections fell below 20%, the lowest since 1918 (Benedetto et al. 2019, 9). Many left-leaning parties, including social democratic parties, are more concerned with not losing the election than winning it (Skrzypek 2015, 14). However, a focus on winning at all costs could lead these parties to abandon their core values and alienate their base, ultimately resulting in a loss of support and influence. The populist left's brief victory in Spain under Podemos and in Greece under Syriza following the 2008 Eurozone Crisis was short-lived.



The change in the working class is a crucial factor to consider here. One contributing factor to the Conservative Party's win in the UK's 2019 general elections was the Labour Party's loss of support in the deindustrialized regions of the English north and Midlands. The closure of mines, factories, and shipyards led to the dissolution of class solidarity and industrial communities (Niven 2019). In post-industrial societies, the industrial workforce has decreased, and class hierarchies have become more complex and dispersed (Benedetto et al. 2019, 18-19). As more women and people of immigrant heritage enter the workforce, the "white" working class is becoming a smaller proportion of the overall working class (Bloomfield 2020, 93). The precariation of labour, which is disconnected from socially integrative principles, is eroding working-class solidarity (Hürtgen 2020, 11-14). The fragmentation of the labour market and creation of rival Labour coalitions are the foundation and means of advancing European and British integration (Hürtgen 2020, 5-13). As Hürtgen (2020) has argued, protected "labour is subject to salary reductions, flexibility, and increasing job insecurity. Therefore, it is crucial for the Left to develop strategies to address these issues and protect workers" (13). To be effective, the larger social justice movement must include the precariat. Here, the concept of "methodological whiteness," as defined by Gurinder Bhambra (2017), is helpful. Structural and institutional racism are linked to more direct forms of racism, even in terms of beliefs. The notion that immigrants are present but not "integrated," which has been perpetuated by "scientific research" for years, supports the racist assumption that if they take so long to integrate, they are probably not capable of doing so. The idea of a contradiction between "the West" and "Islam" or "modernity" and "migrants" perpetuates racist beliefs and further divides society.

Populism and political commentators have shown how the rise of right-wing populism in the UK is a threat to multiculturalism and intercultural engagement, as well as to the well-being of minority communities. The anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing populist leaders can lead to increased discrimination and marginalization of minority groups, which can undermine social trust and stability. Moreover, the spread of misinformation and fearmongering can further exacerbate these trends and contribute to a decline in support for multiculturalism. A more inclusive and integrative approach to multiculturalism, one that balances respect for cultural diversity with a commitment to social cohesion and a common national identity, may be needed to counter the rise of right-wing populism and its impact on intercultural engagement and social trust (Putnam 2007; Uberoi and Modood 2013). In the context of this discussion, the concept of intercultural engagement has been gaining increasing attention in academic and policy circles, with a growing focus on a pro-diversity approach known as Interculturalism. This approach challenges the traditional political philosophy of Multiculturalism, which has been the dominant model for managing diversity in many countries.

### **Intercultural engagement: Multiculturalism and Interculturalism**

For over 10 years, there has been a continuous flow of academic and policy documents that promote a pro-diversity approach to integration known as Interculturalism. These publications have reflected a growing discontent with the political philosophy of Multiculturalism, even to the point of defining Multiculturalism based on its popular understanding and initially disregarding its political theory. However, this dismissive attitude towards Multiculturalism has

proven challenging to maintain, as in recent years, theorists of Multiculturalism have started to respond to the intercultural critique and the assertion that interculturalism is a superior intellectual concept compared to multiculturalism (starting with Kymlicka 2007; Meer & Modood, 2012). As a result, a debate has arisen in which both sides have something to gain from each other and mutual challenge has the potential to enhance the quality of both “isms.” This includes requiring interculturalism to articulate itself as a political theory and not just in terms of policies and empirical studies in areas such as education, creative industries, or urban governance. The collection of essays “Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Debating the Dividing Lines” (Meer et al, 2016) represents the best expression of this new debate to date, although the debate is not yet advanced enough to warrant such a description.

The central argument put forward by proponents of interculturalism is that it is a better alternative to multiculturalism and should replace it. The idea is that multicultural policies are not effective and interculturalism offers a new and innovative approach to dealing with diversity. This view is supported by Cantle (2016b) who says that interculturalism is based on a different policy and conceptual framework (133). Zapata-Barrero (2016) also states that intercultural citizenship is a new paradigm taking shape in the second decade of the 21st century (35). However, the advocacy for interculturalism often includes a critical view of multiculturalism, which has been criticized for being an exaggerated and one-sided view of the concept. This was noted by Joppke (2017) who argued that the intercultural alternative is based on a polemical view of multiculturalism that is not supported by its advocates (37). However, according to Tariq Modood

(2017), interculturalism is not a unified political theory but instead has at least two distinct and incompatible versions (2). The two versions do not present a replacement to the framework of multiculturalism, but rather highlight certain aspects of multiculturalism, including neglected ones (Ibid). Hence, taking some elements of each version could be beneficial for multiculturalism (Ibid). Additionally, Modood (2017) asserts that interculturalism is not entirely a new political theory as some of its key ideas are already present in multiculturalism (2). The concept of majority precedence/recognition, for example, may be a new idea to some versions of multiculturalism but can be revised to fit with it (Modood 2017, 2).

Zapata-Barrero (2016) states that the essence of intercultural citizenship is the idea that interaction between people from different backgrounds is important and has been overlooked by the multicultural citizenship perspective, which mainly focuses on preserving cultural rights of diverse groups (54). This has been the central argument of interculturalism since its inception as a critique of multiculturalism. Interculturalism views the public sphere as a place for interaction and addresses barriers to communication in everyday experiences (Zapata-Barrero, 2016, 56). However, Meer and Modood (2012) argue that this ignores the fact that dialogue is a fundamental aspect of multiculturalism. Cantle (2016a) dismissed this argument. However, Modood (2017) still holds the view that dialogue and the remaking of an identity-based public sphere and citizenship, particularly in the context of identity-related tensions, is crucial to multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism as a political ideology is centered around intercultural dialogue, which is considered foundational to the concept. Political theorists such

as Iris Young (1990), Charles Taylor (1994), James Tully (1995), and Bhikhu Parekh (2000) have all emphasized the importance of intercultural dialogue in developing a liberatory identity, recognizing and preserving cultural identities, building consensus, and allowing for expression of diverse points of view. Iris Young (1990) helped people understand their oppression and find collective identities, such as being black or gay, which they could use to develop a liberatory identity and engage with other groups to institute a new form of democratic politics. Charles Taylor (1994) proposed a dialogical ethics and politics based on recognizing dismissed cultural identities, and later related his approach to diversity to Rawls' idea of an "overlapping consensus" (Rawls, 1987; Taylor, 2009). James Tully (1995) emphasized the need for a "multilogue" for cooperation under conditions of deep diversity and proposed the idea of "public philosophy" for questioning dominant assumptions. Bhikhu Parekh views intercultural dialogue as a crucial aspect of multiculturalism (Parekh, 2000/2006). He demonstrated this in his response to the *Satanic Verses* controversy, where he advocated for giving Muslims who were angry a sympathetic ear and opposed the idea of absolute freedom of speech (Parekh, 1989).<sup>12</sup> Despite acknowledging that in public controversies, the majority usually dominates the discourse and it

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<sup>12</sup> *The Satanic Verses* controversy refers to the debate and backlash that followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. The book was considered by some Muslims to be blasphemous and insulting to Islam, particularly in its portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad. The controversy escalated when the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa (religious edict) calling for Rushdie's assassination, which led to the author living under police protection for several years. The controversy sparked debates about censorship, free speech, and the relationship between religion and art.

is not always conducive to dialogue or mutual understanding, Parekh believes that multiculturalism is not about each minority being allowed to live as they please, but rather, it is about ensuring there is a genuine dialogue where the minority is able to express their point of view. Such dialogues often start with a majoritarian or status quo perspective, but the minority is still trying to persuade the majority by arguing that what they are seeking is not so different from what the majority has sought in the past. In order to do this, the minority must justify their stance by appealing to the existing public values while trying to modify them (Parekh 2000, 267). Modood (2007) also views multiculturalism as a form of dialogical citizenship (116–118). Therefore, one can say that intercultural dialogue is at the core and even the foundation of multiculturalism.

Interculturalists have made a unique contribution to the field of multiculturalism by focusing on cultural interactions and everyday experiences in localities, schools, clubs, and public spaces. While the importance of dialogue has been acknowledged in the context of public discourse and political controversies, as seen in the example of the *Satanic Verses* controversy, interculturalists emphasize the significance of these interactions at a micro level, such as in youth clubs, neighbourhoods, towns, and cities (Meer and Modood 2012). As a result, interculturalists' contribution to diversity theory and practice is to highlight the importance of these interpersonal cultural encounters, group dynamics, and social trust and not overlook the significance of macro-level dialogue in multiculturalism.

## **Multiculturalism: Trust and Suspicion**

In contemporary multicultural societies, the historical cohesion that is often considered fundamental to social and cultural trust is sometimes missing, leading to questions about whether the vision of society promoted by the majority will always include the ideals of minority groups. This question lies at the core of Peter Morey's "Introduction: Muslims, Trust and Multiculturalism" (2018a), in which he explores the question of trust and multiculturalism. In multicultural societies, certain historical pressures affect reciprocity. A set of opinions have emerged regarding how to consolidate and encourage social cohesion. Currently, when the aim is to construct a society in which various ethnic groups trust each other, it becomes necessary to address "the breakdown of trust between Muslims and others" (Morey 2018a, 2). Accordingly, trust relies on the presumption that the interests of others are congruent with ours (Ibid. 3). It is this interdependence, and the consequences of its breakdown, that makes the issue of trust so urgent. Furthermore, the vision of society that elites offer in the name of the majority ignores the image of what a good society is as perceived by minorities.

In a general sense, multiculturalism represents the recognition of the concept that contemporary Western countries consist of diverse communities. In certain instances, immigration is part of the national narrative, such as with settler-colonial states like the United States of America (USA), Canada and Australia. Nevertheless, despite their long history of colonial contact and conquest, the European countries were slower to accept plurality. Even though Britain is made up of diverse ethnic and national communities (Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and English), multiculturalism only makes sense in reference to

people of colour from former colonies (Morey 2018a, 4). This is seen most often in political science through the prism of legislation, where government interference encourages cultural traditions and practices that differ from those of the majority (Ibid.).

Currently, more criticism is aimed at Muslim minorities whose activities and traditions are expected to demonstrate the irrationality of a too generous accommodation of difference (Morey 2018a, 4). In 2016, the rise of xenophobic and Islamophobic violence following Britain's vote to leave the EU shows the divergence from criticism of supposedly misled policies that prioritise minority interests to an aggressive rejection of differences (Morey 2018a, 4). What were considered grievances in regard to sovereignty and bureaucracy often have developed into xenophobia, and a resurgence of "populist nationalism" and "old-style racism" (Morey 2018a, 4). However, even when British multiculturalism is limited to accommodative state practices, it is still rather chimeric in nature and does not accurately enshrine the recognition of the differences of religion, cultural practice and language within the country. It is inaccurate to think that British multiculturalism follows a set of coherent policies because these accommodative state practices were implemented at a civic level in regions with ethnic enclaves, such as Bradford and Birmingham. While many European countries follow different multicultural policies to work with (or against) diversity, in Britain, as Morey (2018a) suggests, it is difficult to consider the tentative positions, "hesitant" approaches and recommendations, a "multicultural policy", regardless of the insistence of those who oppose multiculturalism (5). Those who hold views against multiculturalism view it as a conspiracy or a "movement" aimed at



destroying British values (Ibid.).

The concept of multiculturalism has been attacked in recent years by right and left-wing parties alike. Those on the right attack it for threatening what they regard as cultural-national bonds, while the left approaches the discussion from a secularist perspective, “criticising its schismatic tendencies and its potential for manipulation by the late capitalist market system” (Ibid. 5) Although some, especially on the right of the political spectrum, claim that multiculturalism relates to a dilution of Britishness, a more nuanced view suggests that “multiculturalism is not about minorities [...] [but] about the proper terms of the relationship between different cultural communities” (Parekh 2006, 13).

Therefore, an objective of this thesis is to determine, through the representation of multiculturalism in the novels examined here, whether multiculturalism, as it is presently understood within the divergent perspectives described above, can create trust between communities or if it unavoidably results in mistrust. In the view of racist constituencies, it is often easier to attribute social issues to foreigners with supposedly “untrustworthy” values. Differentiating between the “multicultural as lived experience and multiculturalism as political theory” demonstrates that the daily life of diverse communities works through “thick trust”, where members of a community live side by side and develop relationships over time, whereas political multiculturalism is seen as the problem of creating “thin trust”, where the groups self-segregate and are uncooperative

(Morey 2018a, 11).<sup>13</sup>

The potential of dialogue is rooted in cultural diversity, which is essential for Charles Taylor's "Politics of Recognition" (1994). Symbols and the stories people tell and hear play a crucial role in this process and harmful stereotypes devalue these stories and the discussions of which they are part. Modood (2007) suggests revitalizing British national symbolism with a "plural, dispersed, and dialogical" approach to Britishness that is based on a framework of dynamic national narratives and ceremonies that express a national identity (146-49). Modood's suggestion is grounded in the notion of inclusivity and diversity, which requires equal access to public services. However, under neoliberal policies, access to public services such as the National Health Service and public education system has been reduced, resulting in a two-tiered system that exacerbates inequality and undermines inclusivity. Additionally, the revival of military patriotism may further divide a multicultural society and is unlikely to serve as a unifying factor. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how the erosion of public services and the resurgence of military patriotism may hinder the development of a pluralistic and inclusive national identity that reflects the diverse experiences and voices of the population. Researchers in sociology, political science, law, and education have been major contributors to the discussion of multiculturalism. It is too limiting to have a multiculturalism discourse that gives little consideration to culture. Generalizations about culture form the basis of

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of "thin trust" offers a valuable suggestion for one method through which intercultural relations work signals based on outward behaviour and appearance (Kohn 2008, 89).

conflicting claims and the discussion of multiculturalism does indeed incorporate culture, but often in a simplistic and instrumental way. For instance, the 1989 *Satanic Verses* controversy and the 2006 Mohammad cartoon debate are hasty and oversimplified views of how culture relates to politics and are used as “piledrivers” against an entire religion and its followers (Morey 2018a 12).<sup>14</sup> There is a crisis of trust that influences intercultural relations and hinders or delays full involvement in citizenship and civil society.

Therefore, one can say that cultural difference is not the only reason that causes divisions in society. Another reason is the surveillant gaze that fixes and reifies Muslim minorities whom Mondal (2018) terms “the cryptic other” or “the crypto-Islamist figure”, stigmatising and limiting them to a specific role and a limited frame (30). In “Scrutinising and Securitising Muslims” (2018), Mondal conceptualizes the “cryptic other” in terms of the “Trojan Horse Plot” (27). On 7th March 2014, the Birmingham City Council revealed it was investigating various schools in the city after receiving a document titled “Operation Trojan Horse”, which revealed a plot to “Islamise” schools in Birmingham (BBC 2014). This document was intended to show how certain Birmingham schools could be “invaded” and converted by appointing Muslim governors who adhered to Islamist ideologies. The council’s announcement led to a series of official hearings, investigations, findings, administrative measures, which were followed by

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<sup>14</sup> The controversy over the Muhammad cartoons began when the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 editorial cartoons depicting Muhammad, a prominent character of Islam, which resulted in violent worldwide protests (Shryock 2010, 4; Mechaï 2015).

widespread media coverage (Ibid.). The focus here is not on the arguments and counterarguments, or whether or not there was a conspiracy. The true focus is on the emergence of the “cryptic other” from events such as “Operation Trojan Horse”.

Mondal highlights unique repetitive features in the character of the intimidating, untrustworthy Muslim as seen in the press and public culture. He considers this figure an example of the “cryptic other”, which is a totalising structure that interprets Muslims as having hidden extremist attributes, regardless of how Westernized and assimilated they appear. Mondal relates the characteristics of the cryptic other to visibility and concealment and refers to the usually assumed duplicity, which arouses feelings of doubt or suspicion. For example, Muslim traditions are connected to radicalisation with the association of hijabs and having something to hide (Mondal 2018, 30). Therefore, such dualistic discourses interpret the other as both an insider and outsider, stereotyping Muslims as untrustworthy. Mondal explores inconsistencies in “racial imaginaries” and their rhetorical constructions, which are spread through journalistic and political discourse.

The 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which requires university staff and school teachers to help prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, “represents the institutionalisation of the crypto-Islamist figure deep within the logics of the security-state” (Mondal 2018, 40).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, under the post-2015

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<sup>15</sup> The UK’s 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act empowers law enforcement and other agencies with greater powers to prevent and investigate terrorism, including passport and travel document seizure, monitoring of

Prevent Act, the cryptic other circulates in two ways. From a structural perspective, the Act enables the role of surveillance to focus on nonviolent extremism; it proposes that when the cryptic other practises or shows any version of religion that does not comply with “fundamental British values”, he or she will probably embrace “an Islamist within” (Mondal 2018, 40). Also, it makes public organisations responsible for searching for signs of extremism and for uncovering the crypto-Islamist (Ibid.). Therefore, when those who are recruited for the task lack sufficient experience or familiarity with Islamic traditions, they might follow a set of signifiers that do not necessarily indicate radicalisation, such as beards, skullcaps, hijabs/niqabs, or speaking Arabic. All these concepts appear to be based on two theories. The first is what Mondal (2018) terms “a theory of liberal expressionism”, in which one cannot help but express one’s thoughts and feelings (40). The second is what he considers to be “Freudian parapraxis—the eruption of the repressed” (Ibid.).

This theory interconnects with the meaning of the term “cryptic” in two ways: the parapraxis either unintentionally indicates “a conscious repression”, which signifies “Muslim duplicity” or it unintentionally refers to Muslim identity and implies that all Muslims are “unconsciously violent extremists” (Mondal 2018, 45).

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suspected terrorists, and mandating de-radicalization programs (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015). Schools, universities, and prisons must also have anti-terrorism measures (BBC News, 2015). However, civil liberties groups argue that the act undermines privacy and freedom of speech, and some provisions, such as mandatory data retention by communication service providers, are criticized as intrusive (Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, 2016). Despite criticism, the act is viewed as vital to public safety and national security in response to evolving terrorist threats.

Theories of liberalism, with regard to differences, stem from the idea that differences must not be a problem. Yet, liberal discourse on equality contradicts this principle, since “beneath all surface distinctions human beings are ““equal””, by which is meant the same in a formally legal and ontological if not social sense” (Mondal 2018, 45). Subsequently, tolerance that regulates the liberal discourse of difference is exposed by the cryptic other. It can also be seen that the “limits of tolerability have been displaced from Jews to Communists and now to Muslims” ((Mondal 2018, 47). Through this process of displacement, one can see that the only thing that changes is the person under consideration, although the fundamental problem of liberal social order remains unresolved. Therefore, the cryptic other represents one of the key obstacles to developing trust in today’s multicultural societies and it exposes the extent of mistrust in modern social imaginaries. As will be discussed later in the thesis, this crisis of trust influences intercultural relations and hinders (or at least delays) full involvement in citizenship and civil society. Therefore, one can say that cultural difference is not the only reason that causes divisions in society. Another reason is the surveillant gaze that fixes and reifies Muslim minorities whom Mondal (2018) calls “the cryptic other”, stigmatising and limiting them to a specific role. Mondal is aware of discrepancies in liberal statements regarding Muslims that employ the cryptic figure.

In “Trust within Reason,” Alison Scott-Baumann (2018) examines the consequences of the Prevent Duty and argues that it reduces social trust and dehumanizes individuals who are required to carry out this duty. This leads to a “diminished self” in which public employees, such as lecturers, medical workers,

social workers, and law enforcement officials, are expected to place more trust in government predictions than in their own judgement and to prevent “clients” from becoming “radicalized.” In the UK, universities have been warned that failure to comply with government guidance on radicalization risks them failing to protect their students from extremist threats on campus. The guidance in question, “Prevent Duty”, leads to an increase in suspicion towards Muslims and has been highly controversial. This guidance is essentially a synthetic form of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” which was introduced by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in his book “Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning” (1976). This term refers to a method of interpretation that critically analyzes the motivations, power structures, and ideologies present in a text. It was first developed by Friedrich Nietzsche and involves a skeptical and critical approach to understanding the motives and hidden meanings in a text. Thus, interpretation is not a neutral or impartial process, but is influenced by the biases, beliefs, and perspectives of the interpreter.

Scott-Baumann (2018) suggests that a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” which undermines trust and leads to a diminished sense of self, can be countered on campus by promoting trust within reason. This means that while it’s important to critically examine texts and ideas, it’s also necessary to approach them with a degree of trust and openness to multiple interpretations. According to Scott-Baumann (2018), a form of trust that is based on reason and evidence replaces the “hermeneutics of suspicion”. This approach provides a more secure and stable sense of self and leads to a more productive and fulfilling academic experience. Thus, Scott-Baumann (2018) advocates for a balanced approach to

interpretation that recognizes the limitations of skepticism while also allowing for the possibility of understanding and insight.

Ricoeur (1976) explores the role of suspicion and faith in interpretation. While he acknowledges the importance of the “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” Ricoeur argues that solely relying on this approach can lead to a dismissive attitude towards the text and its meanings (33). He proposes a more balanced approach that integrates both the “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” and the “Hermeneutics of Faith,” which involves approaching the text with respect and reverence for its meaning and purpose (Ricoeur 1976, 27). By balancing these two methods, the interpreter can critically examine the text’s motivations and power structures, while also appreciating its meaning and purpose in a deeper way. Ricoeur argues that a balanced approach that incorporates both elements is necessary for a full understanding of a text. Ricoeur (1976) suggests that interpretation requires temporarily setting aside one’s own biases and engaging in an open dialogue with the text to uncover new meanings (29). This process of suspension enables the interpreter to access the surplus of meaning within the text, which goes beyond its original intended meaning. Ricoeur’s “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” stresses the importance of questioning our own invincibility and recognizing the need for skepticism and self-reflection (Ricoeur 1976, 33). It allows us to not only understand the text but also the experiences and perspectives of others. Scott-Baumann (2018) raises the question of how we can trust others if we cannot trust our own understanding (52).

To some extent, self-doubt is helpful and perhaps required. Paul Ricoeur argues in *Oneself as Another* (1992) that selfhood is a product of our relationships



with others and our sense of self is constantly being reinterpreted and reshaped as a result. He views the self as a narrative shaped by our social and cultural context, and emphasizes the role of empathy in shaping our sense of self (Ricoeur 1992, 23, 125). Ricoeur critiques various philosophical theories of selfhood, including those of Descartes, Hegel, and Heidegger, and argues that these theories are inadequate because they do not fully consider the social and cultural context in which selfhood is formed (Ricoeur 1992, 79). He offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of selfhood and its relationship to otherness, highlighting the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of the self (Ricoeur 1992, 165). The phrase “It’s me here!” and “Here I stand” represents the attestation approach, which involves setting aside excessive distrust and having faith that one can be of assistance despite their own human limitations (Ricoeur 1992, 300–2).

In his book *Trust within Reason* (1998), Martin Hollis, investigates how the concept of generalized reciprocity affects decisions such as blood donation or assisting stranded students, due to unforeseen circumstances<sup>16</sup>. He argues that trust must be rooted in reason to be considered rational and justifiable. According to Hollis, trust must be supported by evidence, argument, and sound logic in order to be dependable and trustworthy. As an illustration, consider the scenario of a student considering donating blood during a school blood donation drive (Martin

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<sup>16</sup> Unforeseen circumstances can include natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes, earthquakes, floods), personal emergencies (e.g. illness, accidents, family emergencies), transportation failure (e.g. flight cancellations or delays), technological issues (e.g. power outages or system failures), and political/social upheavals (e.g. protests or civil unrest).

Hollis 1998). To make a rational decision, the student would need to trust that the blood donation event at school is secure and dependable. For this trust to be reasonable, the blood donation organizers must present clear and persuasive evidence that the process is safe, efficient, and hygienic. This could involve providing information on the qualifications and experience of the medical staff, the donor screening procedure, and the measures taken to ensure the safety and quality of the donated blood. By providing evidence and argumentation, the blood drive organizers can establish trust that is grounded in reason and encourage more students to donate. If the organizers fail to do so, the student may have less trust in the blood drive and be less likely to participate.

In “The Eroding Trust Report”, Dr. Clare Gerada (2016), the significance of trust in maintaining relationships between individuals and institutions is emphasized. The report notes that Dr. Gerada’s relationship with her Muslim patients as a General Practitioner was impacted by her requirement to report them if they exhibit signs of radicalization (Gerada 2016, 49). Dr. Gerada desires that individuals in similar circumstances should have faith in their own discretion and be able to differentiate between terrorism and everyday criticism (Ibid.). They should be able to identify statements that pose a threat to public safety from those that are just expressions of political or social views, such as discussions about the political situation for fellow Muslims, the situation in Syria, frustration about drone attacks, or the treatment of Palestinians. Dr Gerada believes that the decline of trust in the doctor-patient relationship can have a significant impact on the quality of care patients receive, and stresses the importance of professionals finding a balance between their responsibility to report potential dangers to public

safety and preserving the trust and confidentiality of their relationships with patients (Gerada 2016, 50). She also points out that there is no evidence of an increased risk in doctor's offices, communities, or on university campuses (Ibid.). Nevertheless, in this era of mistrust, it is believed that reporting suspected terrorists and possible radicalisation is necessary to be considered trustworthy, relying on a distorted interpretation of generalized reciprocity. There are two sets of norms: one for the majority and one for the minority. The latter group is often subjected to a "hermeneutics of suspicion," where they are viewed with distrust or skepticism by those in positions of power or privilege (Ricoeur 1992, 78).

To address this situation, Ricoeur (1992) suggests that minority individuals must embark on a self-reflection and interpretation journey, in order to establish their own identity and to counteract the ways in which they are perceived by others (78). It is important to note that Ricoeur's suggestion does not address radicalization or any form of extremist behavior, but rather focuses on how individuals can develop a more nuanced understanding of their identity and challenge the dominant narratives that are imposed upon them (Ricoeur 1992, 78). Through this process, they can comprehend themselves as "oneself as another," and gain a more intricate and accurate understanding of their place in the world. Despite the immense pressure on young British Muslim students to conform, they struggle and remain steadfast in creating their own path as British citizens. However, the deterioration of society's fabric is caused by the widespread, baseless assumption, for example, that hijabi women are harmful, eroding trust and stigmatizing diversity.

## **Islamophobia, Multiculturalism and Class**

In exploring the theme of Islamophobia in literature, it is important to acknowledge that not all the fiction writers in this research are of Muslim heritage. While some writers may have a more immediate and personal connection to issues of Islamophobia, it is also valuable to examine how non-Muslim writers approach this topic and to consider the different perspectives they may bring to the conversation. Including both Muslim and non-Muslim writers in this thesis enables a deeper understanding of the complexity of this issue and the many different ways in which it can manifest in literature and the broader cultural, political, and social contexts in which Islamophobia operates. Since 9/11, as this introduction has shown, the place of Muslims in the West has changed.

The term “Islamophobia” was first used in a French article in 1925, but it was not widely recognized until it was introduced as a concept in a report by the Runnymede Trust, a British organization specializing in issues related to ethnic and racial diversity, in 1997. This report defined Islamophobia as an irrational hostility towards Muslims or a fear of Islam that extends to most or all Muslims. It also includes the unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, as well as the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social activities (CBMI 2016, 1-4). The report’s evaluation of the situation for Muslims in the UK and Europe as a whole, was the reason for the introduction of the term. The report concluded that “anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so significantly and quickly in recent years that a new term is necessary” (CBMI 2016), to recognize and address this significant social issue. The term “Islamophobia” was created using the framework of more established terms such

as “xenophobia” and “anti-Semitism”. Anti-Muslim sentiment has grown considerably in Britain, fueled by various events including the *Satanic Verses* controversy, the first Gulf War, 9/11, the Madrid bombings, the London bombings, the Danish cartoon controversy, and the Charlie Hebdo event.<sup>17</sup> These incidents have resulted in Islamophobic acts such as physical assaults, verbal abuse, and property damage. As a result, British Muslims have experienced exclusion and are viewed as requiring integration into the national fabric (Shryock 2010, 5; Mechaï 2015). Following the publication of the Runnymede Trust Report, the term “Islamophobia” has become more widely recognized and used in both public and political arenas. However, some politicians and commentators have opposed the use of the term, arguing that they should be allowed to criticize “Islamists,” Muslims, or Islam without being accused of Islamophobia.

Daniel Pipes, an American writer and political commentator who holds neoconservative views and displays consistent bias against Islam and Muslims, rejects the idea of Islamophobia and argues that it is a way to shield extremist Muslims. Pipes (2005) challenges the notion that a “fear of Islam” is necessarily irrational, given that Muslims who act in the name of Islam are the primary source of worldwide aggression, both verbally and physically, towards both non-Muslims and Muslims themselves. He questions what exactly constitutes an “undue fear

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<sup>17</sup> The 2004 Madrid train bombings were a series of bombings targeting the commuter train system of Madrid, Spain on 11 March 2004—three days before Spain’s general elections (Shryock 2010, 4; Mechaï 2015). In 2015, two masked shooters launched an attack on the staff of the satirical French newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, killing 12 people and injuring 11 others (Shryock 2010, 4; Mechaï 2015).

of Islam” and wonders what the appropriate level of fear is (Pipes 2005). Instead of using the term “Islamophobia,” Muslims should engage in self-reflection and consider how Islamists have turned their religion into an ideology that glorifies violence and murder (Pipes 2005). According to him, Muslims should develop strategies to combat this totalitarianism and work towards redeeming their religion, rather than blaming those who fear their potential executioners (Pipes 2005). Those who criticize Islamophobia claim that criticisms of Islam, which include accusations of being anti-democratic, extremist, anti-Christian, oppressive to women, culturally backward, and seeking to establish Islamic law worldwide, are being incorrectly labeled as Islamophobic. However, this argument oversimplifies the issue and ignores the fact that many Muslims are presented as aggressors rather than victims of confrontation, contrary to commonly held beliefs in the West. The prevalent social anxiety about Islam in the West contradicts the unfounded views of these critics, as Muslims have a different understanding of their traditions and strongly disagree with the way they are represented (Larsson 2013, 156).

Scholars distinguish between valid criticisms of Muslims and their actions, which are necessary for healthy intercultural and interreligious relationships, and the prejudices of Islamophobia, which hinder genuine conversation and understanding (Green 2015, 24–5). However, due to the contentious nature of defining Islamophobia and in an effort to counter claims of generalization or denial of its existence, this section draws on additional definitions that support the discourse on Islamophobia. One such source is the European Islamophobia Report (EIR 2015), an annual report that was first introduced in 2015. This report

includes 25 national reports detailing the trends of Islamophobia in each respective country. The EIR report, which features the work of 37 scholars and utilizes qualitative data, defines Islamophobia as “anti-Muslim racism,” acknowledging that the etymology of a word does not necessarily reflect its complete meaning or usage, as illustrated by Anti-Semitism studies (EIR 2015, 91).

The term “Islamophobia” is now widely recognized both in academic circles and in society as a whole. It is important to note that not all criticism of Muslims or Islam is necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia refers specifically to a situation where a dominant group seeks to maintain or increase their power by defining a scapegoat, whether real or imagined, and excluding them from resources, rights, or the definition of a constructed “we” (Gada 2021, 92). This is achieved by creating a negative and generalized identity for all Muslims. EIR (2015) shows that the way in which Islamophobia is expressed can vary depending on the context, but it ultimately says more about the person exhibiting it than it does about Muslims or Islam (7). The Counter-Islamophobia Collective in France (CICF) defines Islamophobia as “discriminatory acts or violence against individuals or institutions based on their [perceived] affiliation with Islam, [...] provoked by ideologies and discourses that create hostility and rejection of Muslims” (EIR 2015, 91). This definition is important as it recognizes the complex social and political contexts in which Islamophobia operates, acknowledging that it is not simply a matter of personal prejudice but is often fueled by broader societal attitudes and discourses. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to address the systemic and structural dimensions of Islamophobia, rather than just

individual incidents of discrimination or violence. Overall, this definition can help inform efforts to combat Islamophobia and promote greater social inclusion and cohesion.

The Runnymede Trust Report identified eight common beliefs and attitudes that contribute to Islamophobia. The first belief is that Islam is seen as unchanging and monolithic. Secondly, it is perceived as having no shared values with other cultures and being completely separate. Thirdly, it is viewed as being barbaric, irrational, and sexist compared to the West. Fourthly, it is associated with violence, aggression, and support for terrorism. Fifthly, it is considered as a political ideology rather than a religion. Sixthly, any criticism of the West made by Muslims is disregarded. Seventhly, Islamophobia is used as a justification for discrimination against Muslims and their exclusion from mainstream society. Finally, anti-Muslim hostility is viewed as natural (EIR 2015, 54; Meer and Modood 2012, 131).

According to some scholars, the origin of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim propaganda can be traced back to the Crusades (Sheehi 2012, 42-34). However, others argue that it is a modern form of racism that emerged from the history of white America's racism and discomfort with people of colour, as well as the historical hatred of European Jews by Christian Europeans, which was later redirected towards Muslim immigrants (Sheehi 2012, 42-34). To some extent, this statement is accurate, but it oversimplifies and dismisses the well-documented history of animosity and discord between Christians and Muslims. However, it is true that the transition from anti-Semitism to Islamophobia in contemporary times has had severe consequences not just for minority Muslim communities, but also



for the democratic foundations of European nations. The British fascist movement after World War II was not just about hatred towards minorities; it was an ideology that aimed to provide an alternative explanation for social upheaval and the exploitation of the working class, distinct from that offered by left-wing groups (Gada 2021, 93). The far-right movement portrayed immigration from African and Asian countries as a contamination of British identity and a betrayal of British survival, and attributed this to a Jewish conspiracy (Gada 2021, 93).

The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, a document fabricated by the tsarist secret police, purported to demonstrate how Jews deliberately and extensively manipulated and dominated world events for their own benefit (Gada 2021, 93). While racism against immigrants and minorities was a popular way of attracting young supporters to the far-right cause, anti-Semitism was an essential ideological element that could move them into a more visible arena, since it was believed that only Jews could be the main players “in the secret source of economic and political power that had weakened and corrupted the nation” (Kundnani 2014, 242).

In contrast to the UK, the US Islamophobic far-right operates through networks of bloggers, pundits, activists, and protagonists who have a strong influence on public opinion through various media outlets. These individuals have managed to build successful careers, receiving ample funding to promote their biased beliefs on university campuses, public forums, and various social media networks. As a result, many people are now consciously manufacturing and exploiting the fear of Islam in ways that were previously unseen in mainstream political and media circles (Green 2015, 169). This group of individuals who hold

significant sway over public opinion has been dubbed “professional Islamophobia” (Green 2015, 169). This term mainly refers to conservative politicians, far-right activists and bloggers, and even ex-Muslims who have built highly profitable careers out of demonizing Muslims and Arabs. This group, as Nathan Lean describes, is known as the “Islamophobia Industry” (Lean 2012) or the “Islamophobia Network” according to the Center for American Progress (Ali et al. 2011). Those who benefit financially from professional Islamophobia have influential political, media, and publishing platforms through which they perpetuate and intensify unfounded Western fears towards the Muslim Other.

Peter Morey (2018b) considers the term “Islamophobia” in more complex and nuanced ways by critically surveying fictional dramatisations of cultural differences and conflicts that take their cue from current anti-Muslim prejudice. By means of a contextualized close reading of a number of Anglophone literary texts from around the world, Morey (2018b) reveals how literary responses to the supposed “clash of civilisations” have been nuanced and highly critical (2). He discusses a variety of positions “from the avowedly secular to the religious, and from texts that appear to underwrite Western assumptions of cultural superiority to those that recognize and critique neoimperial impulses” (Morey 2018b, 3). He proposes key elements of what one might call “Muslim writing”, “attending to qualities such as ambiguity, stereotyping, the effect of polyphony, responses to the burden of representation that falls on minority writers” (Morey 2018b, 3). Based on what Spivak has called “the information retrieval on dealing with literature of the culturally different subject”, Morey argues that this approach creates what is called “a market for the Muslim” (Morey 2018b, 8). All these

features should be brought into play to explore new ways of understanding literary texts, such as the ones selected for this study, and their response to Islamophobia.

As cautioned by Morey, this thesis seeks to avoid relying on reductive judgements that render the literary text as either sympathetic towards Muslims or not; this is because the political, cultural and literary relationship is never straightforward. According to Morey (2018b), within “the contemporary critical and receptive context is the demand that writing by cultural Muslim background authors be “representative”—something that has implications for form” (6). An obvious and fairly recent example is the controversy about the depiction of the Bengali community in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003). The novel offers a bird’s-eye view of a culturally isolated community in London, “something that united protesters against it and literati who sprang to its defence” (Morey 2018b, 6). Obviously, in reference to the Muslim market, texts that engage more directly with “the existing political articulation of the “Muslim Problem”, containing the right elements and offering some kind of “authentic” pseudo-anthropological insight will be published, circulated, reviewed and critiqued” as much as they reproduce cultural viewpoints (Ibid.).

Indeed, they offer direct and straightforward insights into the private side of Muslim life, an experience that has garnered recent praise and attention. It seems certain that the critical success of novels such as Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) is attributed to the central goal of explaining “the Muslim problem” of honour killing. However, while the novel has been received as either fairly or unfairly portraying South Asian and Islamic communities, *Maps for Lost*

*Lovers* (2004) is incapable of moving beyond the binary of “minority communitarianism against individual freedom” (Ahmed 2015, 177). For instance, even though the novel relates the lives of Muslim women, victimhood is the only role they play; they either comply “with the oppressive misogynistic practices of the community” (Ahmed 2015, 171), or withdraw from the culture and community itself, which means that the novel does not consider the possibility for an innovative British South Asian Muslim identity that works against oppression. Consequently, exploring the possibilities of a political Muslim (but not Islamist) identity becomes unlikely.

In *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (2015), Rehana Ahmed argues that the attacks on policies of multiculturalism regarding British Muslims are “a cipher for the excesses of multiculturalism” (8). She attempts to “complicate and challenge” such attacks as destructive to secular liberalism by examining texts that enable her to reveal “the centrality of class to multicultural politics in Britain” (Ahmed 2015, 10). By developing a materialist approach, Ahmed presents a persuasive case for the recognition of “capitalist structures of power and oppression” in the perception of Muslims in multicultural Britain (Ahmed 2015, 11). She argues that since the 1989 *Satanic Verses* controversy, a reductive dichotomy of secular freedom versus religious oppression has been established. Viewing the “New Atheist” reading of British South Asian fiction as emblematic of freedom of speech, individuality, rationality versus totalitarian, intolerant, and oppressive Islam, Ahmed examines the degree to which contemporary British South Asian writers of Muslim origin exceed “liberal secularist parameters” in their representation of British Muslims and

multiculturalism ( Ahmed 2015, 21). Ahmed does not aim only to complement the work of British South Asian texts in terms of going beyond secular liberalism, she also pushes the field of diasporic British South Asian fiction towards “a materialist, post-secular engagement with multicultural Britain” (Ibid.). Inspired by Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production* (1996), which maintains that literary discourse is “a contestation of language” rather than “a representation of reality”, Ahmed focuses on what the selected texts in her study do not say—and cannot say—in an attempt to disclose the limits of the speech of multiculturalism and Muslims in Britain, therefore elucidating the ideological anxieties present in the social context (16–17).

Ahmed (2015) examines the literary production of British South Asian Muslims and the concentration on the role of class regarding the formation of British South Asian identities and cultures and the politics of multiculturalism, as well as the historicised approach these works use to represent current debates and controversies (20). In other words, she links the literary representations of religion with the material conditions of being working-class and Muslims. Instead of examining religion separately, she takes the wider view that religious and class identities are “not mutually exclusive but intersected and overlapped”, connecting class consciousness with religious solidarity (Ibid. 35). The presence of multicultural subjects (ethnic minorities) who intrinsically and inescapably embody multiple cultural positions challenge an exclusionist ethos. Salman Rushdie, for example, describes those like himself, the product of multiple cultural origins, as “the bastard [children] of history” (Bammer 1994, 158). The characters in the examined novels do not lose or abandon fixed identities; instead, they

experience a movement that transcends borders and connects to national, international, local, and global identities, norms, and practices in unanticipated ways.

This idea speaks to Stuart Hall's (1990) concept of culture as diasporic, which registers the fact that ideas of essential unity based on blood, land or even nationality are, at best, fictions that people use to think of themselves as a single community: "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points or suture, which are made within the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence, but a positioning" (326). Subject positions, such as British South Asian, constantly reinvent themselves and their identities by mixing, or in Hall's (1990) terms, "creolising" various cultural elements and influences from Asia, Europe and the rest of the world congregated in Britain (233). As Hall summarises, there is "no one-size-fits-all" cultural identity for them, but rather a multiplicity of different cultural identities that share both essential similarities and differences, all of which should be accepted and respected (Ibid.). In this sense, British South Asian identities become a concept of intervention against the established categories used to control people and limit their identities by notions deployed by the state (elites) which, as a result, influence social trust.

Modood (2007) advocates a reinvigoration of national symbolism in Britain in the light of a "plural, dispersed, and dialogical Britishness which, nonetheless, sits within a framework of vibrant, dynamic national narratives and the ceremonies and rituals which give expression to a national identity" (146– 149). When addressing arguments regarding British identity, it is necessary to understand which style of Britishness is formed and how the politics of

multiculturalism motivate British identity, along with respect for cultural diversity. As stated by Gavin Barwell, a Conservative backbencher, “We need to promote difference but need to have something that binds us together into British society [...] This is where we have “gone wrong”” (Taylor-Gooby and Waite 2013, 13). This process includes the promotion of fundamental political values, such as tolerance, respect for democracy and the jurisdiction of the law, even though such values are recognized as shared with other societies. Similarly, James Clappison (Conservative, HASC) states that it is important to present something that brings everyone together, to feel the same allegiances, and to feel pride in the same things (Taylor-Gooby and Waite 2013, 13). However, this type of promotion of national identity is controversial. Clappison states, “I don’t think we should be ashamed to have pride in our national culture and the symbols [...], for example, of the armed forces [...] the royal family [...] and other symbols of our national life” (Taylor-Gooby and Waite 2013, 13). This stance is opposed by a liberal discussion in relation to “constitutional patriotism”, which emphasizes the need to form a political attachment to the norms and values of a pluralistic liberal democratic constitution rather than a national culture or cosmopolitan society.

Müller (2009) argues that societies cannot achieve social cohesion solely through “cold” institutions like the armed forces, which are prevalent in many societies. Instead, social cohesion must be specific to the society in focus. When regarding national symbols as the basis for social cohesion, together with respect for diversity, there is a focus on the scope of the classical liberal understanding of citizenship. This thesis aligns itself with the combined perspective that emphasizes individual freedom in terms of following any way of life if it does not

damage the rights of others. This approach can create disparities when it is necessary to identify new values and beliefs that are external to the cultural choices of supposedly free individuals, and ensure that these new values contribute to or align with national cohesion in a way that is consistent with democratic institutions. On balance, social cohesion evolves more quickly in everyday life than through law or implemented policies, and this idea is challenged by many issues, such as social segregation and forced marriages.

The home of ethnic origin is marked by “arranged or forced marriages, religiosity” and is seen to be set against the “modern, individualist, western culture” that allows freedom, especially among the “youth subcultures” (Rattansi 2011, 133–134). With or without this identity vacuum, the subjects of the second generation forge numerous new identities “with a bewildering mixture of religions, class and youth cultures, musical tastes and fashion statements”, as seen in Malkani’s *Londonstani* (Ibid.). The array of these new identities is apparent in the novel where the rudeboys, in Malkani’s view, transform “an ethnic identity into a youth subculture that exists in equilibrium with mainstream society and other subcultures (as represented by the word Desi)” (Malkani 2006b). Being subject to cultural differences, as well as to the politics of marginality, are not the only forces exerted upon these individuals. It is exceedingly complicated because they are part of “the era of ever-expanding transnationalism” (Rattansi 2011, 160), as well as being subject to competing state and society-led discourses, as described above. The idea of a distinct, complete, “other” culture versus a dominant culture is becoming invalid or inappropriate since “the interactions between migrants, their descendants and their previous home countries are



becoming more complex” (Ibid.). With heightened globalisation, marginal identities are transforming and “people are becoming more adept at code-switching between cultures, lifestyles and languages” (Ibid.). These irregular processes are based on uneven and conflicting factors, such as “class and levels of income, gender and age” (Ibid.), confirming Rattansi’s belief that it is becoming necessary and possible “to move from this transnational, cosmopolitan phase” to a “genuinely dialogic interculturalism within state borders” (Ibid.). The past perspectives of a nation- state should be replaced (or enhanced) by views that can accommodate the more complex patterns of global interconnection.

### **Negotiating Home and Identity**

The interaction between home and personal identity is one of the most pervasive, and probably the most significant, challenges that influences multicultural subjectivity. Identity cannot be connected to a particular geographic location and is embodied within a culture. When a person is born in one place but moves to another place, the basic sense of home becomes ambiguous and determining where home is becomes problematic. When the second or later generations are born in the host country and not fully accepted, the idea of home becomes contested. As a result, individuals are unable to identify with many aspects of society because of their colour, race, class, religion or cultural history. It then becomes necessary to re-define the concept of home as it is conceived by members of multicultural societies in the twenty- first century. Because of the formation of new, liminal, multicultural spaces, it is no longer valid to limit home to a specific set of cultural practices within a geographic locale.

Avtar Brah's concept of "homing" suggests that diaspora creates a tension between the desire for a home and a critique of fixed origins (Brah 1996, 192-193). Diaspora involves a strong longing for one's homeland, while creating a sense of place is specific to the actual physical location of one's dwelling or community. Blunt and Dowling identify three important areas of investigation in the critical geography of home: (1) the material and imaginative aspects of home, (2) the politicization of home in relation to power and identity, and (3) an appreciation of the multi-scalar nature of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 22). Home is theorized by Gowans as an organizing principle of inclusions and exclusions, particularly for populations that have not completely settled in one place (Gowans 2003, 428). Additionally, the transnational entanglements of home examine people's relationships with their kin in their countries of origin, such as through hometown associations, remittances, and the politics of obligation. These notions of home are intimately tied to a sense of belonging, as seen in the material expressions of diaspora, such as through food and home decorations (Mohan 2004).

Diasporas are often characterized by an idealized longing for a return to a home that is often considered mythical or imagined, due to their geographical existence away from it (Anderson 1983; Golan 2002; Blunt 2003; George 2003; Gowans, 2003; Yeh 2005; Veronis 2007). Yeh (2005) provides a striking example of this phenomenon in her work on Tibetans abroad, where three groups of Tibetans who arrived in the USA at the same time had different relationships to their homeland depending on the moment in which they or their families left Tibet. She describes the emergence of an alternative imagined geography of homeland,

particularly among a generation of Tibetans who have never seen or experienced their actual homeland. This imagined geography has led to Dharamsala, the political capital of Tibetans in exile and the seat of the Dalai Lama, supplanting Lhasa as "the center of Tibetan diasporic geography" (Yeh 2005, 662).

The creation of place is a crucial aspect of understanding diaspora populations who yearn for a distant homeland and project this longing onto a physical site where they reside. Scholars such as Marden (1997), Pascual-de-Sans (2004), Blunt (2005), and Dodman (2007) emphasize the intimate connection between a sense of place and a sense of self. Marden (1997) argues that a new geography is emerging, one that is more relevant to the interaction between the global and the local and is about the reconstitution of identity and place. Similarly, Pascual-de-Sans (2004) rejects a totalizing view of globalization, stating that the presence of place in people's lives persists despite attempts at globalization. Pascual-de-Sans uses this conceptualization of place to ground the geographical mobility of populations in historically contingent times and locations, emphasizing that migration is a social event that takes place in time, rather than a discrete movement from one place to another (349-350).

In *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) discusses the imaginary properties of home and draws on the concept of "imaginary homelands". The term is coined by Salman Rushdie in an essay first published in 1982 (1991), which espouses an anti-essentialist view of place. He suggests that "imaginary homelands" are basically the imagined creations of immigrants seeking to understand the home they left behind. According to Rushdie, they reconstruct these places to compensate for what they have lost in their real,

physical life—a process he claims he goes through himself when he writes about India, Pakistan and London. According to George (1999), home is a “desire” for an unchanging, rooted identity, and realistic fiction manifests this by positioning individuals between “the realities and the idealisations” that have given “home” such an evocative connotation (George 1999, 2). George argues that the personal and social notions of home have shifted dramatically, a shift that can be extrapolated and categorised even if it is not completely identified by the fiction writers who explore the various aspects of home for these individuals. For example, when people settle in a different place for an extended time, their self-identity is influenced by new practices and experiences, their identity may be formed from fragments, or they may feel divided between the originary and the new host culture. Home might become imaginary or merely desired, especially when it is an amalgamation of the current reality and a variety of distant practices from the past home. Consequently, the concept of the originary home might gain more power in the absence of access to the place itself, and this imaginary construct further complicates the intersection between home and identity (George 1999, 2). Its influence on the individual may increase even as its concrete qualities decrease. The imaginary home becomes problematic because the multicultural subject attempts to reference something inaccessible or the imaginary home serves as a source of alienation. This homeland may be comprised of fragmented and erratic memories because of the distance enforced on the individual. The influence of the imaginary home is perhaps crucial in understanding the multicultural subject in terms of identity formation.

To work through the relationship between these conceptualizations of home

and how they impact on one's identity, I make use of the concept of "transformation", a term Stuart Hall uses in relation to diaspora (1990, 235). According to Hall, "diaspora identities constantly produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew through transformation and difference" in a multicultural context (Ibid.). Reflecting on this term helps to challenge the common binary of submission or transgression whilst being cognisant of the unequal power relations that continue to structure British society. This thesis deals with the concept of transformation at multiple levels. For instance, it explores notions of home and identity in Malkani's *Londonstani* and Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* through three interrelated concepts: neoliberal multiculturalism, the principle of submission and acceptance, and self-transformation. The first concept is used to underscore the fact that the universalist multicultural policies guiding geopolitical and material conditions are in a continuous flux. When failing to see this, as Yaqin and Morey argue, the specific concept of "multiculturalism" used by politicians and community leaders produces a twisted and questionable discourse that renders cross-cultural dialogue almost impossible (Yaqin and Morey 2011, 2). In her book, *Represent and Destroy* (2011), Melamed introduced the term "neoliberal multiculturalism" to demonstrate how these ideas create the illusion of eradicating racism. In addition to lacking accuracy and impartiality, the statements made by politicians and the mainstream media about wanting to "engage" with Muslims, while simultaneously utilizing stereotyping and essentializing language for their own agendas, hinder the possibility of cross-cultural communication. Certainly, civic and political discourse fix national identity, threaten the understanding of British Muslim minorities and increase the instability of law, especially for Muslims. For this reason, Yaqin and Morey (2011)

state: “National security,” “strategic interests,” “multiculturalism,” “integration,” “preventing terrorism”—in fact, all the buzzwords of contemporary political life do little more than obscure a chronically one-sided dialogue that Muslims are invited to join but not change, or forever remain outside the boundaries of civil debate, doomed to be spoken for and represented, but never to speak themselves (2).

The reinscription of such terms are what pushed Gilroy (2004) to introduce the idea of conviviality to focus on diversity as a lived experience. He hopes that conviviality will arise at the point when multiculturalism breaks down. What is attractive about this term is not merely “the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance” (Gilroy 2004, xi). It offers a new context and framework for “their empty, interpersonal rituals, which started to mean different things in the absence of any strong belief in absolute or integral races” (Ibid.). Most importantly, it presents “a measure of distance from the pivotal term “identity”, which has proved to be such an ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity, and politics” (Ibid.). The openness that allows conviviality also “makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification” (Ibid.). Thus, “the umbrella term multicultural (state) has the power to subsume everything from diasporas to ethnic minorities and first-nation peoples [so that] it makes, at least when co-opted with the establishment, non-generalist theories [...] irrelevant” (Mishra 2007, 134).

Secondly, in developing the principle of “submission and acceptance” into what I call the “the imposed self”, the second- generation characters address the submission and acceptance of the most negative elements of the identities that others impose upon them. This section shows how avoiding the collapse of an

imposed identity opens (or at least prevents the closing of) the path to new elements of identity that might ultimately empower the multicultural subject. Thirdly, “self-transformation”, as previously mentioned, propels the multicultural subject beyond the restrictive binary understanding of the immigrant’s experience and its fictional renditions by challenging the common binary of submission or transgression in terms of home and identity. In examining the transformation of ideas of the British South Asian generational memory from mostly embodied to fully mediated memory (i.e. from communicative memory to cultural memory), the research refers to the concept of the “memory of race and racism” and argues that immigration and loss can relate to current race-related issues in Britain (Jan Assmann 2011). During times of mnemonic transformation, which are primarily generational, changes become particularly attuned to issues of memory and generation. Mnemonic transformation also assumes that British South Asians are no longer exclusively migratory or diasporic, prompting a need to reexamine the distinctions between generations. Bearing the residual history of migration in mind, along with its experience of violence and the resultant trauma embodied in the family history, it may be possible to bridge these categories.

Although the case studies for this thesis show a tendency towards assimilation within a multicultural society, they express a clear distinction between the generations, as well as between the immigrant and the second-generation subject. The predicament of the second-generation British South Asian, born in Britain but with ties to the country of ethnic origin through cultural heritage, is sometimes even more difficult than the position of the first-generation migrant (Abbas 2019). It is also more likely that such a person will take on an

innovative identity that does not necessarily fit an existing mould or fail in the attempt to do so. This idea is clearly animated in the debate that Jas and Arun have about culture in *Londonstani*. Just before the debate, the protagonist, Jas, has formed an almost hybrid identity, but he switches allegiances to align himself with essentialist ideas. Jas glorifies his own “desi” subculture and regards hybrid cultures as tainted. Conversely, Arun, who perceives the two of them as an outcome of hybridity, commits suicide, suggesting that becoming hybrid in Bhabha’s sense or a “cross- cultural navigator” does not always guarantee survival.

The authors studied in this thesis demonstrate that gaining a sense of identity is never assured for British South Asians. Moreover, the narrative form contributes much to the authors’ implicit statements regarding the difficulty or impossibility of forming a new identity. Some of the authors studied in the thesis leave the reader with a great sense of doubt about notions of integration and adjustment. They portray characters who may have unprecedented freedom to create a sense of home based on a variety of memories, social realities, and personal and collective concerns. Despite the observed similarities, the heterogeneity of the characters portrayed in the novels analysed indicates the numerous— and indeed, nearly infinite —possibilities for home and identity formation in a multicultural context. Gautam Malkani and Guy Gunaratne’s novels offer ample ground for comparison in terms of voice, style and intended audience. In *Londonstani*, Malkani’s comic slant ensures that the characters adopt strange ways of life, some of which are dysfunctional and eventually ineffective in creating a sense of home.



Gunaratne's debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*, portrays a multicultural subject whose navigation through various personal and cultural influences results in a novel and creative formation of identity and a sense of home, tackling a number of difficulties pertaining to the representation of "other" (particularly South Asian) cultures. Gunaratne offers us a variety of characters, some of whom achieve a sense of belonging while others remain in competing positions that constrain them. Relevant to both these works, as well as certain others, is the distinction that some critics make between the "immigrant genre" (i.e. narratives dealing primarily with characters who have voluntarily immigrated) and novels dealing with characters who have lost their original homes.

The term "immigrant genre" is sometimes used to refer to novels that center on immigrants, but the themes explored within these stories can often be profound, particularly in relation to losing one's home or sense of belonging. In his book *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss* (1999), Andre Aciman combines these two ideas, arguing that exile can mean more than simply losing one's home; it can also mean being unable to find another or to even think of another (21). While novels within the "immigrant genre" do often explore the theme of achieving a sense of belonging, there are noticeable differences between generations. Furthermore, there is an increasing likelihood for such immigrants to either attain a sense of belonging or fail to do so. As Stuart Hall (1990) notes, displaced individuals often feel compelled to constantly "produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew through transformation and difference" (235).

Such transformations and differences will be the primary focus of this

thesis. Multicultural subjects take a variety of paths to achieve a sense of belonging, and some are anticipated in the novels examined here. The narratives by Malkani, Gunaratne and Shamsie demonstrate the formation of home and identity in a more subtle way in their expression. Characters are displaced and experience a sense of alienation, and selectively adapt to elements and values that were foreign to them at the outset. Often this is not a rejection of fundamental traditional and religious values but rather a subtle adjustment. Again, the impact of the home of ethnic origin constructed through memory is shown to contribute to the individual's sense of home. In contrast, the protagonists in novels by Aslam, Sahota, and Hamid highlight the potential shortcomings of multiculturalism and identities that are viewed as culturally diverse. The main characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers* are unable to attain a sense of belonging, exposing the vulnerabilities and fractures inherent in culturally diverse identities.

Postcolonial consciousness prompts a reassessment of identity and encourages the critic to challenge the dominant narrative. However, in doing so, it asserts that it moves beyond ambiguity and towards a more comprehensive expression of truth. This truth encompasses the cultural identities of both the dominant and the Other, which are often confined to their separate and, at times, conflicting roles. Each cultural identity claims its own version of truth, and postcolonialism asserts that truth is shaped by the narrator's experiences and perceptions. According to Cundy (1996), colonialism disrupts a country's historical narrative. To illustrate this disruption, magical realism presents alternative realities and various versions of history, as stated in the following quote: "Magical realism, with its juxtaposition of alternative realities and

alternating versions of history, is a way of figuring out this disruption” (Cundy, 1996, 97).

Therefore, magical realism necessitates an interrogation of the narrative. Understanding that it is not a representation of an ultimate truth or reality but merely a version of them, the critic is urged to investigate the reasons behind the way in which the narrative is told. Novels with “magical realist” practices (e.g. fragmentation, hidden (illusionary) meanings and self-authoring) call into question what Norridge (2015) terms the “politics of the possible” or what one decides to believe is likely or not. Some novels discussed here (*Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Exit West* and *The Year of The Runaways*) lean towards combining some magical and the realist practices.

This thesis builds on the literary and cultural critique of multiculturalism by examining the representations of British South Asian identities and the individuals who are attempting to obtain a sense of identity in a new place, often within a dominant culture that is fundamentally different from the immigrant individual’s culture of origin. The individual, as described in fictional literary narratives is in a liminal position, both related to and distinct from the dominant society. The process is carried out in response to a sense of belonging to a physical or metaphorical “home,” or the lack of such belonging. Race, class, home and identity are central to the entire body of work examined in this thesis, and the sense of belonging that some of the characters achieve stems from unique cultural combinations. Many factors impede a sense of belonging, particularly concerns such as class and sexuality, as well as race. Nevertheless, if the liminal characters are able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them, there

is a sense that they may find a place in society. This is perhaps where Gunaratne differs from Aslam. Gunaratne seems to argue for the possibility of achieving a sense of belonging through presenting characters who make the decision to integrate from a western perspective, regardless that it is regarded as a form of betrayal by some members in the minority community. In contrast, Aslam's depictions of subjects are problematic and have been criticized for perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing negative perceptions of marginalized groups. For example, in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the portrayal of Muslim characters as repressed and backward reinforces orientalist stereotypes, while the portrayal of South Asian women as submissive and obedient reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. In addition, the novel's depictions of violence and honor killings perpetuate negative perceptions of Pakistani culture. These problematic representations not only reinforce harmful stereotypes but also hinder the possibility of achieving a sense of belonging for marginalized individuals.

When examining home and identity, three themes that represent the nation must be considered: locating, describing and stabilising the characters' identities. Said (1997) notes that the reader's task is to recognize that "all interpretations are [...] situational [...]; today Islam is defined negatively as that with which the west is at odds, and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam" (89). The nature of this framework is what Yaqin and Morey explore in *Framing Muslims* (2011). They are "concerned with tracing this encircling discursive boundary as it appears in political rhetoric, journalism, and popular media texts" (Morey 2018b, 4). However, in *Islamophobia and the Novel* (2018b), Morey further explains that a type of framing can be seen at work in

literature, too. Literary framing takes place on three levels. First, any act of writing in and of itself is an act of framing; [...] bringing together and accentuating themes, issues, and characters as well as dramatising the consequences of the collision of different ideas (Ibid.).

This is especially the case in multicultural fictions that explore the relationships between groups with different traditional backgrounds and value systems. Such fictions “always occupy a terrain warring and hierarchically unequal discourses” (Ibid.). That act of framing occurs within a larger framework (political, media and journalistic discourses) that regards the key issues that define intercultural relations. In the case of Muslims, the key issues are related to “the lack of integration,” gender inequality and a propensity for “radicalisation” (Ibid.). These two acts of framing— “the textual and contextual”—are considered essential to their “production, reception, and recognition as literary” (Ibid.). Finally, “the third-level frames certain types of utterance in which those key “Muslim” issues become central to the way texts are understood, grouped and reviewed” (Ibid.). The identification of an individual or a group of people is usually based on their relationships and their experience with the existence of the Other, so otherness becomes a tool to identify oneself.

Again, according to Hall (1990), “diaspora identities constantly produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew through transformation and difference” in a multicultural context (235). The initial assumption is that the goal of the characters is to achieve a sense of home and form a collective and personal identity that does not necessarily conform to any existing model to achieve participation and agency in diverse, multicultural societies. The aim is to create a balance between

these aspects, acknowledging cultural hegemony while valuing each individual's unique qualities. Otherwise, this examination of identity may have a propensity to ignore individual differences. Worse, it may also restrict or devalue an individual's ability to redefine their relationship with power and form a sense of identity. The best example for this identity-formation is seen in *Londonstani*, where the rudeboys transform "an ethnic identity into a youth subculture" (Malkani 2006b). While exploring the possibility that identification with the originary home may serve as the foundation for new identities, this thesis examines the sustainability of such identities and whether they can be accommodated within an existing model in a multicultural context.

Literally or symbolically, home and identity as perpetually changing concepts necessitate a re-examination within the multicultural context while touching upon the current policies that govern the ethnically charged enclaves in which the selected novels are set. Postcolonial inquiry, which can be preoccupied with the loss of identity and the marginalisation of minority subjects, must transcend and re-examine these concerns in the contemporary contexts of multicultural, cosmopolitan or pluralistic sites. To substantiate these ideas in terms of multiculturalism by exploring the literary, political, legal and cultural debates that address multiculturalism in contemporary Britain, this thesis focuses on the methods in which multicultural discourse of race and class in a narrative may act productively and lead to a new understanding of the formation of British South Asian and Muslim identities influenced by contemporary British multiculturalism. Through this process, this thesis examines the discursive boundaries of contemporary British multiculturalism. In each of the following

chapters, the discussion of the primary texts will consider aspects of the British South Asian home and identity across a range of social contexts.

In Chapter One, I examine Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and its critical analysis of the ongoing public debate on diversity and assimilation in the UK. The novel comprises multiple layers that have implications for both individuals and the community, presenting not only a tale of a mysterious honour crime but also a narrative about establishing a sense of home, identity, and integration for South Asian Muslim immigrants in England. As such, *Maps for Lost Lovers* offers a portrayal of the lived experience of being an outsider in a place and occupying a non-assimilating minority within the broader context of the British multicultural state. In this chapter, I intervene in the ongoing discussion on cultural identity in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, and I argue that the novel presents a personalized and liberal perspective on the failure of multiculturalism in a community that is partially secular and partially religious. My argument is based on the assertion that Aslam's portrayal of British South Asian identity, especially those with Muslim heritage, aligns with classical liberal principles of multiculturalism, which emphasize assimilation. According to Green et al. (2009), proponents of assimilation-based multiculturalism regard cultural identity as a barrier to individual freedom, as it implies that one's culture determines their identity instead of personal choice (21). As a result, I seek to demonstrate that Aslam's portrayal of identity constitutes an extreme critique of multiculturalism, as he views identity as an internalized process that should not be influenced by cultural communities. However, I also recognize that Aslam's contribution lies primarily in the realm of art, where the voices of the most marginalized members

of society can still be heard (Moore 2009, 17).

In Chapter Two, this idea is central to the discussion of Sunjeev Sahota's novel, *The Year of the Runaways* (2015), which explores the journey of runaways from the north of India in the Global South to the north of England in the Global North, demonstrating how giving attention to the center allows for a reimagining of the periphery. In this chapter, I critique the notions of "precariousness" and "precarity", as well as "cartographic anxiety", in relation to *The Year of The Runaways*. I draw on Judith Butler's distinction between "precariousness" and "precarity". Precariousness refers to the corporeal fragility of all beings, including the rich, whereas precarity specifically refers to the fragility imposed on the destitute, dispossessed, and those threatened by conflicts, wars, and natural disasters (Butler 2009, xvii, xxv, 25). I argue that these notions affect the lives of people who move across countries and social structures and can serve as a shorthand for power hierarchies between the Global North and Global South. Additionally, I consider how Sahota complicates and troubles this binary by relocating the novel's protagonists from North India to Northern England. This shift demonstrates how critical attention to the centre enables a reimagining of the periphery. I argue that the characters' experience of identity formation requires defining themselves in relation to the Other (cf. Bhabha 1994, 63). Although incorporating marginalized identities into fictional depictions of multiculturalism is a positive step, it is insufficient if the "image" of the Other continues to be metaphysically connected to the dominant culture, leading to concerns about social trust.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the relationship between multiculturalism and trust



in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). Specifically, I examine the crisis of trust between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the UK, and how civic and political discourses can fix national identity and threaten the construction of British minorities, ultimately increasing the instability of law for Muslims. I argue that the surveillant gaze fixates on Muslim minorities and stigmatizes them as "the cryptic other", limiting them to a specific role and frame. I draw on Mondal's analysis of this figure, tracing its presence through various forms of discrimination and prejudice, including antisemitism, anti-communism, and Islamophobia. Though examining *Home Fire*, I seek to demonstrate that liberal discourses often only shift the focus of surveillance, neglecting the underlying issues within liberal social orders that continue to produce racial imaginaries and further marginalize minorities.

In Chapter Four, I examine *Exit West* (2017), with a focus on counterterrorism and the colonial formations of sovereignty reflected in policing and surveillance. I argue that blindly following government guidance on radicalization leads to increased suspicion towards Muslims. The concept of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" introduced by Paul Ricoeur, suggests that interpretation is influenced by the interpreter's biases, beliefs, and perspectives. This process reduces social trust and dehumanizes those who must carry out this duty, resulting in a "diminished self" for public employees and law enforcement officials (Scott-Baumann 2018). Similar to Scott-Baumann, I support a balanced approach to the interpretation of literature. However, I specifically apply this approach in my analysis of *Exit West*. I recognize the limitations of skepticism but also believe in the importance of allowing for understanding and gaining insight through interpretation. By showing how "trust within reason" can challenge the

“hermeneutics of suspicion” and encourage diverse interpretations of texts and ideas, I make the case, using *Exit West* as an example, that governments in developed countries should prioritize developing strategies to accommodate refugees instead of opposing their presence.

Chapter Five of the thesis delves into current debates surrounding the application of multiculturalism and neoliberalism in relation to two works of literature, *Londonstani* (2006) and *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). I examine the concepts of home and identity through three key ideas: “neoliberal multiculturalism”, “self-transformation”, and “submission and acceptance”. The first concept, “neoliberal multiculturalism”, introduced by Jodi Melamed (2011) suggests that universalist multicultural policies guiding geopolitical and material conditions are constantly evolving. However, the specific use of the term “multiculturalism” by politicians and community leaders creates a problematic discourse that hinders cross-cultural dialogue. The second concept, “self-transformation”, challenges the binary understanding of the immigrant experience and its fictional representations by propelling the multicultural subject beyond restrictive categories of submission or transgression in terms of home and identity. Finally, the chapter develops the principle of “submission and acceptance” into “the imposed self” to examine the second-generation character’s acceptance of negative elements of the identities that others impose upon them. In this section I discuss how avoiding the factors that contribute to the imposition of identity can create opportunities for the multicultural subject to develop new aspects of their identity that can ultimately empower them. This process has been examined by critics like Gilroy (2001, 2004) and Wood and Landry (2008) who suggest that identity evolves through intercultural

engagement and interaction, especially among young people in urban settings. As conventional norms do not dictate behaviour and lifestyle, this chapter argues that individual engagement and choice within and across cultures shape identity. This type of interaction can give rise to a distinct British South Asian culture and promote the evaluation of convivial and cosmopolitan identities (Gilroy 2004; Vertovec 2007; Modood 2012). In this section I conclude that while state intervention should be limited and individual choice encouraged, there must be a balance achieved. Otherwise, as Joopek notes, it may result in a crisis of multiculturalism (2009, 469).

In conclusion, the experiences of British Asians are deeply influenced by the context of living in societies where multiculturalism is the norm. While some arguments about the impacts of colonial interactions in the past may still hold validity, it is important to scrutinize them and recognize that the experiences of British Asians are shaped by a complex range of factors that go beyond just historical factors. For example, contemporary issues such as discrimination, identity politics, and globalization also have significant impacts on the experiences of British Asians in multicultural societies. Therefore, a more nuanced and multifaceted approach is needed to fully understand the experiences of British Asians and their place in multicultural societies. This is a field of research that is rapidly evolving, and the thesis through its set of case studies of British South Asian literature contributes to it by establishing a connection between the concepts of home and identity in the multicultural subject. Specifically, it addresses issues of representation in British South Asian fiction, and the ways in which such fiction engages with home, identity and belonging in relation to factors such as race, class, religion, and multiculturalism. By examining

representations of multicultural subjects in fiction, this thesis offers a unique perspective for social and political analysis that is relevant to the current global climate. Through the lens of literature, this thesis explores the complex experiences and identities of multicultural subjects and sheds light on the ways in which they are shaped by a range of social and historical factors. By engaging with literary works that foreground multiculturalism, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates about the role of culture in shaping individual and collective identities, and highlights the ways in which literature can offer new insights and perspectives on complex social issues. Since this terrain is constantly changing, even recent observations on multiculturalism are in constant need of reassessment and revision.

## Chapter One: Aslam's Multicultural Map: Muslim Becoming

*Maps for Lost Lovers* by Nadeem Aslam, published in 2004, is the earliest work of British South Asian literature examined in this thesis. This chapter explores Aslam's representation of British Pakistani culture in the novel, which frames "honour crime" in an Islamophobic context, and how he balances liberal individualism against the portrayal of Islam and British Pakistani culture. The narrative revolves around the potential honour killing of Jugnu and Chanda by Chanda's unrepentant brothers and takes place over a year in a segregated British South Asian community that is precariously poised on the faultline of twenty-first-century British multiculturalism. Jugnu, an irreligious lepidopterist, displays his atheism through his boat's name, *The Darwin* (Aslam 2004a, 63). Chanda, his girlfriend, has been divorced twice, but her second husband abandoned her without lawfully (and Islamically) divorcing her, preventing her from marrying Jugnu. However, Chanda's family sees living out of wedlock as a disgrace that may warrant murder, creating a dramatic and tense situation.

Aslam's novel contributes to the debate on multiculturalism by depicting the complexities and challenges faced by South Asian immigrants living in Britain. Through the story of Jugnu and Chanda, the author explores issues such as honour killing, religious extremism, and cultural clashes that arise in a multicultural society. The novel portrays the tension between traditional and modern values within the South Asian community in Britain. Chanda's family represents the traditional mindset, which places great emphasis on honour and adherence to cultural and religious norms. On the other hand, Jugnu represents the modern, secular worldview that challenges these traditional values. By

presenting these conflicting perspectives, the novel highlights the difficulties of multiculturalism, where people from different cultural backgrounds struggle to find a common ground and coexist peacefully. The novel also sheds light on the discrimination and marginalization faced by immigrants and their struggles to adapt to a new culture. It provides nuanced and thought-provoking insight into the challenges of multiculturalism and the complexities of cultural identity in contemporary Britain.

I intervene in the ongoing debate on cultural identity in *Maps for Lost Lovers* by arguing that the novel is an individualized and liberal interpretation of the failure of multiculturalism in a community that is partially religious and partially secular. I seek to establish that Aslam's portrayal of British South Asian identity, particularly of those with Muslim heritage, is consistent with classical liberal concepts of multiculturalism that are associated with assimilation. These nations perceive multiculturalism as impeding freedom by presuming that culture endorses identity instead of providing opportunities for individual choice (Green et al. 2009, 21). Therefore, Aslam's representation of identity takes the most radical critique of the theories of multiculturalism because it presents identity as an internally evolving process for individuals that should not be influenced by cultural communities.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, negative and stereotypical portrayals of Islam and Muslims became more prevalent in Western media, politics, and literature. As Illott (2015) notes, this period saw a heightened focus on religious identity in Western media, with a tendency to create a binary between the secular, Western, benign "us" and the Muslim, non-Western, threatening "them" (Illott

2015, 27). This Manichean understanding of identity has been criticized as reductive and indicative of a wider trend in Anglo-American discussion of Islam (Clements 2016, 2). Given this context, Muslim writers have often been called upon to comment on the situation, with some refusing to perpetuate the “brown man’s burden” (Ahmed 2015, 157). Aslam is one such writer, who, in his novel, exposes the malpractices of Pakistani Muslim migrants in England. Yaqin observes that this depiction can be seen as reiterating populist clichés (Yaqin 2012, 101), but Aslam also challenges the binary by highlighting the complexities involved in Pakistani migrants’ negotiation of identity in diaspora. Several critics have explored the strategies employed by Pakistani migrants to navigate their identities in the host country. Moore (2009) focuses on the portrayal of British Muslim identities in the aftermath of an honour killing in a Pakistani community. She argues that Aslam’s portrayal of the characters’ experiences of racism, Islamophobia, and terrorism serves to highlight the complexity and contradictions inherent in British Muslim identities. Moore also notes that the novel challenges prevalent Western narratives regarding Muslims, while exploring the ways in which trauma and violence impact individual and communal identities. Ultimately, Moore suggests that *Maps for Lost Lovers* presents a nuanced and empathetic portrait of British Muslim communities and the obstacles they encounter in contemporary society. In her essay, “Racism in the Diaspora: Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*” Cordula Lemke (2008) argues that Muslim immigrants in the novel construct their identity based on the fear of losing cultural or biological purity, resulting in tropes of racism. However, Lemke’s claim does not explain how other characters, such as Shamas, Jugnu, Chanda, and the children of Kaukab, who are not anxious about losing cultural purity, shape their identity in

British society. Similarly, Nadia Butt (2008) identifies the obsession with “ideals of purity” as the cause of Pakistani immigrants’ “social crisis,” resulting in despicable acts such as honour killings and forced marriages. Butt observes that in a world of mobility, “impurity” in the cultural sphere is the norm. However, Butt does not explore why the majority of the community fails to overcome their fear of cultural contamination, while a small number of migrants succeed in adapting to the new environment despite the challenges they face.

Yaqin (2012) introduces a new aspect to the discussion on how migrants in diaspora negotiate their identity. She posits that factors such as “ghettoization and lack of material resources” contribute to cultural practices, including honour killings, among migrants in England (101). Ahmed (2015) supports Yaqin’s viewpoint by suggesting that the Pakistani migrants’ difficulty in negotiating their identities in England is due not only to a “culturalist” perspective, which attributes it to an Islamic culture that is oppressively patriarchal, but also to a more complex material context in which the migrants find themselves (169). Although examining the Pakistani community’s actions in the host country from a different perspective is possible due to the migrants’ material circumstances, as Yaqin and Ahmed observe, Amina Yaqin (2012) notes that the novel does not address Islamic culture as a source of social cohesion capable of resisting racism and other types of discrimination. Building on this, Rehana Ahmed (2015) suggests that the novel avoids “culturalism” (cultural relativism) by concentrating on material conditions, but unfortunately, it lapses into culturalism by failing to represent a non-oppressive cultural community (171).

In *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (2015),



Ahmed delves into the discourse surrounding multiculturalism and Islam by analyzing British South Asian literary texts. She explores the “limits of liberalism” regarding the integration of religious and cultural differences in British Muslim communities (Ahmed 2015, 8-10). Ahmed argues against establishing a rigid separation between the public and private spheres and asserts that the public sphere cannot remain impartial. The liberal approach of confining Muslim practices to the private domain tends to sideline and depoliticize religious minorities while promoting a dominant set of norms and ideals, such as liberalism, secularism, and individualism (Ibid.). The criticism of multiculturalism may lead to the stigmatization and condemnation of Muslims, just as the “cultural excesses of Muslims” may be utilized to criticize multiculturalism (Ahmed 2015, 8).

According to Rehana Ahmed (2015), Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* deviates from the novel’s implicit purpose and message by failing to present a non-oppressive cultural communitarianism. While the novel avoids culturalism through its materialist approach, it reinforces harmful stereotypes and negative perceptions of Pakistani culture. The focus on cultural aspects of the community without addressing the underlying structural inequalities and power imbalances that contribute to the marginalization of immigrants perpetuates culturalism (Ahmed 2015, 171). Ahmed argues that this is a limitation of the novel, as it falls short of challenging dominant norms and ideals, such as liberalism, secularism, and individualism, that tend to depoliticize religious minorities and promote a homogenized cultural identity (Ahmed 2015, 171). The novel’s portrayal of the South Asian community is limited to their cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions, which are often presented as monolithic and unchanging.

This approach overlooks the diversity and complexity of the community and reinforces stereotypes and essentialism. Moreover, the novel's depiction of the characters reinforces gendered and patriarchal power dynamics within the community. Chanda, as a divorced woman, faces discrimination and is at risk of an honour killing, which reinforces the patriarchal norms of the community. The novel fails to challenge these norms and instead reinforces them through its portrayal of the characters and their actions.

While Octavio Paz's assertion that "A human being is never what he is but the self he seeks" could be the premise for the novel, there is limited space for an innovative British South Asian identity of Muslim heritage. Aslam's work portrays the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of developing and maintaining a firm sense of identity. The novel depicts the identity of the British South Asian minority as fragmented, which is evident from the outset with the potential honour killing of Jugnu and Chanda and at the end with the protagonist Shamas's death. This suggests that fragmentation remains, with little progress beyond it. The novel offers a pessimistic view of intercultural understanding and identity formation, with the portrayal of culture, place, and the rigid formation of traditional identities putting the South Asian characters in a precarious position of either assimilating or becoming alienated (Ahmed 2015, 171).

The concept of place is crucial to the novel, a working-class British South Asian neighbourhood in a fictional town in England that its inhabitants call "Dasht-e-Tanhai" (in Urdu meaning "the wilderness of solitude" or "the desert of loneliness"). Aslam centres the novel on one Muslim family and their outer circle, using "solitude" as a leitmotif. He provides complex insights into "the desert of

solitude”, depicting a society where political affiliation and multiculturalism are overridden by a sense of alienation and despair. The principal motif of overwhelming solitude dominates the intergenerational conflict between the immigrant parents—Kaukab, the deeply religious mother; Shamas, the irreligious and former communist father and their children, who are assimilated to British culture. All family members, both the first and second generations, display contradictions and confusion in their religious and cultural identities and in their interpretations of home. Charag, the eldest, is an artist living in London with his English girlfriend Stella and their son. Mah-Jabin was married to an abusive cousin but returned to England and is now a college student planning to travel to the United States. Due to a difficult relationship with his mother, Ujala left home. She had given him bromide, thinking it was blessed salt that an Imam had recited Qur’an over, hoping it would control his will. However, her mistake had unintended consequences and may have contributed to the strained relationship between Ujala and his mother (Ahmed 2012, 304-313).

Aslam seems to deliberately engage with the criticism of multiculturalism, specifically where it relates to the performance of identity. Stuart Hall (1990) argues that identity is formed “within, not outside of, representation” (222). This suggests that the text performs a significant role in the perception of identity. Aslam’s novel actively engages with identity performance, which supports Hall’s argument. (222). In most works of literature to some degree, the difference between the performance of identity and the identity itself is not established until imposed by the critic or reader. However, in Aslam’s novel, there is a seemingly deliberate emphasis on the issue of performance. In the novel, the characters of

Shamas and Kaukab play roles that are closely linked to cultural identity and the differences between cultures. The novel's exploration of the disappearance of the lovers is primarily seen through the perspectives of Jugnu's older brother, Shamas, a communist, and his devout, traditional wife, Kaukab. Their youngest son, Ujala, perceives them as a "dangerous" couple, with his mother longing for the past and his father daydreaming about the future (Aslam 2004a, 324). During the course of the narrative, identity performance becomes more apparent, especially through the characters' conflicting views of religious and philosophical beliefs, different behaviours, various manners of interaction and dress patterns and dietary rules. The amalgamation of these elements forms the perception of identity. The formation of identity is not self-formed, which an essentialist view of liberalism maintains. Instead, it is strongly influenced by culture. In this sense, it is not accurate to think of identity as "an already accomplished fact", but instead, identity is "a production which is never complete, always in progress" (Hall 1990, 222). The idea that identity is influenced by culture goes to the heart of this thesis.

In Aslam's novel, there is a notable exploration of cultural identity and the contrast between different cultural perspectives, as depicted through the experiences of the characters. By setting the novel in a fictional town in England named by its inhabitants, he reflects on the difficult circumstances in Pakistan and the inhabitants' experience of displacement:

Pakistan is a poor country, a harsh and disastrously unjust land, its history a book full of sad stories scarred by a series of catastrophes, not least Partition at its inception; and life is a trial if not a punishment for most of the people born there: millions of its sons and daughters have managed

to find footholds all around the globe in their search for livelihood and a semblance of dignity . Roaming the planet looking for solace, they've settled in small towns that make them feel smaller still, and in cities that have tall buildings and even taller loneliness. (Aslam 2004a, 9)

While all immigrants may feel a sense of loss, it is not merely an internal feeling of unease. As the quotation above reveals, the situation is aggravated by issues outside each community in the diaspora; they arrive in small towns. This question leads to what Cordula Lemke (2004) describes as a community trapped “between longing and belonging”. The society that Aslam represents follows the conviction that an isolated community, fearing outside contamination, is concerned with individual and collective reputations. Their perceptions of racial and religious sanctity or purity are pervasive to the point that “may your kid marry a white woman” is a common term of abuse in Dasht-e-Tanhaii (Aslam 2004a, 118). Furthermore, the threat of giving a child “away to a white person” is used to scare children into obedience (Ibid., 220). When Michael O'Connor interviews Aslam, he inadvertently highlights the ethnic divide, claiming that integration and England are both “absent” in the novel (Aslam 2004b, 1). Aslam's response is that “only the WHITE England is absent” (Ibid.). As a result, the novel calls into doubt any presumed multiethnicity or any hope for the success of a multicultural community in this corner of England (Ibid.). Even Shamas, Aslam's protagonist and the novel's director of the Community Relations Council, is described as assisting others in negotiating “the white world” (Aslam 2004a, 15). Although he is the most secular among the first generation of Pakistani immigrants in the novel, he does not help community members integrate into white society but

challenges it instead.

This sense of confrontation may stem from the fact that Shamas was once a communist. This also explains why he is considered impure, notably by his religious wife Kaukab. She condemns “his Godless ideas”, his occasional drinking habits and his previous affiliation with the Communist Party, a political platform devoid of God and diametrically opposed to Islamic philosophy (Aslam 2004a, 34). Shamas is revered in the community for his kind heart, but he also provokes suspicion due to his noticeable tolerance and acceptance of the Other, as well as his embrace of Western egalitarianism and notions of equality (Ibid., 210). In *Dasht-e-Tanhaii*, Pakistani women wear special clothes outdoors to avoid contamination from encounters with white people. Kaukab, for example, removes her clothes immediately upon returning home. Her poor English skills cause anxiety during brief interactions with white people, but her fear of impurity is more pressing (Aslam 2004a, 69). This fear is also shared among South Asian minorities, particularly in intermarriages between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Aslam’s work suggests that this concern for purity is religious in nature rather than based on racial fears. Marriages in *Dasht-e-Tanhaii* are often arranged within the community to prevent interracial marriages, even ignoring medical advice against cousin marriages (Aslam 2004a, 119).

If no appropriate spouses can be found inside the ethnic community, parents send their sons and daughters to Pakistan to be married or enlist the service of a matchmaker to bring a spouse from Pakistan. Likewise, Mah-Jabin, was sent to Pakistan to marry a cousin, but her marriage resulted in catastrophic consequences, and she returned to Britain where she was viewed as “spoiled”

for no longer being a virgin. Female purity is valued more highly than male purity, and in contrast to a white prostitute who is allowed to continue her business, a South Asian prostitute would be beaten and forced to leave the town (Aslam 2004a, 16). Following such reasoning, Chanda is labelled a “whore” by her brothers and eventually killed when she lives with Jugnu without being married, illustrating how a woman bears the burden of a man’s reputation (Aslam 2004a, 64). In a paradoxical situation, Chotta, Chanda’s second brother, is in a relationship with Kiran, a Sikh woman, but fails to see any similarities between his situation and Chanda’s (Aslam 2004a, 344). The gender equation becomes even more complex with religious differences, as women are compared to infidels and labeled as “minions of Satan” in the novel (Aslam 2004a, 194). Suraya, too, who was divorced and returned to Britain after advocating for a rape victim in Pakistan, also comes to view women negatively, concluding that “We women are wicked” (Aslam 2004a, 204). The misogyny is further exemplified by an imam at a mosque who refers to women as “faeces-filled sacks” that should be immediately disposed of (Aslam 2004a, 126).

For such people, the purity of their reputations exceeds the importance of racial and religious purity. Shamas cannot overstate the importance of reputation in *Dasht-e-Tanhaii*. Shamas “imagines what any scandal [...] about ideas of “honour, shame and good reputation”” would do to those like the deeply traditional *Kaukab*, Muslim and Hindu alike; a consequence that is summarised by a Pakistani saying, “he whom a taunt or jeer doesn’t kill is probably immune to even swords” (Ibid., 197). The novel’s main dramatic event, the murder of Chanda and Jugnu by her brothers, serves as a glimpse into the tight-knit

community and reveals transcultural anxiety among its members (Aslam 2004a, 176). Despite widespread knowledge of their guilt, Chanda's father seems pleased with his sons' actions (Aslam 2004a, 176). Aslam portrays a setting where the brothers kill their sister with their father's implicit approval in the name of honour and reputation. The interplay of cross-cultural forces is also evident as Suraya, influenced by English culture, tries to mediate in a conflict involving an uncle raping his niece in Pakistan. Despite her innocence is endearing, the men threaten to claim they raped her, emphasizing the importance of public perception over actual events (Aslam 2004a, 157).

Cross-cultural forces work conversely as well. Suraya, who is influenced by English culture, attempts to mediate in a conflict that involves an uncle raping his niece in Pakistan. While her "wide-eyed innocence was found endearing and laughed off" during the mediation, the men threaten Suraya to tell people that they have raped her (Aslam 2004a, 157–8). Kaukab affirms this idea. After rebuking Chanda for her extramarital relationship with Jugnu, she clearly indicates that she is more concerned with appearances than with the couple's true love (Ibid., 62). She even defends the religious cleric who kills a young girl to exorcise djinns, (Ibid., 185–186). This also recalls the paedophile mosque cleric whom the community members defend (Ibid., 245). In the novel, a priest is also convicted of inciting his congregation to dismiss two members for inappropriate behaviour in light of God's precepts (Ibid., 247).

Indeed, in terms of secular versus religious, Aslam fails to avoid simplistic binary oppositions. Kaukab is depicted as extremely religious who considers the idea that Qur'an is untranslatable as an Islamic order, committing herself to



reading the Qur'an in Arabic. In contrast, Shamas is not a "believer" in God, and for him "the universe is without saviours" (Ibid., 20). Although Aslam differentiates between religion as an institution and as a cultural heritage, the novel is filled with themes of religious abuse and Islamophobic images. Pakistan's separation from India was founded on the principles of religion. Islam, in both the religious and political sense, serves as the foundation for the community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii.

Shamas's father's story is an example of the themes of memory loss and the restitution of identity and family connections. He was born as a Hindu but could not find his family after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919. (Aslam 2004a, 47). He lost his memory as a ten-year-old boy and drifted into Muslim life. The narrative incorporates British colonial violence into the family archives and tacitly undermines the contemporary Muslim image of Pakistan. Physical events mirror historical events when Shamas recalls that his father's aorta "had ruptured and [...] his body was consuming itself" at the same time as the Indian army was arriving in secessionist East Pakistan in 1971 to reinforce the independence of Bangladesh (Aslam 2004a, 82–3). A crucial issue emerges when Islam is regarded as applicable to all mankind since on the national level, and even on the community level, Islam is neither universal nor inclusive. Nations and communities are exclusive by nature; they are bordered. Therefore, the citizens of a nation and the members of a community usually identify themselves not only by those who represent "them", but also by those who do not.

In the case of the people of Dasht-e- Tanhaii, reimagining or remembering the community is built on a sense of loss, something that cannot be recovered in its original form. The intersection of the community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii becomes

a source of conflict because of the opposing views and approaches to navigating identity. This seems impossible to achieve, evoking anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's statement, "One man's imagined community is another man's political prison" (Aslam 2004a, 32). The people of Dasht-e-Tanhaii are frequently unfamiliar with one another and unable to communicate effectively. While this tendency is evident at the national and community levels, it is also evident at the family level, particularly between the parents and their children and their different memories of the old Pakistan. Obviously, both the first and second generations recognize that their alternative ways of life can conflict with those of their parents, but they approach the issue differently and not necessarily along generational lines.

The concept of home might gain more power due to the lack of access to the place itself, and this imaginary construct has the potential to have a significant impact on issues relating to the interaction of home and identity. Constant references to an imaginary home are problematic for the characters when it evokes feelings of longing for a place that is no longer accessible or if it highlights their alienation from their current surroundings and society. Sometimes, the family unit may be disturbed or fragmented due to a member's devotion to the abstract concept of home. The clash between what is changing and evolving (multicultural society) and what is seen as unchanging (traditional Islamic values or the desire for them) has, in a sense, a fragmenting influence on the core family structure and individuality. Kaukab, for instance, is the novel's matriarch and the most traditional—not to mention the most racist—of the characters, reading the Qur'an unquestioningly each day without an understanding of Arabic (Aslam

2004a, 322).

The sense of ambivalence generated within the novel stems mainly from the characterisation of Kaukab. Even though her role seems to deliver all the problematic aspects of identity, it also makes her character consistent and, to a certain degree, sympathetic. When she arrived in Britain, she was “bright with optimism” about the world around her; now her incentive to explore her environment is more measured and tentative (Aslam 2004a, 32). Kaukab is portrayed as a pitiful figure in the contrast between her previous optimism and her current outlook on life as she collects little hints about the world outside Dasht-e-Tanhaii. There is some basis for the idea that, in a sense, Kaukab has not left Pakistan at all. She remains sheltered by the ready-made social construct into which she is transplanted, and it bears enough resemblance to her society of origin that the relocation does not challenge her worldview or identity. Kaukab’s lack of agency and power is due to a lack of opportunity and education. She realizes that she is excluded because of her class position and obvious Muslim identity (Aslam 2004a, 32). Her position as a housewife with deeply traditional values and views highlights the gap between her and her husband, Shamas, who serves as a contact point for the British South Asian community (Aslam 2004a, 15). Despite their conversations, they still feel alone and isolated (Ibid., 156). Before the trial of the brothers, Shamas, his wife and their three children are briefly reunited at an elaborate meal. During the meal, mutual recriminations and old secrets emerge, with Kaukab held responsible for various acts of violence.

Through the setting of the meal, Aslam explores the correlation and links between opposing cultural, racial, sexual and generational identities. Charag

obtained a vasectomy, which Kaukab regards as a “Christian conspiracy to stop the number of Muslims from increasing” (Aslam 2004a, 59). Mah-Jabin escaped her husband in Pakistan, who it turns out was abusive, a fact that Kaukab only now discovers (Aslam 2004a, 306). Earlier in the novel, the girl says that her mother is trapped “within the cage of permitted thinking”, explaining any form of rebellion in her children as proof of white contamination (or the Other) (Aslam 2004a, 110). She also strikes out at Mah-Jabin when they have a dispute over her way of life; Mah-Jabin then criticizes her mother for her “laws and codes, the so-called traditions that you have dragged into this country with you like shit on your shoes” (Aslam 2004a, 114).

In keeping with Aslam’s focus on the conflict between generations, the novel depicts the perceived need to send children back to the home of ethnic origin in order to escape the corruption of the West. This is similar to Guy Gunaratne’s *In Our Mad and Furious City*, where both Yusuf and Iqbal were about to be sent “home”, to live with relatives; the decision is based on the perceived “need” of the sons to return and experience the steadying and enriching effects of the old country. In Aslam’s novel, this perceived “need” is generated from the time that Mah-Jabin shows a preference for English culture, which results in sending her to marry a cousin in Pakistan. However, Kaukab thinks that “Mah-Jabin’s chances in life were ruined by her father” refusing to move to “a better neighbourhood”, as “no decent family was ever going to ask for a girl’s hand living in this third-class neighbourhood” (Aslam 2004a, 337). The younger son named Ujala explains his parents’ opposing viewpoints when he left home eight years prior to escape his mother’s longing for the past and his father’s daydreams about his grandchildren’s future (Ibid., 324). The only shared trait between the parents

is their disregard for the present. Shamas' wife, Kaukab, accuses him of prioritizing his values over the family's needs. However, Kaukab is paradoxically open to new influences from the wealthier classes while simultaneously considering them as contamination. This openness is partly linked to class, reflecting the sharp class divisions in British society. Kaukab finds the relative freedom and open-mindedness of the wealthier class more intriguing than the static and dull "third-class neighbourhood" to which Shamas clings. Shamas, who considers himself secular, fears this process and, like other immigrants, remains connected to a distant home and identity instead of embracing his immediate surroundings (Aslam 2004a, 324).

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping identity, acting as a coping mechanism for individuals and a weapon against assimilation for communities, particularly under the influence of Shamas. Despite his acceptance of secular Western lifestyles and genuine affection for it, Shamas adopts a conservative stance when it comes to standards of behaviour. This is ironic considering his initially liberal views on religion and desire for his children to select their own faith. In response to the rising threat of far-right English nationalism, he wants his children to cover their heads. Kaukab believes that if they had left Dasht-e-Tanhaii, Charag could have pursued medicine, and Ujala would have avoided dropping out of school at the age of fifteen and cutting off contact with the family for seven years. Shamas is significant as he embodies a liminal identity, explaining Western concepts from an Eastern perspective. The reader becomes attached to him throughout the narrative, where his statements and pronouncements become less important than the man himself. Through his

words and actions, Shamas effectively expresses a problematic clash of values (Aslam 2004a, 325).

In contrast to Shamas, Kaukab struggles to reconcile her literal interpretation of religion with her family's experiences, which leaves her feeling empty and unsure of her identity (Aslam 2004a, 276). When Charag's girlfriend Stella becomes pregnant, Kaukab is torn between disappointment and a desire to be with the mother of her future grandchild, leading her to take a train to London where she gets lost (Aslam 2004a, 319). Her struggle with identity leaves the reader questioning which version of Kaukab is the true one. After Mah-Jabin confronts her for forcing her to marry a relative she had never met in Pakistan, Kaukab defends herself by claiming she did not have the freedom to give her children the freedom they desired (Aslam 2004a, 324). However, she also reinforces her authority by using religion as a means of control, accusing Mah-Jabin of being un-Islamic for divorcing her husband under British law rather than in a Muslim court. Throughout the novel, the characters are confronted with racism, including physical violence, racist insults, and name-calling (Aslam 2004a, 118). Kaukab's understanding of cultural tradition is limited, offering few possibilities for life, and dismissed imagination and fantasy as outdated concepts. In contrast, the second generation aim not just to fit in but to participate in the intricate and interactive ethnoscape.

The children's experiences differed from their parents, whose cultural framework had been created after a traumatic past and upheld for comfort and stability. This framework had a harmful impact on their offspring, which explains the parents' misery and hopelessness towards the end of the novel. Kaukab

blames Shamas for impregnating her with “Satan’s seed,” and when her children accuse her, she tries to commit suicide. Shamas rescues her, and her suicide attempt is thwarted (Aslam 2004a, 338–9). The impact of modernity on South Asian immigrants of Muslim heritage is felt most acutely at the family level, resulting in familial and cultural trauma, separation, suicide, and murder.

Aslam’s novel explores the historical context of immigration, including stories such as Shamas’s father and ten-year-old Deepak, a victim of a 1919 British bombing in Punjab (Aslam 2004a, 53), and the love story between the Sikh Kiran and Kaukab’s Muslim brother, whose wedding was cancelled by the man’s family back home thirty years ago (Ibid., 7). It is important to note that the central story of the deceased lovers and the alleged theme of honour killing intersect with several other stories of individual freedom. Any attempts to violate communal or cultural boundaries are met with severe punishments. In the case of the love story between a nameless Hindu boy and a Muslim girl, the girl is bludgeoned to death by a cleric who claims she is possessed by a jinn (Ibid., 185–6).

One of the most significant stories in the novel involves Suraya, who faced divorce after defending a victim of sexual assault in Pakistan (Aslam 2004a, 134). Her husband pronounced Talaq (divorced) three times while drunk (Ibid., 159). In order to remarry him and be reunited with her son, she must first briefly marry another man. Shamas, who is allowed to have multiple wives as a Muslim, becomes the focus of her efforts. Suraya’s unique position as a devoted Muslim who has also adapted to British culture allows her to “ambivalently” navigate the situation of Muslim women:

Allah is not being equally compassionate towards the poorwoman who is having to go through another marriage through no fault of her own is a thought that has occasionally crossed Suraya's mind, along with *It's as though Allah forgot there were women in the world when he made some of his laws, thinking only of men* – but she has banished these thoughts as all good Muslims must. (Ibid., 150)

Even though Suraya appears more moderate than other devout women in the community, the women also question their lives and the assumptions they make. Chanda's mother, for example, makes a secret confession to her husband that she thought to herself that "it was unimportant that [Chanda and Jugnu] were living in sin, so what if it goes against His [God] law" (Aslam 2004a, 173). Of course, these are the misgivings and assumptions of a mother whose daughter was killed and sons are in prison. Her conscience is weighed down by the fact that both the victim and the murderers are her children (Ibid., 276). The novel presents the opportunity to challenge assumptions through art and creative expression, rather than relying solely on religious and political interpretations. By posing meaningful questions, the best literature and art can create new avenues of thought. At the beginning of the book, jazz music brings together "migrant workers" regardless of their gender, beliefs, or age, showing that through jazz, people's identities as human beings break down barriers: "So engrossed would the listeners become that, by the end of the piece, the space between them would have contracted, heads leaning together as though they were sharing a mirror" (Aslam 2004a, 13).

According to Lemke (2004), who underscores the importance of jazz as a



bridge between cultures, jazz is an effective means of expressing one's own culture in a foreign setting. Muslim musicians, for example, have been using aspects of jazz in traditional Asian music for a long time, which represents integration in the novel (Lemke 2004, 176). In particular, indigenous musical genres are given more leeway in expressing unconventional viewpoints, as evidenced by Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn's well-attended concert. His song relates the tragedy of a young woman who is compelled to marry a man she doesn't want. In addition, the song extols a spiritual relationship with Allah, in which women "more than the men, attempt to make a new world" (Aslam 2004a, 192). Charag is an artist who has collected vintage photographs of locals in the community, saying, "I might want to do a series of paintings based on them" (Ibid., 319). He hopes to bridge the gap between art and "real" people by incorporating outdated pictures destined for the rubbish bin into his paintings, thus introducing the photograph to a variety of interpretations (Ibid.). The photographs appear to provide answers to questions about how much of a society's past and cultural identity should be rescued, what should be changed, what should be preserved, and what should be restored (Ibid., 71).

The questions raised suggest that cultural identity is not fixed and can be negotiated, rather than a one-size-fits-all situation. The second-generation characters in the novel highlight the flexibility of cultural identity, which involves both "being" and "becoming" (Hall 1990, 394). Myria Georgiou (2010) explains that individuals create a sense of identity in relation to the interconnected space they are part of, and from which they may feel excluded (20). In the novel, the second-generation characters are caught between the interrelated realms of

Dasht-e-Tanhaii and England, the home of ethnic origin and the current home, British secular culture, and Pakistani Islamic culture. They may identify with one home and feel alienated by the other. Sometimes, their perceptions of these various settings become inverted due to their previous experiences, which prompts them to form a new subjectivity.

For instance, Charag's painting of himself, "The Uncut Self-Portrait", has just been featured in a Sunday newspaper, which portrays him in a naked and uncircumcised state. It serves as a protest against what he deems as "the first act of violence done to me in the name of a religious or social system" (Aslam 2004a, 320). Though his mother was dismayed by the painting, Charag clarifies that he cannot create with restrictions and explains that Jugnu taught him to break away from the "manipulative groups" constraints. His father is proud of him for maturing as an artist and understanding his duties as one through his work on vintage photographs of the community (Ibid.). Even so, the novel's refusal to shoulder the "brown man's burden" is voiced through Charag's "The Uncut Self-Portrait". The failure of art to achieve, to speak universally, to link people from all over the world to its rootedness in the material undermines the liberal ideology of the aesthetic. The inclusion of an Islamic aesthetic in the novel also helps undermine the barrier between creativity (i.e., individuality and freedom of expression) and religious culture. In terms of an Islamic aesthetic, Aslam's novel is inspired by poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz and artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai. Aslam names the town Dasht-e- Tanhaii after a poem by Faiz and Chughtai's drawings precede each chapter. Two of the chapter titles are named after paintings by South Asian artists Anwar Saeed and Bhupen Khakhar, whose subject matter

focuses on the repressive attitudes towards sexuality within certain aspects of Pakistani culture (Moore 2009, 7)

In the novel, Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan gives a concert that represents an important and shared Islamic (Sufi) aesthetic. Through Nusrat, it brings the community members together in a collective appreciation of the music and rage at repressive traditions. Nusrat sings about Heer, the victim of an honour crime who is poisoned by her brothers and the imam of the mosque for abandoning her husband:

She would condemn them [her murderers] with her last breaths, the poet-saints of Islam expressing their loathing of power and injustice always through female protagonists in their verse romances [...] And always it was the vulnerability of women that was used by the poet-saints to portray the intolerance and oppression of their times: in their verses the women rebel and try bravely to face all opposition. (Aslam 2004a, 195-6)

Even so, the novel is replete with instances of unsuccessful writing and efforts to communicate, transpose and translate—from a secret letter that Kaukab discovers, proving that Mah-Jabin's husband is abusive (Ibid., 108), to letters between Pakistan and India that must be sent via a third country because of the uneasy relations between the two countries (Aslam 2004a, 306); from “seeds and seedlings and cuttings” from Pakistan, “none of which had flourished” in England to a deceased white mother whose son steals her heart from the hospital and buries it so it would not be transplanted into a “black man's body” (Aslam 2004a, 156; Moore 2009, 11).

Additionally, a love letter composed by a Hindu boy for his deceased Muslim lover is not permitted to be buried alongside her. The love letter, a desperate attempt to communicate with her beyond the grave, is removed from her shroud, torn into fragments and thrown into the lake (Aslam 2004a, 199–200). However, a piece of the poem is found by Suraya, which reads, “The heart is the first organ to form and the last to die” (Aslam 2004a, 210; Moore 2009, 11). Charag’s painting of himself “uncircumcised”, while successful in metropolitan London, fails to communicate with Shamas and offends Kaukab (Aslam 2004a, 210). Before marrying Kaukab, Shamas once wrote verses of poetry to her on a newspaper he borrowed from her father, and then Kaukab embroidered the verses on her wedding dress. However, she burns the dress after Shamas hits her for making the newly born Ujala observe Ramadan because she believes that since he was born without a foreskin he is a holy child (Aslam 2004a, 139–42). Encouraged by Suraya, Shamas finally decides to write poetry again, but he dies before achieving her wish. Whilst in Hindu mythology Shiva finds Parvati by following her footprints on the ground, Shamas dies searching for his lost lover Suraya (Ibid., 164–5).

The novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* concludes with a minor character who decides to venture out into the world despite the tragedies that have torn his family and the “white” society apart. He expresses a desire to be with his fellow humans in the face of an impending calamity (Aslam 2004a, 379; Moore 2009, 11). This sentiment echoes one of Kaukab’s earlier thoughts, in which she contemplates the importance of other people and the absence of Hell in any people or civilization (Aslam 2004a, 33). The graffiti of the National Front that has

been overwritten with “NFAK Rules,” which now stands for Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, highlights the novel’s culturally and linguistically diverse landscape (Aslam 2004a, 165), despite the difficulties and challenges it presents. Various lost lovers are represented in the novel through their spectral presence. Towards the end of the story, Shamas meets the Hindu boy, who says he can see his spectre and the spectre of the lover he lost walking by the lake. Other community members claim these spectres are Chanda and Jugnu. The rational Shamas cannot fully comprehend the complex reality of the world, so he regards what he sees as irrational. At this point, the two men’s tales of illegal love are intertwined. Moore (2009) notes that the deceased Muslim woman’s husband remarries Suraya, reminding us of the complex reality of the world that Shamas cannot fully comprehend. Shamas remembers lyrics that point to social responsibility: “Which to hold dearer: my love for you, or the sorrows of others in the world? They say the intoxication is greater when two kinds of wine are mixed. Good artists know that society is worth representing too” (Aslam 2004a, 319–320).

Confronting accepted truths and certitudes via artistic inquiry reopens what Nadia Butt (2008) refers to as “the singular space of Islam” to a variety of “cultural encounters” (Ibid., 166). The novel crystallizes this open-mindedness, when Shamas and his friend Poorab-ji encounter revellers smelling of alcohol going home late at night. The look of distaste on Poorab-ji’s face is obvious. It surprises and disappoints Shamas, who thought to himself, “There was hardly anything more beautiful than those young people, fumbling their way through life, full of new doubts and certainties” (Ibid., 144). Aslam, to some degree, indicates that the negotiation between the identities that are the result of immigration is

simply too costly for the characters. The loss of this authentic self, the result of the need to develop a new form of identity, threatens the characters' being. The clash between what is changing and evolving (multicultural society) and what is perceived as unchanging (traditional Islamic values or the desire for them) has a fragmenting effect on the basic family structure and the individual. If the aim is to achieve a less traumatic cultural mobility, where belonging does not come at the expense of solitude or the loss of fundamental values, there is a need to continuously work towards an identity-formation that does not resist malleability and negotiation.

The novel devotes particular attention to the secluded society of "Dasht-e-Tanhaii", which Aslam refers to as "strangers in the land". Certainly, the novel rarely moves outside its tightly defined setting, apart from a couple of references to a distant London. Only the apparatus of English law (as a criminal process) and the experience of racial discrimination pierce the walled environment of their community (Aslam 2004a, 287). Even though the city transforms, one thing remains static: "Only one name has been accepted by every group, remaining unchanged. It's the name of the town itself. Dasht-e- Tanhaii. The Wilderness of Solitude. The Desert of Loneliness" (Ibid., 29). The British-Pakistani minority is frequently represented as a group of disgruntled outsiders barred from fully participating in the state's political apparatus by habit and choice. These statements frequently neglect the dreadful machinery of everyday discrimination. There are significant normative pressures on British Pakistanis, and notably they rest on first-generation immigrants who are likely to have stronger links to the country of origin. These pressures compel individuals to have less participation

in the political community.

In the final stages of the story, an omniscient narrator discloses the accounts of minor characters who had seen Jugnu shortly before the murder (Rai 2004, 348). The murder of Jugnu and Chanda is portrayed as the outcome of a sequence of interconnected accidents and complicity in the neighborhood. Despite having seen Jugnu before his death, some characters did not speak to the police due to their fear for their safety. Naheed, for example, wrote to her sister weeks after the murder, informing her that she saw Jugnu an hour before his death when he helped her send a letter to her family. She could not tell the police about it, as her husband would question her about being out late and interacting with other men (Aslam 2004a). Another character, Kiran, had a sexual relationship with one of the murderers, Chotta. She keeps this a secret, fearing for her life. Kiran believes that her fight with Chotta prior to the murder may have triggered the tragic events leading to the death of Jugnu and Chanda (Aslam 2004a).

Using structural aporias, speech and silence, and the ghost as a metaphorical figure representing the unacknowledged past, the novel explores the connection between cultural transmission and obscuring minority issues (Moore 2009, 13). Aslam employs absent central characters, such as Chanda and Jugnu who are already dead when the story commences, and Shamas who dies at the end of the narrative. The novel is steeped in partially concealed histories and experiences that originate from the subcontinent and Britain. The work is marked by grief and the complexity of dual cultural identity, highlighting the emotional significance of abandoned places. It deals with inclusion and

marginalization based on factors such as generation, gender, ethnicity, religion, and economic status. By trying to define the meaning of “neighbourhood,” the novel portrays a period of transition in community cohesion in the United Kingdom. The overall atmosphere is somber, with ghosts lingering near the lake, hinting at their unfinished life stories.

In the novel, the ghosts serve as a metaphorical representation of the characters’ emotional and psychological turmoil resulting from the violence and trauma of the partition. Moore suggests that the glowing stomach of the female ghost may represent either Chanda, who is pregnant with Jugnu’s child, or another young Muslim girl who had a love affair with a Hindu man and was subsequently killed (Aslam 2004a, 365; Moore 2009, 13). If it is Chanda, then the glow represents the hope and promise of new life amidst the darkness of death and destruction. If it is the other young girl, then the glow symbolizes the enduring power of love even in the face of violent hatred and division. Overall, the use of ghosts in the novel emphasizes the idea that the past is never truly gone and continues to haunt the present, as well as the importance of acknowledging and confronting the trauma of historical events.

The impact of the honour killings of Chanda and Jugnu on the community is subtle yet pervasive. As the narrative progresses, the crime is slowly revealed to maintain the emotional intensity of the crime and divert attention away from analysis. The brothers who committed the crime are portrayed as bumbling criminals who lack any persuasive reasoning. They find support in Pakistan because they know the laws of England will not view their crime leniently. As Aslam writes, “They boasted of having killed her and Jugnu—but only in Pakistan,



where the laws and the religion and the customs reinforced their sense of having acted properly, legitimately, correctly” (Aslam 2004a, 357). The novel exposes the outrageous hypocrisy of the brothers: one is in a relationship with his lover, while the other forces his wife to have an abortion only to learn, to his dismay, that the baby was a boy instead of a girl as they were led to believe. In contrast, the murder trial is almost an afterthought that gradually emerges in the plot.

[Shamas] heard the judge say that the killers had found a cure to their problem through an immoral, indefensible act; a cure, a remedy—and their religion and background took care of the bitter aftertaste. Their religion and background assured them that, yes, they were murderers but that they had murdered only sinners. The judge said that Chanda and Jugnu had done nothing illegal in deciding to live together but, Shamas knows that the two brothers feel that the fact that an act is legal does not mean it’s right. (Aslam 2004a, 278)

After a hundred pages, the verdict is finally given in a passive scene:

Here in England, the judge, batting down all talk of “code of honour and shame” would call them “cowards” and “wicked” on the day of the trial [...] A distinguished Pakistani commentator on the Asian radio too would be forthright: “some immigrants think that just because they belong to a minority they are nice people, that they should be forgiven everything just because they were oppressed.” As for the murderers themselves, after the verdict had been announced they would begin to shout in the court the litanies, including words like “racism” and “prejudice”. The judge’s remarks

would be deemed to have “insulted our culture and our religion.” They’d said England was a country of “prostitutes and homosexuals.” Being led away, the younger, Chotta, would shout, “It’s a kangaroo court!” (Ibid., 357).

Obviously, the judge believes the crime was committed in the name of Islam, as he insists that the murderers believe that their religion and cultural background justified their actions and that they were only killing sinners (Ibid., 278). Aslam demonstrates how the judge and the criminals converse in “litanies” in this scene, offsetting their responses in scare quotes. The judge’s reprimand brings neither comfort nor a sense of justice to the aggrieved family. Chotta’s outburst, “It’s a kangaroo court!” is incorrect, yet the court has failed to fulfil one of its responsibilities. Even though it renders a legitimate verdict, the court ultimately operates in its own interests, accusing an entire culture of promoting violence.

The characters’ experiences of being ignored by the legal system exacerbate feelings of alienation from the democratic process. In the community Aslam depicts, no one has any sense of genuine belonging. Neither Sharia nor British law provides compensation for any sense of loss; punishment is never a relief or a solace. Pakistan’s long-standing customs and traditions are either contaminated by naive longing or brutality. Second-generation children deny these conventional notions of belonging, yet they feel uncomfortable in a British culture that is unable to overcome racial and religious divides. The immigrant community, which has the potential to be a source of solidarity across cultures, is only local and situational. In Aslam’s desert of solitude, there are no

communities of positive belonging open to British Pakistanis—only terrible, agonizing loneliness. Chanda's brothers find justification for their brutal crime in the country of Pakistan, where hundreds of “honour killings” take place annually (Aslam 2004a, 226-73). They feel vindicated and believe that being murderers is preferable to being the brothers of a sister who was living in sin. According to them, Chanda reduced them to eunuch bystanders by not paying attention to their wishes (Aslam 2004a, 342). This warped sense of justice is also transferred to their community in Britain and highlights the social relativity of justice, as Shamas remarks, “They have become a bloody Rorschach blot: different people see different things in what has happened” (Aslam 2004a, 137).

Aslam demonstrates a clear understanding of the culturalist discourses that accompany these atrocities but excludes any reasonable critique by merely parodying their misogynistic and homophobic views in talk of “cowards” and “wicked” “prejudice”, and a country of “prostitutes and homosexuals” (Aslam 2004a, 357). The same technique can be seen in the depiction of the media sensationalising honour crimes in terms that are typically Islamophobic. Kaukab's neighbour, referred to as “the matchmaker”, engages Kaukab in a conversation about the murder of Jugnu and Chanda, saying that “the white police are interested in us Pakistanis only when there is a chance to prove that we are savages who slaughter our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters” (Aslam 2004a, 42). Later she is viewed as a hateful character who declares that Chanda is “a shameless girl”, accusing her of killing Jugnu and ruining the lives of her brothers even though she was the victim. The novel anticipates objections to negative representations of the community and dismisses them by underlining

the potential complicity of such an attitude with criminal behaviour that targets women and children. For example, the men in the mosque attempt to hide the sexual abuse because “the Hindus and the Jews and the Christians would rejoice at seeing Islam being dragged through the mud” (Aslam 2004a, 241).

Another example in the novel is a story their neighbour relates about a Muslim girl wearing a niqab who was abused by the American police. The story is immediately refuted by Mah-Jabin, who says that the police “could’ve mistaken her face-veil for the hood of a Ku Klux Klan member” (Aslam 2004a, 109). Upon hearing about the inspection of the girl’s body by the police, Mah-Jabin criticizes the community’s refusal to permit their daughters’ internal examination out of fear that doctors might damage the hymen (Aslam 2004a, 107). Any criticism of Islam or of Muslims being stereotyped becomes a form of encouraging crime within the economy of the narrative. Consequently, the novel imposes a fixed point of view in which the possibility of meaningful multicultural critique is repeatedly diverted, particularly through the novel’s focus on the oppression of women.

Yaqin (2012) suggests that the predicament of diasporic migrants is in negotiating identities that always already suffer “ghettoisation and lack of material resources, among other factors, which promotes cultural practices, such as honour crimes” (101). This failure to negotiate identities in England should not be read only from a “culturalist” viewpoint, which might relate it to an oppressive Islamic culture, but in relation to a complex social context in which the migrants find themselves. Consequently, contextualising honour crime in Islamophobic and social hierarchies, and attributing it to the culture of the criminal or victim, does not confront the issue but rather leads to implicitly

tolerating it (Ahmed 2012, 103). The fight against honour crimes should be considered a fight for human rights rather than a fight against culture. The racialisation of such crime, rather than constructing it as a human-rights issue that the media exacerbates, puts the most vulnerable members of a minority community (women and children) at risk by sensationalising these crimes in their reporting style. An attack on multiculturalism and passivity typically follows; it is their culture, “religion and background [not ours] [...] which assured them that, yes [...] they had murdered only sinners” (Aslam 2004a, 286). It is a mere “cultural defence” based on the premise that the offenders’ culture forced them to commit the crime. This excuse is used in trials to earn mercy for the accused. It lessens the seriousness of the crime while still accuses a culture and society of certain moral failures.

The trial highlights the implications of obscuring issues of class and religion. Theories of multiculturalism seems trapped between two extremes—irreconcilable differences and ineffective cultural relativism. According to Fortier (2008), there are various “versions of multiculturalism” that coexist in both popular and policy discourses. (68). As Malik (2009) argues, multiculturalism strengthens the hands of religious leaders and limits the freedom and agency of the most vulnerable members in the community, such as women and children (12). For example, in 2003, the Metropolitan Police investigated honour crimes in the United Kingdom. The police stated that a number of women and second-generation immigrants were convicted of being accessories and covered up approximately thirteen honour crimes annually (Brandon and Hafez 2008). It is widely acknowledged that these crimes violate human rights and require attention

at both national and international levels (ICAHK). However, addressing this issue in the British context can be complicated as it concerns minority members who may have complex relationships with the nation and/or transnational “elective affinities.” This is exacerbated by documented institutional racism and the tendency to demonize Islam in Western government rhetoric (Hesse 2000). It is worth noting that not only far-right Islamophobic organisations, such as the English Defence League, and right-wing media contribute to the creation and perpetuation of such demonised images. Left-wing, liberal media pundits and politicians also contribute to the problem. The classical liberal approach to human rights does not always extend to Muslims because it confines religion to the private sphere, rendering Islamic traditions and practices irrational and barbaric.

Throughout *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the representation of Kaukab indicates the implications of liberal individualism, which simplifies issues related to class and faith. When she responds to Ujala’s criticism of the role of women in Islam, she says, “What I don’t understand is why [sic] when you all spend your time talking about women’s rights, don’t you ever think about me. What about my rights, my feelings? Am I not a woman, am I a eunuch?” (Aslam 2004a, 331). Ujala does not answer her questions and continues to criticize Islam, forcing Kaukab to be defensive until she admits that she believes that Jugnu and Chanda were guilty (Aslam 2004a, 332). Mah-Jabin’s attempt to defend her mother does not count, as she merely indicates how vulnerable older women are. Thus, Kaukab’s exclusion from mainstream feminist discourses is attributed to her social status as a working-class and uneducated immigrant, rather than to a more objective discourse that could tackle the understanding of Islamic cultures as

hostile to women's rights and question the binary of feminism and multiculturalism.

Furthermore, abandoning the community clearly shows that rejecting the community's strict gender norms and asserting individual subjectivity against community teachings leads to the polarisation of gender equality and Islamic culture, as well as feminism and multiculturalism. Alam compares Chanda's brothers' violence and hyper-masculinity to Charag, who chooses to have a vasectomy, which can be seen as a way of subverting traditional notions of masculinity and fatherhood (Aslam 2004a, 59). This idea echoes Mah-Jabin's sense of a loss of femininity when she chooses to cut off her hair, which highlights the tension between the characters' gender roles and the realities they face in a society that imposes rigid expectations on women (Aslam 2004a, 255). This polarized portrayal of characters oversimplifies gender norms and leads to the problematic victimization of Muslim women in the novel. Therefore, the representation of women in the novel can be classified into three categories: victims (Kaukab and most of the women in *Dasht-e-Tanhaii*), complicit in oppressive anti-female practices (many older women), or cultural fugitive (Mah-Jabin).

The spectral Chanda represents a spatially separated presence in the narrative; she asserts her individuality by choosing to live with Jugnu without marriage and even staying in the community. However, her brothers attempt to isolate her after two divorces. First, they fail to make her wear a burqa. Second, they remove her name from the display board of their parents' local store (Aslam 2004a, 348). Her ghostly presence indicates an inadequacy in envisioning the

possibility of a British-Pakistani female subjectivity. Such a possibility problematizes and challenges the totalizing categories of the liberated cultural fugitive who surrenders herself to individualism or liberalism and the persecuted victim at the mercy of her male family members. In the novel, the limited positions given to women in the community impede the prospect of any serious attempt to form a female collective identity.

One might argue that Aslam knowingly references headline-grabbing contemporary issues: from the exorcism that results in a rebel girl being beaten to death to the abortion of a female foetus. In an interview, the author defends himself, stating that each shocking incident in the book is based on a true case and highlights the alarming statistic that a woman in one Pakistani province is killed every 38 hours (Aslam 2004b). Aslam refutes claims that he seeks controversy or opportunism for the sake of British readers and critics, arguing that his books serve as a means of exploring his own consciousness rather than conveying any particular message (Ibid.). Problematically, *Maps for Lost Lovers* focuses on repeating and confirming social power structures that, in the fiction, further reify and marginalize minority groups. Other fictions studied in this thesis offer a different perspective.

Gautam Malkani in *Londonstani* (2006) and Guy Gunaratne in *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) have been particularly successful in diagnosing, examining and narrativising the resistances and setbacks within the neoliberal state. Aslam's novel hints at the failure of multiculturalism and partially implements a mode of pseudo-secularity that forms the experience of British South Asian communities in England—public discourse is obscured and legal



procedures are vague. The community gathers in a desperate and weak expression of solidarity devoid of any community cohesion. In contrast to France, where secularism or *laïcité* is a fundamental law in the French constitution, in Aslam's England the existence of minority communities and their religious differences is problematic in the post-imperial period. These communities are neither traumatized nor portrayed as rebellious because of significant governmental intervention. Instead of representing them as contributing to a cross-cultural dialogue and a highly textured and inclusive idea of the multicultural state, the novel at once overlooks and at times denigrates those who refuse to assimilate. This is evident in the novel's apparent failure to conceptualize a cultural community that is not oppressive. Nonetheless, Aslam's work is a thought-provoking retelling of the textures of British society during a period of heightened Islamophobia and changing attitudes towards notions of a multicultural society.

One possible premise of the story is to reconsider the notions of security and threat, re-examining the nation from its margins and within the contradictions of multiculturalism and neoliberalism. Readers are also invited to examine how memory, melancholy and sorrow might be used to promote a more encompassing view of national and global communities. One possible premise of the story is to encourage readers to reassess their understanding of security and threat, by exploring the nation from its fringes and within the complexities of multiculturalism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, the narrative invites readers to reflect on how memory, sorrow, and melancholy could be harnessed to cultivate a more comprehensive view of national and global communities. Aslam's contribution is

found in the artistic realm, wherein the voices of the most vulnerable members in the community can still be heard (Moore 2009, 17). This conceptualisation is central to the next chapter, as Sahota's novel, *The Year of The Runaways* (2015), brings the runaways from the north of India in the Global South to the north of England in the Global North, illustrating how critical attention to the centre facilitates a reimagining of the periphery. Although refugees and illegal immigrants are accorded rights on a civil level, they do not have the economic or political rights that exclude them from the scope of formal authority as a differential form of entry. The experience of identity formation within this context demands that to exist is to define yourself in relation to the Other. As will be seen, this dynamic works both ways and has great relevance to the discussion of *The Year of The Runaways* that follows.

## Chapter Two: Precarious Space and the Precariat in Sahota's *The Year of The Runaways*

Sunjeev Sahota's second novel, *The Year of The Runaways*, published in 2015, offers a distinct perspective about Indian immigrants living in England. Sahota describes the challenges faced by Indian migrant workers, which include the possibilities and limitations imposed by how one conceives of, understands and experiences the notion of home. Migrants like Sahota's runaways are part of what Guy Standing (2011) calls "the precariat"—people who do not fit in a "solidaristic labour community" and "drift towards opportunism" as they feel a "sense of alienation and instrumentality in what they have to do" (12).<sup>18</sup> The precariat are aware that what they are doing has no future. The progression of increasingly racist immigration policies distorts the image of England as multicultural, especially when basic conditions for survival, such as housing or legal status, are not met. I believe that Sahota's critical intervention lies in his incorporation of marginalized identities into the novel's depiction of multiculturalism. The multiculturalism that the author portrays indicates that there is no reason for optimism about the future of society and the prospect of achieving a sense of home and identity if the "image" of the Other remains rooted in a metaphysical relationship with the dominant culture. Despite the novel's focus on Indian migrants, some critics point out that its release in 2015 coincided with the

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<sup>18</sup> According to Guy Standing (2016) the precariat is the first class in history to be losing acquired rights –cultural, civil, social, economic and political.

refugee crisis in Europe. In a video interview, Sahota (2015b) was asked if his new novel relates to issues in the world as much as it does to Sheffield and the United Kingdom. In the interview, the author acknowledged that the narrative alternates between “the globalisation of desperation” and his strong attachment to Sheffield as a place to which his parents immigrated (Sahota 2015b, 29:50–30:51).

Set primarily in Sheffield in northern England, the novel follows the lives and trajectories of three young Indian migrant workers and a British Indian Sikh woman—Tarlochan (Tochi), an illegal immigrant and a member of the Dalit community (the lowest caste in India); Avtar, who sells his kidney and borrows money to obtain a UK student visa; and Randeep who has married a British Sikh woman, Narinder, for one year so he can live in England on a marriage visa. Narinder lives in a flat in Sheffield, and Randeep lives nearby in a house that he shares with eleven labourers, two of whom are Avtar and Tochi. Upon their arrival in the United Kingdom, Randeep and Avtar are welcomed by relatives who have already established themselves in the country. Even though they cannot depend on their relatives as a source of income, other contacts offer opportunities for illegal labour. Like other migrant workers, they are hired as day labourers with no job security or individual work identities. They always hoard the little money they earn because of their pressing financial obligations to illegal moneylenders or to fake spouses in their flats. They are subjected to such hardships due to the threat of deportation and because labour, even when it is underpaid, is a way to secure residence, citizenship or earn enough money to go back home and make a new

life. Tochi, whose entire family was killed in a caste-related attack, aspires to do something similar.

The novel is divided into four sections, named after the four seasons of the year and describe the events in the characters' lives during each season hence the title, *The Year of The Runaways*. As the title indicates, the narrative focuses on their arrival in England in the winter of 2003 and ends in the autumn of the following year. The time in which the novel is set is not arbitrary. In his review of the novel, Thomas Jones (2015) observes that the narrative can be dated to 2003 because it indicates a period prior to "Theresa May and her predecessors", starting to tighten many immigration "loopholes". When Randeep and Avtar travelled to the United Kingdom, the immigration policies and opportunities available to them had been formed by the domestic political environment and not by British and European legislation on asylum seekers at the critical time of the novel's publication in 2015. One soon realizes that during this year the protagonists have not escaped to England, but instead escaped from their personal calamities in India.

Fiction writers can use a variety of narrative techniques to illustrate the precariousness of their characters. Cultural and social contextualisation allow more in-depth insight, varied perspectives with conflicting storylines and more interiorisation in depicting themes of displacement. This flexibility encourages the consideration of diverse, overlapping and even clashing viewpoints so that the reader is engaged at multiple levels. Morrison (2013) identifies a "turn to precarity" in early twenty-first century novels, and when drawing on Judith Butler's arguments in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009), he highlights

methods of interpretation that rely on a thematic viewpoint, voice and aesthetics to mobilize and govern readers' moral and emotive responses (12-15). This method is especially important when examining the increasing number of literary and artistic responses to the migrant and refugee crises.

Sahota's narrative style focuses on the characters' current lives in England, as well as their previous lives in India. The interludes highlight their desire to leave India and describe the specific personal circumstances that forced them to undergo these journeys. In this sense, the intersecting structure contrasts with a simple division between past and present events. *The year of the Runaways* is structured non-linearly, with each section of the book being expanded by three intervals, except for the "Spring" section, which is expanded by only one interval. On the one hand, *The Year of The Runaways* adheres to the conventions of nineteenth-century realist fiction, in which biographical intervals are used to offer a comprehensive description of characters and events. On the other hand, its fragmented narrative and surreal epilogue add postmodern elements. The events from the characters' pasts and their lives in India appear as flashbacks and provide a sharp contrast to their current lives in England, which indicate the juxtaposition of the burdens they carry. The symbolic contrast between their past and present is fraught with political discourse and economic policy that unite the differences of the runaways as they perceive England (a developed country seen as the centre) as providing the desired solution to their lives in India (a country seen as the periphery). Despite the novel's apparent attention to location, the runaways are left drifting in a shadow economy, without a clear sense of time or place.

The structure includes three novella-length chapters that describe the lives of the characters when they lived in India. The novel's international and cross-cultural context and dual time scale of pre-and post-migration refer to India's diverse class and caste demographics, as well as the South Asian diaspora in England (Wilson 2017, 8). This framework implies that precarity and anxiety permeate the lives of people who are moving between countries and social structures. Judith Butler (2009) argues that in immigration politics not all lives are recognized as lives, "though apparently living, [they] [...] fail to assume perceptual form as such" (24). For example, although refugees and illegal migrants are given their rights on a civil level, they do not have economic or political rights, and cannot gain access to the bureaucratic system with its stringent requirements for entry. In the novel, the narrative framework is relevant to what Butler calls "the politics of moral responsiveness", when one or more fundamental human needs are unmet, such as housing, employment, food, medical treatment and legal status (Ibid., 41). Still, the threat to the migrants' high hopes for better living conditions prevents any effective response. The characters' own traumas or misfortunes that have forced them into exile may evoke sympathy, and the difficulties they face upon landing imply that fleeing to a developed country is not always a viable option. Sahota gives nuances to his narrative and invites us to re-evaluate the threat of migration to one's life and well-being. This is seen in the portrayal of the British Indian Narinder, who risks her secure life and her family's reputation by entering into a one-year sham marriage with Randeep to help him obtain a resident's visa, thus exposing herself to prosecution under the law.

To a great degree, the characters in the novel are divided and

distinguished according to whether they suffer from the dream of going home with what they have earned or not. This idea is mentioned at the outset of the novel when Tochi is asked by a co-worker, Ardashir, how long he is staying in England. Tochi responds, "until I have earned enough" (Sahota 2015a, 89). Therefore, Ardashir warns Tochi that he is a fool if he believes that making the amount of money he wants is a sufficient reason to remain:

"Take my advice and go back now. Before there's nothing to go back for, and you're stuck here." [...] I used to be like you [...] you should go home [or else] Forget any ideas about going home. You'll still be here, still doing this, in eleven years' time as well [...] Thirty-three years. Didn't do my papa's rites, my biji's. Wife and children started new lives. For what? So I can sit here in this hell. No future but death. Just a body needing to be clothed and fed. Go back, you understand. (Ibid., 89)

Ardashir insinuates that the dilemma is that they will never save enough money to go back home. The implication, then, is that they will stay forever in a state of limbo, not truly present in their new home but unable to return to their old country. This dream of going home appears to define the experience of migrant workers to a degree. Certainly, the novel is partly populated with characters who do not appear to be part of the precariat in any obvious way but who are, at first glance, merely displaced South Asians whose identities are still firmly embedded in their country of origin. The precarious community in which the migrants live is substantially based on the standards and culture of the country of origin, which have been transplanted onto English soil. They have constructed a sub-community with weak links to mainstream culture, but nonetheless it seems vital



and thriving.

In this episode, which contextualizes the dream of going home, Tochi decides to immigrate so he can return to his homeland, which he has never forgotten. In a captivating analysis of this idea, Sandhya Shukla (2003) suggests that identification with the homeland and the constant desire to return “home” is actually an important element in the formation of immigrant identity in the new country. Moreover, to some degree, when immigrants return home, they will form an exaggerated sense of identity developed during their stay in England. They will return “home” reflecting what they have earned, their success and their benefactors. Their residency in England will have contributed to the inflated identity that is inextricably connected to the Asian “home”. According to Sahota, many immigrants perceive “home” as somewhere else; they are living in England, but really not there at all. A great deal of background information about the experiences and perceptions of the migrant worker is revealed through the conversations of Ardashir, Gurpreet, Malkeet, Dr Cheema and other minor characters who are realistic and reasonably well-rounded and serve an important, informative purpose. They set the parameters of the migrants’ experiences, expectations and worldview for the protagonists as well as for the reader. Regarding identity and homeland, the use and function of the concept of “home” are significant.

*The Year of The Runaways* includes a conscious and comprehensive examination of issues relating to home and identity. It turns the concept of home

into a state of “cartographic anxiety”.<sup>19</sup> The novel frequently shows maps that help locate characters symbolically and reveals how alienated they are from their surroundings. This paradox is evident in the opening scene:

Randeep Sanghera stood in front of the green-and-blue map tacked to the wall. The map had come with the flat, and though it was big and wrinkled, and cigarette butts had once stubbed black islands into the mid-Atlantic, he’d kept it, a reminder of the world outside. (Sahota 2015a, 3)

The passage shifts the reader’s focus from Randeep, who stands before the map, to the map itself and raises concerns about Randeep’s role as a social actor in a world that contrasts with the bleak conditions of his life in England. Even though the passage focuses on the map rather than Randeep, “the world” it depicts is delusive—making new islands by burning cigarettes highlights the difference between a world that is real and a world that is illusory or even removed. The map, to some extent, is not really a “reminder” of a world that Randeep knows, but evidence, referring to his lack of belonging in Sheffield. He came to the city after a sham marriage to Narinder, a religious Sikh from Croydon, in South London. In this passage, both are in her flat, which they use to keep up the appearance of a married couple in case the immigration inspectors visit. Randeep actually resides in a shared home with other Indian immigrants. Under such fraught circumstances, the map serves two purposes: it alerts the reader to

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<sup>19</sup> A term coined by Sankaran Krishna (1994) that describes the fear among India’s leaders concerning parts of its territory being held or contested by other countries.

the immigrant workers' uncertainty and insecurity, while capturing their desire for a better future. Randeep and Avtar choose to travel to England not because it is an appealing location, but because there is a well-established social infrastructure in Punjab that makes the journey possible.

Leaving India is unavoidable; finding a job in Punjab is becoming ever more difficult for people with inadequate qualifications and aptitudes, so many people migrate to Toronto and Dubai (Sahota 2015a, 106-112). In the world of the informal economy, immigration or travelling overseas is marked by despair rather than hope. The cost of such despair forces Avtar to sell his kidney and borrow money from illegal moneylenders to fund his journey on a student visa to the "Coll. of NW London" (College of North West London) (Ibid., 190). Nonetheless, obtaining a visa to enter the United Kingdom lawfully does not settle the fragility of Randeep and Avtar's financial security. As soon as they arrive in England, they begin searching for jobs to stabilize their position in British society, but struggle to achieve this because their sense of alienation in London hinders their search for work.

When Randeep first arrives in London, his cousins disappoint him and dismiss his enthusiasm for seeing them after a decade apart. The cousin, Jimmy, advises Randeep and Avtar to assimilate. His advice is interspersed with exclusionary phrases like "you freshies", and "you lot", which emphasize their differences (Sahota 2015a, 199). Even so, in Randeep's expression of his attempts to fill the gap between himself and others, his encounters reveal the lasting historical connections between Britain and India. This idea is clearly seen in two short passages in the novel, which relate to the telephone conversations Randeep has

with Michael, an elderly Englishman, while working part-time at a call centre for a British insurance company in Punjab. When Randeep senses Michael's loneliness, he forgets about his duty as a customer service consultant and evokes Michael's memories of fighting alongside the Indians in Burma during the Second World War:

Randeep switched the receiver to his other ear. He knew the battle. "The 1944 campaign, sir? We really out-foxed the Japanese, I think." "Once we got Maungdaw, we knew we were in with a chance. As long as those tunnels stayed true." "The tunnels. Yes, the tunnels. You must admit the engineers were heroes, sir. The Indian Seventh Division put their lives on the line for your country". (Sahota 2015a, 149)

They recall when Britain and India "out-foxed the Japanese" (Ibid., 151). Michael and Randeep begin to talk on the phone periodically, developing what Randeep regards as a flourishing friendship. However, the extent to which he misinterprets this friendship becomes apparent when, after his arrival in Sheffield, Randeep becomes disgusted with his filthy shared house and presumes he can stay at Michael's home in Doncaster. When he arrives at Michael's door with his briefcase, Philip, Michael's son, puts an end to the cultural misunderstanding by telling Randeep that it is impossible to offer him such hospitality. Philip re-establishes the cultural differences that Randeep's cousins have already emphasized so cruelly: "I know that in your culture guests can come and live willy-nilly, but that's not how we do things" (Sahota 2015a, 209).

In this sense, his cousins and Michael's son suggest that England and

India represent equally long-established and contentious ideas. Despite the constant rejection of Randeep's presence, which indicates irreconcilable differences between the two cultures, the presence of the immigrant is a reminder of the longitudinal and close relationship between Britain and India. When Randeep's cousins and Michael's son rebuff him, there is an allusion to Britain's denial of such a relationship that reaffirms a polarising culturalism. Their assertion of cultural differences reveals an intentional disregard of the historical relationship of "we" who "out-foxed the Japanese" (Ibid., 149). Thus, putting the ["Indian soldiers"] lives on the line for your country [Britain]" is not a sufficient reason to accept Randeep as a guest in Michael's house (Ibid.). While Randeep struggles to understand a new culture in England, his need for work becomes increasingly urgent. Migrants like Randeep and Avtar are part of a precariat aware of the fact that what they are doing has no future. Their apprehension of being discovered by the immigration officers is emphasized by the fact that their social communication is kept to "apna" or "apbeh" (i.e., the Hindu and Punjabi words that mean "ours"). As precariat, "to be "out" tomorrow would come as no surprise, and to leave might not be bad, if another job or burst of activity beckoned" (Standing 2012, 12).

The novel emphasizes social networks that make up the shadow economy of South Asian society through restricting the characters' quest for work to be done only amongst the *apna*. If the networks of the Indians, and the Punjabis in particular, show that community is possible, this interdependent relationship may quickly break when employment is limited. The generosity offered by the *apna* is limited due to the changing degrees and boundaries of belonging. This idea is

evident when Randeep is ordered to sleep with other labourers beneath the bridge and not in the gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship (Sahota 2015a, 393–95). As Janet Wilson (2017) notes, the novel's analysis of the perilous nature of being a migrant in England, and in such miserable circumstances, "show[s] the increasingly arbitrary divisions between abandonment or support, caring or violence" (10). Despite the vulnerability shared by the runaways, each embodies a distinct position, demonstrating the diversity of this class of workers.

In Sheffield's desolate surroundings, Tochi, Randeep and Avtar occupy a precarious space as they begin to interrogate their commitments and allegiances. The living conditions of the protagonists make them doubt the significance of familial attachments, a primary reason for their move to England. While Gurpreet thinks that: "It's not work that makes us leave home and come here. It's love. Love for our families", Avtar thinks that Gurpreet is "a sentimental creep": "We come here for the same reason that our people do anything, duty. We're doing our duty, and it's shit" (Sahota 2015a, 7).

In times of need, they turn to the British South Asian community or the gurdwara, the centre of religious practice. However, such bonds are weak when it comes to survival and making a living, which makes poverty worse. Tochi steals Avtar's job when he is away in London for his exams. Taking vengeance, Avtar robs Tochi's money to pay his debts; his moneylenders have finally found his family in India and are threatening to kill them. As part of the precariat, runaways do not have a work-based identity, so they are free of any moral or behavioural commitments, even though some have professional credentials and prestigious titles. The usual divisions of class and caste continue in the South Asian

community in England, and the attempt to conceal ethnic or caste identity causes additional tensions; they remain intact and do not disappear. For instance, when a rich British Hindu family regards Tochi as a potential match for their daughter, they turn against him when they learn of his Dalit caste and withdraw the offer.

Precarity is also related to the disparities associated with resource distribution and is manifested in the political battle between the rich and the marginalized poor. Sahota focuses on the inequalities and the great precarity to which marginal groups are more regularly subjected. The novel tackles economic disparities, caste and class inequalities and challenges the perception that wealth and social class are the only determinants of value. As Standing (2011) states, signs of precarity include lack of focus, alienation, which are “anomic, uncertain and desperate”. This is common among the wealthy and the displaced migrants who have succeeded in making a better life in the new country (23). Dr Cheema, a successful British South Asian entrepreneur who deals with new overseas students at Avtar’s university, starts to suffer psychologically and existentially when he feels that belonging requires sacrificing all that is familiar. He considers the impoverished working-class migrants as a way to express his alienation from England. To him, they represent a higher level of authenticity, and their physical presence serves as an analogue of his own spiritual losses, displacement and longing for the home of origin.

After meeting Avtar, he becomes conscious of his alienation, which precipitates a cultural identity crisis and the need to feel secure when away from the household and the workplace:

“Everyone’s a little upset with me,” Cheemaji said. “You’ve no doubt noticed. [...] They don’t understand. We don’t belong here. It’s not our home. [...]. You’ve helped me realize that. People like you.” “Me?” “We’re like flies trapped in a web. Well, I don’t intend on waiting for the spider.” [...]. “I said that to Rachna. Do you know what she said? She said I seemed to have forgotten that for the fly, once webbed, it’s already over”. [...] [Avtar thinks] “What decadence this belonging rubbish was, what time the rich must have if they could sit round and weave such worries out of such threadbare things”. (Sahota 2015a, 317)

Dr Cheema’s desperate desire for deeper roots transcends his class and wealth, and shifts these positions in terms of power. In contrast, Avtar, an indigent and illegal student, is unaware of Dr Cheema’s identity crisis and pronounces him responsible for his spiritual loss in the face of his materialism. The worthiness of the runaway’s quest in a new country is called into question. Dr Cheema, who should represent success, continues to feel alienated and disappointed with his life, leading Avtar to doubt the possibility of having a successful life in England. Although it is reasonable to believe that social participation will create a sense of belonging and identity, the factors that influence one’s ability to initiate participation are marginally represented in this novel and allow the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Dr Cheema’s intellectual and career successes offer some explanation as to where this image originated. Despite his identity crisis, Dr Cheema’s participation in society is in proportion to his self-perception. Dr Cheema would be able to acquire status from the society in which he participates. Although his



image and identity as a successful British South Asian create an imagined identity of “flies trapped in a web”, the image seems inflated but still powerful (Sahota 2015a, 317). I presume that it was this identity that supported Dr Cheema through his life in England; his initial integration at least allowed him to feel a sense of belonging in England. Yet Dr Cheema’s sense of self no longer seems to be linked to the level of success he feels he should have achieved in London, and he does not “intend on waiting for the spider” (Ibid., 317). He feels a sense of separation from, and perhaps a superiority to, other Indian migrant workers and students. In a sense, his self-perception as a successful social actor does not flourish in a vacuum. His position as an advisor at Coll. of NW London introduces added pressure.

Therefore, Dr Cheema is forced to interact with students from India in a way that does not depend upon illusion. The prospect and eventual reality of students like Avtar, or, in Dr Cheema’s words, “people like you [Avtar]”, forces him to examine his values and consider how they might be affected by society (Sahota 2015a, 317). His desire for authentic connection, community and relationships with people from his home of origin overwhelms and overshadows his imagined identity. His delusions rob him of any power he may have had, pushing him into an existence that does not provide him with a sense of identity that he finds acceptable. This essential contradiction creates extreme personal issues in Dr Cheema’s life and eventually results in his divorce. When Dr Cheema, the model of success, collapses, Avtar loses motivation for his studies, which symbolically indicates that with his mounting debts he is giving up his pursuit of wealth and success in England.

Sahota's runaways inhabit a contested space in which they are radically alienated. The supposed connection of the experiences of the runaways in England obscures subtle and small rifts in the social network that determine who actually belongs to the South Asian community (i.e., the apna). Excluded from the apna, Randeep and Avtar live in a gradually restricted space, and their limited movement in England is in marked contrast to the international journey they undertook to come to the country. There is also a geographical dimension to the ongoing exclusion of migrants from their social sphere in England. During their early days of looking for work, Randeep rejects a potential offer in Scotland because it is too far from England. Randeep and Avtar have no sense of where Scotland is compared to their location in Ilford, East London. Avtar looks at "the fag-holed timetable on the lamppost. Birmingham. Bristol. Derby. Edinburgh. Glasgow. Gravesend. Leeds. Manchester. Newcastle. Wolverhampton. But no Scotland" (Sahota 2015a, 196). Their extreme ignorance of the geography of Britain contrasts with the "reminder of the world outside" that Randeep will locate later on the map in Sheffield. The rest of the world seems closer than the rest of Britain (Ibid., 3).

To some degree, the protagonists fail to gain any real sense of home, identity, culture and even geography from their surroundings because they lead such limited lives. Although the runaways confuse the North of England with the North of the United Kingdom and are unaware of its history, they still show an indescribable and remarkable understanding of it. Working as day labourers, they are hired to toil at work sites, such as construction and sewers in Leeds, Derby and throughout the West Midlands. Near the end of their first year, Randeep and

Avtar continue to look for work after they discover that there might be a chance to get a job in Rotherham. When Randeep wonders if they have already worked there, Avtar's reply is mixed with alienation and capitulation: "Maybe. I lose track" (Sahota 2015a, 463). The idea of the North seems to stem from the sense of ambiguity that migrants experience, encapsulating regional geography with cultural and psychological imaginaries, which further disrupts their sense of place. Like many migrants, they leave India, seeking a better life in one of the developed countries. Their prospects of comfort soon vanish and their desperation is reflected in the gloomy situation of Northern England. The divergence of Northern England from the Global North suggests that it is a place of paradoxes.

Randeep admits to Tochi that he had never heard of Sheffield before his arrival (Ibid., 25). This reveals the estrangement of those consigned to the periphery of political society and shows the novel's concentration on cultural geography. Murthy (2021) suggests that the confusion of immigrants is emphasized by the different levels of geographical space examined in the novel, which leads to a critique of the North of England (79). Although the novel describes a specific place, its boundaries are ambiguous. It is not clear if these boundaries reach to the south as far as the Midlands. In her introduction to an edited volume on the creation of the English North in cinema and television, Ewa Mazierska (2017) suggests that the best method to identify the North should be to ask individuals in a particular place where they belong (2). This statement indicates that, to some degree, the demarcation is more cultural than geographic. Avtar and Randeep are unaware of such cultural signs, which could lead them to

confuse the diversity of the North, and the strongest proof of this confusion can be seen in their inability to locate Scotland.

Alexander Beaumont (2016), in a radio interview, states that common to the North of England and the North of Britain (Scotland) is their involvement in “dearth, dirt, and, quite often, dreariness” (2:05–2:09). Peter Davidson (2005) reflects this image when he observes that “Scotland seen from the south is a place of dearth: a mean, negligible land”, and the North of England is likewise “consistently described in terms of dearth, authenticity and pastness” (215). The protagonists do not realize that the territorial North of England is different from the North of the United Kingdom and that the two norths lie confusingly next to one another. The Indian labourers are not the only ones who are confused. Narinder’s position presents a more complex image of the British citizen who still occupies the precarious place of the Other. Her social life is limited to the Sikh community in London, so her knowledge of Greater London only includes the gurdwaras of Croydon, Ilford and Southall. The hyphenation implied in her identity as a British Sikh signifies the multicultural status of Britain but fails to lessen the differences between Sahota’s runaways and the English. She is neither entirely English nor Indian, and her life in Sheffield is equally unstable. As a religious turban-wearing British Sikh, Narinder occupies a liminal space that allows her to be both an insider and an outsider. Her middle-class family in London is not aware of her position, and regardless of the material conditions and caste and class status that make her life different from the everyday realities of the workers, Narinder, in a sense, is also a runaway.

In Narinder’s story, which exposes gender issues entrenched within her

community, another sign of precarity is evident in her community through her high propensity for risk-taking and seizing opportunities to challenge marginalisation and discrimination. When Narinder rejects her arranged marriage and comfortable life and enters into a sham marriage with Randeep, she gains independence at the expense of emotional stability. By challenging the idea that the cohesion of the Sikh family is based on women, the novel offers an interesting twist. Narinder's failed attempt to become socially empowered highlights the paucity of freedom for Sikh women. She intends to help others, even at the expense of her own safety. Her idealism allows her to voluntarily suffer for others and to ultimately secure a job, thus achieving a degree of independence and enough income for her one year of a "visa marriage" (Sahota 2015a, 97). Despite this, Narinder cannot overcome family pressure and is subjected to their expectations. After being bullied by her brother and his wife and emotionally blackmailed by her father after her mother's death, she returns home to take care of him. She is also unable to define herself, and when the possibility of love with Tochi arises, she rejects it.

Her position relative to the three Indian male characters and her portrayal as a devout Sikh causes some difficulty with the secular perception of the feminist praxis. Narinder is the type of character that secular feminists would interpret as oblivious to the sexism to which she is subjected because of her family. She is excited about covering her hair when she is too young, even though her mother does not agree, because "What's the hurry? [God] won't mind if you wait a week" (Sahota, 2015, 215). When she is older, Narinder gladly accepts her father and brother's request to remain at home until they find her a suitable marriage partner

(Ibid., 256). It is this flexibility—an attribute that Saba Mahmood (2009) suggests contains “a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement”—that spurs Narinder’s sense of justice (29) and allows her to confront her father and brother and to help the three runaways irrespective of the stringent immigration laws. Her father confuses the difference between the moral law Narinder learns at the gurdwara with the rule of British law. When Narinder wants to help an Indian woman locate her undocumented daughter in England, her father responds, “It’s a police matter, beiti. Let’s not get involved” (Sahota 2015a, 259). This interpretation of morality gives primacy to intention over action. Because of this understanding, Narinder refrained from helping Kavi, who asked her for a visa marriage during her visit to the gurdwara in India, saying, “It’s illegal. It’s against the law. People could go to prison” (Ibid., 287).

However, Narinder loses faith in the British law and reconsiders her own understanding of moralities after the dramatic death of Kavi in Siberia during his illegal journey to enter Britain:

“I destroyed a family, Baba. My actions killed someone and I don’t know how I’ll ever forgive myself.” “God will forgive you. He knows your heart.” “But why he let it happen. Is he teaching me a lesson?” “Narinder we’ve spoken about this. I promise you it will make sense in the end”. (Sahota 2015a, 292)

At this point, key political elements of Narinder’s identity start to emerge, as she fearlessly disregards the anger of her father and brother, and the constant

questioning by immigration inspectors. She risks her potential marriage to support migrants from India against Britain's racist immigration policies. Unlike Aneeka in Shamsie's *Home Fire*, whose specialisation in law and whose response to British law places her dramatically and explicitly in the public sphere, Narinder's response significantly disrupts the boundaries between the public and private, the secular and religious. Unlike Aneeka, her actions do not lead to an escalation of international tension; instead, Narinder asks her brother Tejbal, "Should Guruji not have fed the hungry sadhus? Should he have walked past?" (Sahota 2015a, 268). This expression of religiosity prompts her to reprimand her brother for his failure to act on injustice, causing her to retreat to the private sphere during much of the narrative. Narinder's awareness of her own agency provokes the obstacles she faces, while her position in the private sphere and her indecipherable demeanour makes Randeep dislike her (Ibid., 172). Even so, this does not prevent her political agency. In fact, her religious beliefs go beyond silence and mere talk when she politically and romantically identifies herself with Tochi, whose lower caste enflames her father, Avtar and Randeep because of their beliefs in caste.

Because of her strong beliefs, Narinder sympathises with Tochi and she even defends him against Avtar and Randeep's verbal abuse: "Can't you see how he's suffering?" (Sahota 2015a, 455), she reprimands Randeep after a violent fight between Avtar, Tochi and Randeep. Narinder's open mindedness shapes her worldview and identity as she gains insights into Tochi's suffering as a Dalit. When she is unable to find a religious explanation for the ethnic cleansing of his family, she questions her religious beliefs, as well as her feelings towards him

(Sahota 2015a, 432-433). Although she ultimately abandons the outward signs of her faith, she maintains her political alignment with Randeep, Avtar and Tochi, assisting them in evading the immigration authorities and the police at the end of the novel (Ibid., 458-468). She is unable to pray at her father's funeral, and as the narrator observes in the final chapter, titled Epilogue, "If there was a God he'd know how false her prayer would be" (Ibid., 467). Her religious beliefs motivate her actions throughout the narrative, contrasting sharply with other characters discussed in this thesis. Shamsie's Aneeka and Isma, for example, criticize racial discrimination, but a commitment to a liberal humanist viewpoint is what defines their actions. Challenging the secular rule of law demands suggesting an equivalent moral law that is easily accessible in libertarian forms of theology. The public sphere is not accessible to precariat subjects, whom Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) describe as "always at war, always in hiding" (30).

Narinder, perhaps out of fear of violence and reprisal from the public sphere, seeks shelter in the private sphere, the gurdwara. Here, she can undermine hegemonic power systems that are completely contradictory to their justice-oriented worldviews. The description of Narinder's experience in the book suggests that, instead of considering these public and private poles from the point of view of a female, feminist practice might benefit from a fundamental rethinking of what it entails to be an agent, social actor and a migrant worker in a world where national borders are becoming increasingly indistinct, and where secularism alone is not enough to confront the racial and gender discrimination of the rule of law.

As a member of the Dalit community, Tochi's life in India has been



enveloped in caste prejudice, and his response is stoical silence. In contrast to Avtar and Randeep, who come from Punjab, Tochi's home state is Bihar, which Toral Jatin Gajjarawala (2013) refers to as the "central locus of intranational migration" in northern India in his book on Dalit fiction, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (159). After working in Punjab during his teenage years, Tochi returns to his village to support his family after his father loses both his arms in a machine accident. As time passes, Tochi succeeds in establishing a business by driving a rickshaw, but his life has already been determined by the politics of caste and class. He is restricted to his position in the social order through caste prejudice, institutional racism and social alienation even though he has become a successful driver. Suddenly, political conflicts explode and the militant group, "Maheshwar Sena", starts a violent war against "the Maoist", or Communist, Indian government forces (Sahota 2015a, 58). The war takes on the form of social cleansing as the upper caste starts eliminating members of the Dalit community and Tochi's family is brutally massacred. It quickly becomes evident that Tochi's narrative serves as a darker counterpart to the stories of Avtar and Randeep.

The reappearance of caste and class politics, and its transformation to ethnic cleansing, excludes Tochi from his precarious position on the margins of society. He decides to leave India for an undetermined destination to escape the brutal circumstances that he has endured. Tochi's journey to England differs from the other protagonists in various critical aspects. While obtaining a visa to travel abroad suggests a guarantee of a better life for Avtar and Randeep, Tochi escapes from the precarity of his life in India by being smuggled through France

and entering the United Kingdom illegally. Nevertheless, when he arrives in England, he is subjected again to the same social discrimination that he attempted to escape by leaving India. At first, he cannot secure work with the apna without lying about his last name and gives himself a Punjabi surname, Sandhu, which makes him anxious and afraid of being discovered, not only by the police but also by his Punjabi employers.

Tochi focuses on the journey itself, unlike Avtar and Randeep who act in the hope of a better future. When the travel agent informs him of the possibility of arranging a route to Paris, he asks the agent to show him France on the map that hangs on his wall. The agent tells him that it shows only South India and Kanyakumari, where he is from (Sahota 2015a, 71). That the south of India is as foreign to Tochi as France is not surprising and gives further evidence of his caste status and his consignment to the social periphery. This is symbolically emphasized by his inability to recognize the map, and since the city is located in the southernmost part of India, Kanyakumari becomes as desirable as France:

He thought again of that place called Kanyakumari. The place of ends and oceans. It seemed amazing to him that there could be an end to India, one you could point to and identify and work towards. That things needn't go on as they are forever (Sahota 2015a, 72).

Kanyakumari is located at the intersection of three bodies of water—the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea—and comprises a zone of both connection and disconnection. It denotes the beginning and end of land and water. Likewise, Tochi's feelings of melancholy indicate the end of one phase of

his life and the beginning of another as he leaves northern India for northern England. He arrives in Sheffield after a dangerous journey through Turkmenistan, Turkey and Paris, where he stays for two months before being smuggled to London. England, to him, becomes almost a stopping point before returning to India. As Tochi's year in Sheffield comes to an end, Narinder, who has fallen in love with him, asks him to name a place he would travel to if he had the freedom. Tochi says, "Kanyakumari [...] at the end of India. Nothing but sea from there" (Sahota 2015a, 465). What is important to him is that Kanyakumari is located at the endpoint of the contiguous Indian subcontinent. This view indicates that "there can be no more false dreams" (Ibid., 449). His pointed response is calculated to remind her of the new beginning that she can share with him (Ibid.).

In this sense, the southernmost point of India is seen as a place where desires are fulfilled rather than a place of poverty and misery from which one must flee. Yet, as Murthy (2021) suggests, the two spaces that Tochi envisions in England and India are neither "hemispheric" nor "latitudinal" but "conceptual", resulting from the outcome of a geographical split created by imperialism, Cold War politics, and neoliberal capitalism (86). Our perception of the so-called developed countries and the periphery should adapt to the continuous changes in the world economy. As Arif Dirlik (2007) notes, "the "South" of the contemporary world may be significantly different in its composition and territorial spread than the South of the early 1970s, or the colonial South of the immediate post-World War period" (13). Despite Tochi's enthusiasm for the South's potential, Sahota does not romanticise it. Rather, he portrays India (South) and England (North) as amorphous intellectual territories that overlap and push

against one another regionally, nationally and globally.

At the end of the novel, the story jumps from the protagonists' first year in England to an epilogue that looks in at them ten years later. Their lives throughout the book, specifically during their first year in England, are characterized by their urgent need for employment, continuous fear of failure and deportation, pain and threats to their physical and mental well-being. The epilogue, conversely, takes place in a perhaps imaginary world. Here, Avtar and Randeep's families join them in England, and their lives no longer seem to rely on the uncertainty of provisional work. Similar to the previous migrant networks that enabled them to go to England, their families have now come to England through Avtar and Randeep.

The epilogue fails to justify Randeep and Avtar's decision to travel to England, regardless of the change in their lives. Randeep resides in a studio apartment and has bought a house for his family (Sahota 2015a, 475). Avtar, his wife and his family live nearby in Sheffield, where they reside in relative comfort. In the ensuing years, Randeep's hair has greyed and he must continuously ward off his mother's meddling in his marriage plans; with a combination of nostalgia and remorse, he recalls his visa-marriage to Narinder. Avtar's life has changed even more dramatically; he nearly dies as a result of the removal of his kidney and walks with a noticeable limp. He marries Randeep's sister, Lakhpreet. They reside in a rented apartment, and she is the principal breadwinner in a family that includes Avtar's parents and younger brother. England has not fulfilled the promise that the developed countries seemed to offer since their experience in Sheffield is merely a small improvement from the material conditions of their lives in India. Nonetheless, Avtar and Randeep have adapted to their new lives.

Despite the problems and frustrations of living in a developed country, the novel promotes the belief that migration from India to England is still a desired path for the precariat.

Tochi's and Narinder's stories demonstrate a different England-India relationship. Narinder has travelled to different parts of India and England, including Croydon and Sheffield. The transformation of her identity and her life is possibly the most drastic. She has abandoned her religious practices, her turban and her kara. Despite her lack of courage to return Tochi's love, she chooses to return to London. She finds a middle ground by suppressing her passion and refuses to marry the man who has been chosen for her by her family. Unlike the male characters in the narrative, her future remains unstable and precarious. However, it is this precariousness and instability that allow her to gain insights into her understanding of the notions of home and the development of identity. In the epilogue, she interweaves the various homes from India to England with a short journey to London and Sheffield to see Avtar and Randeep before flying to Punjab from Manchester. Once she arrives, she makes an impromptu decision and visits Kanyakumari before returning to England.

The epilogue ends in Kanyakumari, with Narinder watching Tochi and his wife and children from afar, "but she didn't call out when she saw him" (Sahota 2015a, 468). The epilogue confirms Tochi's "desire to be allowed a say in his life" (Ibid., 58) and he is the only principal character who develops a sense of belonging. His life in Sheffield has healed him from the physical and psychological wounds that linked him to his past in Bihar. He has forged an identity and a sense of home in Kanyakumari with a wife and four children, a future that the other

characters have not achieved. Then again, the epilogue could be viewed as imaginary and at odds with the realism of the rest of the novel since it is chronologically split from the narrative. Narinder wonders, “What else had she wanted?” when she sees Tochi with his family in Kanyakumari (484). Significantly, the question remains unresolved. Her wish is left unspoken, and the narrative does not draw a conclusion. With such open-endedness, *The Year of The Runaways* does not redefine home but it recognizes that the imposed dichotomy between both homes (India and England) camouflages additional intricate relationships. In so doing, the novel predicts and stages a cross-cultural dialogue and critique of multiculturalism.

Tariq Modood defines multiculturalism very precisely as “the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries from outside the prosperous West” (Modood 2007, 5). This definition identifies some of the ways in which the current discourse of multiculturalism reflects logic and argument patterns from previous discourses on racism. Sahota’s understanding of the changing meaning for “the West” can also apply to “the East”. The East generates a space for opportunity, while the West causes fear. The relationship of the West with the East is already embodied by the presence of the Other from “outside the prosperous West” (Ibid.).

The hardships that characterize the lives of Sahota’s characters connect the anxieties of the migrants with the structural problems at work in a transforming West. The reader’s role is not to untangle such complexity but to focus on the threads of connection and purpose in discussions regarding East and West. Narinder’s journeys demonstrate one way of navigating the world, revealing each

place while simultaneously disclosing the interpersonal and psychological paths that connect individuals. When she is about to leave Kanyakumari, the final image of the narrative shows Narinder watching Tochi and his family, which indicates the longstanding yet hidden ties that exist between East and West.

At the end of the novel, the reader is left wondering if the real possibilities for identity formation or a sense of home lie only in the doubts, or aporia, contained in the narrative. The sequence of events in the epilogue is dream-like and surreal and the narrative as a whole is fragmented, intermingling disparate places and past with present. This leads the reader to wonder whether Tochi actually returned to India and started a family, and if Randeep and Avtar began a new life together and brought their families to England. Moreover, the narrative stretches the boundaries of what is believable in terms of a “cultural logic” embedded in Western thought and perceptions. In the epilogue, Narinder travels to London, Sheffield and Kanyakumari to check on Randeep, Avtar and Tochi. She feels their need for her more strongly than before, suggesting that she has maintained a sort of psychic connection with them that stretches the bounds of realism. The epilogue is perhaps plausible as a representation of the psychological search for wholeness and meaning.

When reading fiction, our perception of what is and is not plausible is guided by the narrative. The “cultural logic” of Narinder’s quest from a feminist Western viewpoint is evident as she returns to Sheffield “without her turban, her Kara, her Kandha” to tell her father and brother she is not going to marry, “not Karamjeet, not anyone” (Sahota 2015a, 458). She does not change her mind even though her father “slapped” her, her brother “bellowed”, and her “frantic [...]

[fiancé] tried to talk her round, to the wedding, to God" (Ibid.). This indicates that Narinder could achieve a sense of belonging, but her wholeness must include abandoning her religion and making a shift to secularism. She demonstrates her new identity during her last visit to India, and when the priest asks her to offer her father a prayer, "She was sorry, she told the priest, but if there was a God he'd know how false her prayer would be" (467).

Narinder's evolved identity seems inconsistent with the events that occur throughout the narrative. According to a cultural logic embedded in the secular West, it seems misguided that Tochi would willingly return to the country where his family was ethnically cleansed. Regardless of the immigrants' desire to return home, the notion that individuals can control their destiny is profoundly Western. Tochi returns to his destiny, but it is only his destiny because he believes it is so. Imperialist cultural logic dictates "not only that the West has led the world to modern society, but that as people in other civilisations modernize they also Westernize, abandoning their traditional values, institutions, and customs and adopting those that prevail in the West" (Huntington 1996, 28). To allow minorities to speak for themselves and participate in a cross-cultural dialogue that they can truly change is a view that must be considered, and Sahota's novel successfully provides this challenge.

The fragmented narrative and its evolution through the course of the novel makes the process of identity-formation in the multicultural context of the United Kingdom almost experimental; the reader is transported with the runaways through time, place and various permutations of selfhood. The runaways' process of acclimatisation to a new culture provides ample material for a multicultural



exploration of identity formation, offering grounds for comparison with other authors. Ultimately, it presents an innovative concept of a type of cultural belonging that is transcendent and potentially universal without being defined by a Western cultural hegemony. In this way, Sahota's narrative truly seems to build upon the body of multicultural literature and criticism and provides a penetrating commentary about the notions of home and identity; it represents the uncertainties of identity and positionality of such precarious individuals, and it turns home into a condition of cartographic anxiety. Even more strikingly, Sahota's work leads the reader to re-examine and interrogate existing assumptions regarding the nature of British South Asian or multicultural identity formations at a meta-narrative level.

*The Year of The Runaways*, as a narrative about migration, is reminiscent of fiction where the values of wealth and marriage highlight social mobility. Since it questions these values and hierarchies, the novel's concern is centred more on the crisis of multiculturalism as in *Home Fire* (2017) and the recent refugee crisis, as in *Exit West* (2018) by Mohsin Hamid. The next chapter shows how *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie tackles the nature of this crisis, suggesting that this crisis of multiculturalism stems from a more complex crisis of trust between communities in England, especially between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. After all, it is not just cultural difference that results in divisions; it is indeed the surveillant gaze that fixes and reifies (Muslim) minorities whom Mondal (2018) terms "the cryptic other" stigmatising and limiting them to a specific role and confined frame.

### Chapter Three: The Question of Trust in a Multicultural Society

*Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie portrays the experiences of two British-Pakistani families struggling with racial and religious profiling. The novel is about the Pasha family, who are of Pakistani origin and live in England. The youngest member of the family, Parvaiz, joins Daesh (ISIS) which creates a conflict between his sisters, Isma and Aneeka. Isma believes in reporting Parvaiz's case to the police while Aneeka thinks they can bring him back by using Eamonn's position as the son of the Home Secretary. However, Parvaiz is killed while trying to escape from Farooq in front of the British consulate in Turkey. In this chapter, I examine Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) in the context of contemporary arguments about multiculturalism and trust. Drawing on Mondal's examination of the "cryptic other," I illustrate how liberal discourses perpetuate discrimination and generate racialized representations. I suggest that the surveillant gaze, akin to cultural differences, has a role in perpetuating divisions and reinforcing the representation of Muslim minorities within a specific role and a confined frame.

*Home Fire*, a novel that delves into themes of identity, family, loyalty, and the effects of terrorism on individuals and communities, has garnered significant attention in literary criticism. One such contribution is Claire Chambers' (2018) analysis, which concentrates on the use of sound and violence as literary devices, emphasizing their potential to provide a voice for marginalized characters and to explore the intricacies of radicalization and its effects on marginalized groups. Chambers also investigates the various forms of text incorporated in the novel and their impact on the relationship between sound and text. Another important contribution comes from Amina Yaqin (2021), who employs Achille Mbembe's

theoretical framework to examine the concepts of necropolitics, necropower, and trauma in Shamsie's fiction. Yaqin analyzes *Home Fire*, *Broken Verses* (2005), and *Burnt Shadows* (2009) to demonstrate how Shamsie engages with the effects of a globalized securitization of borders on diasporas in Britain and North America, as well as the historical and political moments in which necropolitics and necropower operate in Pakistan. Yaqin also highlights the pressures Shamsie faces as a British Pakistani writer in representing her culture, and the interplay between gender, race, and class in her work offers a thought-provoking critique of power dynamics.

However, some scholars have focused on the representation of Muslims in literature and how these representations contribute to the wider socio-political landscape. Aamer Shaheen et al (2018) and Debjani Banerjee (2020) and Rehana Ahmad (2020), examine the representation of Muslims in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*. Shaheen et al explore the novel's representation of extremist points of view and link it to post-colonial studies. Their analysis suggests that the novel portrays a complex web of politics and identity, demonstrating how extremism can arise from a combination of internal and external factors. Additionally, they suggest that Shamsie's work engages with post-colonial theory, which highlights the historical and cultural implications of colonialism and its aftermath. In contrast, Banerjee's article focuses on the political and cultural diversity of British Muslims and how *Home Fire* illuminates this situation, thus indicating gaps in the representation of Muslims in literature that require further study. Banerjee suggests that the novel offers a nuanced portrayal of Muslim characters, who are often marginalized or stereotyped in

mainstream literature. Through her analysis, Banerjee argues that literature has the potential to challenge and transform dominant narratives about Muslim identity. Ahmad's work explores the challenges of Muslim representation in the secular literary marketplace and how *Home Fire* overcomes these obstacles. Ahmad argues that the novel's success in representing Muslim experiences is attributed to its nuanced portrayal of characters and its ability to navigate the complex relationship between literature and politics.

By challenging preconceived notions about Muslim identity and representation in literature, *Home Fire* opens the door for further exploration of these issues. Therefore, the current chapter echoes Joppke's (2009) belief that promoting acceptance of diverse cultural identities requires limiting government intervention and prioritizing individual choice. However, Joppke notes that until a balance is reached, this could be seen as a crisis in multiculturalism (469). To be more precise, I argue that a significant factor contributing to this crisis is the absence of trust among Muslim communities, British society, government, and the law. Through an examination of *Home Fire*, I propose that selective surveillance of Muslim minorities portrays them as an ambiguous source of terrorist violence, perpetuating division in society.

The novel uses the story of Antigone to challenge the recurring pattern of racial profiling (Chambers 2018). Shamsie's *Home Fire* allegorizes the impact of mythology and religion on modern identity, fate, and belonging, as characters use past mythology to question racist immigration laws. The novel's themes make a powerful statement about British-Pakistani immigrants' place in society and challenge loyalty through surveillance in a multicultural society. According to

Chambers, Shamsie introduces new elements to the original story by addressing issues related to discriminatory immigration laws and radicalization, which provides a fresh perspective on Sophocles' work. The Pasha family, who are involved in British politics and have a history of terrorism, exemplify these themes as they attempt to integrate into British society. In *Home Fire*, Karamat Lone assumes the role of King Creon, while a prologue to the novel quoting Seamus Heaney's translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (2004) shows Shamsie's grasp of the divided loyalties experienced by British South Asian Muslims in Britain, with the line "The ones we love ... are enemies of the state". Karamat Lone echoes this sentiment by repeating the phrase "Whoever isn't for us / Is against us", reflecting the fate of post-9/11 *Antigone* as depicted in Heaney's translation.

In recent years, political rhetoric has been used to create divisions and polarize situations, as illustrated by George W. Bush's statement during his anti-terrorism campaign after the 9/11 attacks: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Bush 2001). Such statements pressure people who are not aligned with existing conflicts to choose a side, either supporting those in power or risking being considered an enemy. These political tactics have had a significant impact on certain groups, such as "visibly Muslim" citizens who are currently under scrutiny, as noted by Morey (2018a). The situation is reminiscent of the *sus* law, which allowed police officers to stop, search, and potentially arrest individuals they suspected. While the law has been repealed, British Muslims are still viewed with suspicion and are not fully trusted as law-abiding citizens, despite being legally recognized as British citizens (Morey 2018a, 1).

The characters in *Home Fire* struggle to belong in their own country, as

they are legal citizens but are still considered outsiders, particularly in the political sphere. Isma's detention at the airport is not solely because of her Pakistani origin or religion but also due to her family history. Her father's past as a gambler, con-man, and jihadi made life difficult for his children, and her brother's affiliation with ISIS further complicates matters. The interrogator's question about her British identity implies an unspoken accusation that she is a jihadist like her family. The novel examines the notion of Britishness and the challenges faced by individuals who do not conform to the conventional standards of what it means to be British. The Pasha family serves as an example of individuals who do not have ties to authority and who are easy targets for victimization due to their faith-based practices and failure to assimilate.

According to Birt (2008) and Martin (2014), this combination of non-assimilation and extremism is inadequate and intimidating. This has led to anxiety and prejudice permeating public policy. As Kundnani (2015) and Stephens (2014) have demonstrated, recent British policymaking assumes that a lack of knowledge about British values can promote extremism and result in terrorist activities. However, it is important to note that British values beyond openness and tolerance have not been adequately articulated (Eade 1995). The change in policy was first expressed by Prime Minister David Cameron in his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2011, where he identified "the passive tolerance of recent years" as the primary cause of extremism (Cameron 2011). Cameron's speech ends with a condemnation of "tolerant" multiculturalism. Maira (2009) and Patel (2017) argue that post-9/11 is not a defining moment but rather a continuation of colonial power or racism towards people of colour. However,

Shamsie's novel presents a convincing case for a shift in societal attitudes. Aneeka cleverly employs the term "GWM: Googling While Muslim" in a conversation with Eamon, which symbolizes the overarching governmental policies of surveillance, security, and community engagement affecting people at various levels (Heath-Kelly 2013; Kundnani 2015).

The most significant counterterrorism strategy was perhaps the Prevent Duty, which was introduced by the Labour government in 2003 and revised by the coalition government in 2011. The policy defines extremism as a "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values" (HM Government 2015). It was further revised in 2013 to include "surveillance of the political and religious lives of Muslims [...] public pressure on Muslims to declare their allegiance to British values" (Ibid.). As a result, over two million public sector employers were enlisted in "Prevent," making it the most extensive monitoring and reporting operation in British law. In an interview, Shamsie acknowledges her relatively new British citizenship and expresses the belief that she must "be really good and stay under the radar" now and would not have written *Home Fire* if she were still "on the verge of citizenship" (Shamsie 2017b). Through the novel, the author illustrates the detrimental impact that such a feeling can have on citizenship quality. Shamsie portrays the challenges faced by British Muslims when dealing with UK law.

The Pasha siblings' identities are complex and not easily defined, which generates anxiety in contemporary Britain and in the novel. Shamsie explores the ways in which British Muslims respond to the law through the characterisation of the Pasha siblings. Isma tries to be a law-abiding citizen, as evidenced by her

answers under interrogation and her denouncement of Parvaiz for joining ISIS. Aneeka, on the other hand, begins as a brilliant law student with a scholarship from LSE (Shamsie 2017a, 7), but becomes increasingly disillusioned with UK law as she becomes more aware of the catchphrase “Googling While Muslim” and Karamat Lone’s rhetoric of assimilation (Shamsie 2017a, 68). Parvaiz’s response to UK law is initially inward, with suppressed feelings of anger and persecution, but eventually he is radicalized and groomed by ISIS.

Despite Aneeka’s confidence that her twin will eventually realize he is wrong, Isma ultimately denounces him to the authorities out of a sense of loyalty to the state. Isma’s responses make her the near-perfect epitome of what Home Secretary Karamat Lone demands of British Muslims to achieve assimilation: “Don’t set yourself apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to” (Ibid., 90). This constrained behaviour is seen even when Eamonn accosts her about why she wears a turban, “Cancer or Islam—which is the greater affliction? [...] it must be difficult to be Muslim these days” (Ibid., 23). He apologizes to Isma, but we understand that he does not consider himself a Muslim. As seen through Eamon’s eyes, Shamsie demonstrates how the hijab forms resistant identities. Aneeka and Isma dress modestly and attend regular prayers. Owing to a combination of mistakes, this idea leaves them susceptible to being accused of being unpatriotic. Indeed, several studies show that women who wear hijabs may experience discrimination and harassment from non-Muslims, who consider it a symbol of oppression or unwillingness to assimilate (Phoenix 2019). Therefore, the author interprets women’s gender as an area where identity, integration or ethnicity are contested.



Notably, the narrative evolves through Isma and Aneeka's discussions regarding gender, race and religion. Shamsie illustrates these ideas by using Karamat Lone's perspective to show that British South Asian Muslims are often perceived as being stuck in the past. Lone is celebrated in the media for enduring what is seen as the "backwardness" of British Muslims (Shamsie 2017a, 36). At the start of the novel, Eamonn is also taken aback by the Muslim community's lack of support for his father's progressive views, saying that British Muslims need to leave behind the Dark Ages if they want to be respected by the rest of the nation (Shamsie 2017a, 36). This narrative, which suggests that British Muslims need to assimilate to a monolithic British culture, is based on a simplistic understanding of the dichotomy between the Dark Ages and the Enlightenment. This type of discourse can contribute to extremism by implying that practices like wearing a hijab or praying are inherently radical.

For instance, Karamat Lone's words fuel racial and religious divisions at a Muslim high school in Bradford where he studied alongside two young men killed in Syria. He gives a speech to the students, urging them not to set themselves apart in their appearance, thinking, behavior, or loyalty to outdated ideologies, and to embrace the diversity of the United Kingdom (Shamsie 2017a, 89-90). His position in terms of belonging is evident; only assimilation can achieve this goal. Lone's views echo those of a government that is deviating significantly from inclusive multiculturalism and leaning instead towards monolithic notions of British identity. Home Office records from 2002 and 2008 state that British values are welcoming and inclusive, and such values provide the route to "citizenship". But the expectation exists that you must learn English, which will facilitate

opportunity, you must abide by the law and you must contribute to society. Through Lone's speech, Shamsie highlights how cultural differences overlook inequality and discrimination even in the context of diversity. Good and bad Muslims emerge from these state-led notions of integration. A fully integrated Muslim is "good" but will still be viewed with suspicion and seen as "the enemy within", while the culturally marked Muslim might be reduced to "extremist".

According to Tariq Modood (2007), multiculturalism is "the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries from outside the prosperous west" (5). This definition helps us understand why Karamat Lone believes that the struggle of British Muslims occurs because they "insist on difference" (Shamsie 2017a, 89). The main task of multiculturalism within contemporary Britain is to overcome the gaps between people from divergent ethnic communities. Nonetheless, the polished, sanitised image of society shown by the mainstream elite, with figures like Karamat Lone as its representative, is not inclusive and fails to represent the minority voice. Political scientists have considered this problem from a legislative perspective, arguing that the government must intervene through robust legislation to allow cultural practices that are different from those of the majority, instead of accommodating the British Muslim minority. Lone incriminates them if they continue to "cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties" (Shamsie 2017a, 89).

*Home Fire* touches on debates about Britishness, which are triggered by the indefinite nature of national identity as a concept, especially because it refers to minorities in the United Kingdom. The Home Secretary has the power to strip "British passport holders" of their citizenship, especially those whose activities

are considered “undesirable”.<sup>20</sup> Building social cohesion in a multicultural society faces complex challenges from within minority groups themselves. One way of affirming loyalty and managing ethnic differences is by developing a cadre of community leaders who promote state policies in exchange for personal power. Some scholars, such as Tariq Modood (2003), believe that religious communities offer a good place for active citizen participation, while others indicate that religious leaders have failed to represent society effectively (Gopal 2013). Right-wing and neoliberal ideologues are co-opting feminists who attempt to speak out against patriarchal oppression in minority groups. The debate on gender equality is intertwined in complex contexts, and Gopal asks, “Is multiculturalism bad for women or is feminism bad for multiculturalism?” (106) The representation of the Pasha family indicates the legacy of these conflicting contexts.

For instance, Isma’s decision to rent out the family home infuriates Parvaiz; his recruiter Farooq criticizes him for displaying an emasculated version of Islam since his sister is handling the property, not Parvaiz (Shamsie 2017a, 133). Farooq’s reasoning seems to have a lot to do with the futile masculinity that pervades his community in the absence of a platform for debate. Trapped between the contexts of the values of the modern state and the complicated relationship between belief and society, the female voice is repressed by power struggles within minority communities. Furthermore, Shamsie attempts to

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<sup>20</sup> According to a 2022 report in the Guardian, a recent study by “Free Movement”, a website run by lawyers to provide information for those affected by immigration control revealed that “at least 464 people” had been stripped of British citizenship by the government in the past 15 years (Taylor 2022).

highlight the economic inequalities between the Pashas and the Lones (Shamsie 2017a, 96). While the Pasha family is forced to let their home so that Isma and Aneeka can pursue their studies, Eamonn and his friends lead comfortable and self-indulgent lives in their country houses.

The focus on class differences indicates the failures of institutions aimed at supporting minorities. These failures have led to a widespread sense of disaffection among Muslims, especially in northern England (Kundnani 2015). Following 9/11, the political right wing added new allies from the centre and left (Yuval-Davis 2011; Kundnani 2015). *Home Fire* explores the complicated cultural legacy of unchallenged discourses of securitisation. The state employs surveillance systems to monitor individuals who exhibit “outdated codes of behaviour” to prevent them from leaving or returning to the country. Karamat Lone’s speech at a school sparks debate, which is intensified by the fact that Lone is seen as one of the few British Muslim minorities to have successfully integrated into wider society. However, this has also led to his sense of alienation from both his South Asian community and the dominant British society. He was elected as an MP by the “Muslim-majority constituency” and became influential in the Conservative Party, but this changed after a tabloid published a picture of him entering a mosque of a “hate preacher” (Shamsie 2017a, 37). He now openly adopts secular values and is supported by a white conservative constituency, despite attempts by the British South Asian community to vote him out. As Home Secretary, Lone’s appointment deepens the sense of betrayal felt by his local Muslim community (Shamsie 2017a, 37).

As the narrative continues, one understands that Karamat Lone’s attempt

to “prove he is one of them” is almost a permanent disorder in his personality. Aneeka texts Isma: It’s all going to get worse. He has to prove he’s one of them, not one of us, doesn’t he? As if he hasn’t already. I hate this country. Don’t call me I’ll say things I shouldn’t. Stop spying on our messages you arseholes and find some bankers to arrest”. (Ibid., 35) This dialogue shows the paradoxes of liberal discourses of tolerance that Mondal (2018) discusses in “Scrutinising and Securitising Muslims”, which highlights the recurring images of the untrustworthy Muslim represented in the media and popular discourses—the so-called cryptic other. These discourses are particularly hospitable to the figuration of others as hidden enemies because the disjuncture between the public and the private selves on which they are founded replicates the constitutive disjuncture of the cryptic other (Mondal 2018, 45). If the situation that marks liberal tolerance “is triggered when subordination at the site of a difference cannot be maintained through privatization of that difference”, it is because privatization must always be previously rendered and is inevitably incomplete (Mondal 2018, 45). It is this incomplete assimilation that the cryptic other helps to achieve, rhetorically speaking, by marking it with the suspicion that such “deracinated” public attachments are inauthentic, and that the “real” attachments are to some transnational collectivity that continues, as Brown (2006) suggests, to haunt the national imaginary (76). In summary, the figure of the cryptic other is a more useful rhetorical resolution for liberal ideologies and imaginaries than overtly racist ones, such as Eurabianism or far-right white supremacism.

Indeed, when a white man spits at Aneeka inside the train, it is because he recognizes her as the cryptic other. He is angered by her dress code, hijab

and complexion. These characteristics prove to him that she does not follow the laws imposed by politicians like Karamat Lone in their “double discourses”, distinguishing between “a surface appearance and a hidden reality”, which ultimately marks British Muslims as an outside threat (Brown 2006, 29). He urges Pakistani Muslims to comply and not “insist on difference”. Aneeka questions her fiancé Eamonn Lone about his father’s speech, asking how he can justify the message that encourages discrimination against people based on their attire and conformity (Shamsie 2017a, 67). She also asks why his father failed to acknowledge the injustices faced by Muslims in the country, such as torture, detention without trial, airport interrogations, and spying in mosques (Shamsie 2017a, 670). Eamonn, sheltered by his father’s status and mother’s whiteness, is taken aback by Aneeka’s reference to “British injustice,” as he struggles to grasp the extent of its meaning. Aneeka points out the flaw in politicians like Karamat Lone’s discourse, which assumes a universal and fixed identity.

In his analysis of “liberal monism”, Parekh (2006) explains that the concept of monism suggests that there is a sole path to becoming fully human and achieving a good society (33), an idea shared by Karamat Lone, whose argument echoes Thomas Hobbes’ belief in the importance of a strong state for building trust. This idea is built on the view that human history is a struggle between good and evil represented by “liberty, individuality and rationality” versus “despotism, collectivism and blind costumes and social conformity” (Ibid.). The very model of individualism that Karamat Lone tries to enforce, in which the interests of the individual are reconciled with the rights of all, is also problematic for multicultural societies because it fails to recognize that humans are “culturally embodied” and

that cultures differ significantly (Parekh 2006, 9). Though communities in Britain may seem like a harmonious array of cultural diversity, British South Asians of Muslim heritage can speak for themselves only in a limited way through authorised platforms and adhering to a particular agenda. If they fail to conform, they will be punished and excluded. This “monoglot diversity” proves that “liberal multiculturalism” sometimes “domesticates” the other to accommodate it in a manner that it understands. Tolerating other values and views only functions within the boundaries specified by the dominant culture. Liberal multiculturalism relies heavily on the idea of “authenticity”, permitting specific individuals and institutions with the right to speak for wider communities.

A key question that underpins *Home Fire*, which is articulated by Stuart Hall (1990), is how people from different cultural backgrounds can share space without having to imitate the dominant group (26). Eamonn’s transformation in the novel creates this space, as he defends Isma and Aneeka in a video before joining Aneeka in Pakistan. He argues that punishing them for their father’s actions is unjust, stating that Aneeka’s protests against the home secretary’s decision are completely legal and not a crime (Shamsie 2017a, 258). Eamonn has progressed from the position of a mere spectator who places trust in Western Enlightenment to the position of critical questioning and manipulation of state totalitarianism. His criticism of his father and state policy is a sharp condemnation of realpolitik, “the state that sends away its citizens when they act in ways we don’t like [...] and stop[s] a family from burying its own” (Shamsie 2017a, 230), which is neither tolerant nor open-minded. Eamon gradually begins to think and feel his way towards a new political consciousness, slowly constructing a more

informed sense of self that moves from the position of naive bystander to a person who profoundly understands religious practices and non- integration, which gives some hope for a dialogue between the state and British Muslim minorities beyond radicalisation and distrust. By the end of the narrative, Eamon has truly been transformed.

In the video, he summarises Shamsie's overarching argument—a nation will be successful as a democracy if it guards against attacks on the citizenship rights of racialised others. The government's response to the demands of British Muslims to accommodate their differences has often been reluctant; the demands might be accepted, but only after considerable resistance (Parekh 2018, vi). The demands are generally viewed as showing a willingness to maintain their cultural identity and refusing to integrate. The idea that Muslims refuse to adapt has increased the fear of Muslims in certain quarters of white British society. The government has confronted "the Muslim threat" through strategies of strong surveillance, a secret social network of informers, additional anti-terrorism laws, spying on mosques and banning certain imams from travelling abroad.

At the same time, the visibility of Muslim representatives and the extent of their authority has been severely circumscribed. Some voices have been prominent while others have been "downplayed and marginalized, considered as less representative" (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 80). Censure, in the name of patriotism, is a preferred tactic of the state when faced with any kind of discord (Ibid.). Alleged Western values are projected as normalised and universal. These discursive strategies and policy changes, so marked since 9/11, have tended to obscure the much longer history of postcolonial Britain, with its roots in a colonial



past and as the seat of an empire (Gilroy 2004; Boehmer and Morton 2010). The state's imposition of surveillance and monitoring on the protagonists in *Home Fire* highlights how appearance-based perceptions of the other can widen the gaps between cultural groups, preventing their interaction. British Muslims face widespread racism as they are seen as the enigmatic other, often wearing hijabs or praying in public spaces which are viewed as feeding religious division by mainstream society.

Morey and Yaqin (2011) explain how British Muslims are expected to perform both "Britishness" and "Muslimness" in public, leading to a double bind of performativity (40). Karamat Lone, despite his class privilege, is compelled to demonstrate both "Britishness" and "Muslimness" in his public role. He attempts to show goodwill by attending a church with his wife after being seen entering a "hate preacher" mosque to prove his "Britishness", which results in him being alienated by his Muslim community despite being voted in by his white constituents. Interestingly, Karamat Lone's son, Eamonn, reaffirms this cultural and spatial navigation when he avoids walking past a mosque, then crosses back "so as not to be seen as trying to avoid a mosque" (Shamsie 2017a, 61). As the novel emphasizes the failed encounters between characters, it seems to dismantle the dichotomy of self and other between readers and characters, decreasing the gaps and allowing them a measure of communication. As a result, the reader occupies an uneasy space within the narrative, not unlike the uncomfortable space that Karamat Lone briefly occupies when meeting with Isma. In such a space, the awkwardness Karamat feels is not particularly due to the social gap or their class difference but rather because of familiarity. Looking

at him, “something passed between them—it wasn’t about sex, but something that felt more dangerous. She was familiar to him, a reminder of a world he’s lost” (Ibid., 250). Within the narrative, all the significant encounters are between British Muslims.

To some extent, the failure of communication between Muslims shifts the difference from culture and religion to class. The division seen between British Muslim characters is expressed in the degree of their religiosity, and the narrative suggests that this is influenced mainly by class. The novel shows the heterogeneity of British Muslims and breaks down the dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims since different Muslim characters (rather than Muslim and non-Muslims) often construe or misinterpret one another. In Lone’s speech at the school, the consequence of nonconformity is to lose the opportunities Britain offers: “And look at all you miss out on because of it [difference]” (Ibid., 90). The speech perhaps stems from the debate in British universities, generated by a clause in the 2015 Security and Counter-Terrorism Act, demanding specific obligations from institutions of higher education to prevent subjects from being drawn into terrorism (Scott 2018, 51). Focusing on this “Prevent Duty”, the implications of the Act continue to erode social trust and simplify the role of lecturers and scholars, along with others, by encouraging them to stop trusting their judgement, act as informers and accept the state’s political view.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (2015) states that Prevent is too intrusive, giving the example of two college students who were stopped by a lecturer who noticed they had made way for two female students and lowered their gazes. The Council says they were reported to the senior team for

“concerning behaviour”. Prevent was supposed to facilitate understanding British values, focusing on early intervention to prevent extremism (HM Government 2015). Such policies, with the task of solving the issue of homegrown terrorists, have primarily targeted Muslim communities. Indeed, British Muslims are believed to behave in a particular way; failure to do so risks being seen as “rhetorically being made un-British” and even radicalized (Shamsie 2017a, 40).

In *Home Fire*, such debates emerge in the discussion around national identity and the questionable discourse of civil dialogue about citizenship and belonging, which British Muslims are invited to join but are never able to change. Consequently, the Muslim side of the dialogue remains obscured; they are forever “doomed to be spoken for and represented” (Yaqin and Morey 2011, 2). Isma’s discussion with her PhD supervisor, Dr Shah, introduces the issue of the “rhetorical exclusion” of British Muslims from Britishness, with reference to colonial laws that have historically deprived people of their rights (Shamsie 2017a, 40). Isma notes that even though the perpetrators of the 7/7 terrorist attacks were British citizens, the media always described them as “British of Pakistani descent” or “British Muslim” or “British passport holders,” thus distancing them from their British identity (Shamsie 2017a, 40). Despite her understanding of the nationalist rhetoric of insecurity, Isma struggles with the impact of state discourses on her choices as a law-abiding citizen. When her brother joins ISIS, she reports him to the authorities as required by post-9/11 British laws. Isma’s decisions highlight the split loyalties within the family and echo Seamus Heaney’s epigram, “The ones we love...are enemies of the state” (Ibid., 43).

The narrative works through the long history of conflict and upheaval that underscore British history. On the one hand, radicalisation theories seem to place the persistent threat of violence and terrorism squarely within the Muslim community. On the other hand, it obfuscates the political context in which anti-Western sentiments may arise. The discourses on extremism or radicalization neglect the responsibility of the Global North in triggering wars in countries like Iraq (O'Toole et al. 2016). Such teleological radicalisation is ineffectual. It is perhaps better to understand radicalisation as part of a historical or interactive encounter (Porta et al. 2009). However, the research has not been well received by policymakers because it does not offer simplified and straightforward comparisons between integration, dissent and extremism. This is reflected in Shamsie's novel, which charts the complexities of this cultural encounter.

Religious radicalisation has become the most widely accepted rationale to understand and explain violence and terrorism since 9/11, but Parvaiz's story does not take that path. He is not religious; he volunteers at the local library and is close to his twin sister Aneeka. None of his friends or neighbours understand how Parvaiz has become radicalized and been "turned inside out" (Shamsie 2017a, 251). In an interview, Shamsie explains that she dedicated a significant amount of the narrative to the development of Parvaiz's recruitment, and she chose to include it to complement the story of the overlapping laws and benefits of citizenship (Shamsie 2017b). Farooq, Parvaiz's handler, speaks with a larger objective in mind, as do all those who recruit young people to militant activity. ISIS needs to engage in a heroic struggle, with truth and justice on one side and lies, depravity and corruption on the other (Shamsie 2017a 151). This dream of

achieving great things is exploited throughout the world to recruit young men for the army. It is a clear crisis of masculinity, as Claire Chambers (2018) argues, “Put simply, Farooq purports to teach Parvaiz “how to be a man””(11). Moreover, the promise of working as a sound recordist and technician is what tempts Parvaiz to join ISIS. The motivational stories that Farooq weaves suggest that ISIS does not use religion to persuade young men, but instead materialistic, masculine discourses that promise recruits a utopian life. Parvaiz regrets reaching Raqqa as Shamsie portrays its brutal reality, revealing its utopian facade. His attempts to escape are unsuccessful due to the threat of death for expressing doubts. Tragically, as he nears safety at the British embassy in Turkey, he is killed by his ISIS comrades, likely by Farooq.

Terror ends trust and the rhetoric of “they want us all dead” generates fear and mistrust. What fuels the latter is that some young Muslims are involved in terrorist acts, whether in Britain or abroad. Because of certain feelings like being alienated from their Muslim community and British society, angry Muslim youth create a counter-Islamist community and subsequently form an identity that is poised for recruitment by militant groups. However, Isma criticizes the journalistic discourse that exploits such realities in the media coverage of terrorist attacks and in issues of Britishness and citizenship, like those addressed in Karamat Lone's problematic rhetoric as Home Secretary. This kind of media rhetoric and Karamat Lone himself are reminiscent of the case of Shamima Begum's case.

In 2019, Home Secretary Sajid Javid stripped Begum of her citizenship,

thus triggering a heated debate about the handling of returning jihadists.<sup>21</sup> Muslims in Britain are not beneficiaries of anti-discrimination legislation, while being “full recipients of its obligations” (Meer 2010, 177). Their attempts to be included in the nation illustrate the emergence of “a politically self-defined identity that contests Muslim-specific discrimination and Islamophobia” (Ibid.). Furthermore, associating “transparency with trust” in a state-led multicultural society influenced by global neoliberalism is problematic; it conceals liability and accepts the state’s accusation that minorities are uncooperative and disloyal in terms of relations (Khair and Petroit 2018, 149). This idea also means that minorities do not fully trust the law of the state, regarding the law as a source of mistrust. Minorities like the Pasha family can be quickly stripped of their Britishness by the authorities and criticized, or at least questioned, by people if they do not fit in: “Do you consider yourself British?” (Shamsie 2017a, 5) They can easily become “un-British” (Ibid., 40).

Unsurprisingly, Karamat Lone’s political success is due to his self-image as “Mr. British Values. Mr. Strong on Security. Mr. Striding Away from Muslimness” (Ibid, 53). He supports the right of the state to strip any “British

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<sup>21</sup> Shamsie’s *Home Fire* foreshadows the issue of citizenship rights that arose in the case of Shamima Begum, a young girl from East London who joined ISIS in Syria at the age of 15. Two years later, Sajid Javid became the first British Muslim Home Secretary (BBC 2021). In 2019, when Begum expressed her desire to return to the UK, Javid revoked her British citizenship (Ibid.). In 2020, her appeal was denied. Shamsie’s novel is both anticipatory and suggestive, as it was written prior to these political events and provides troubling insights into the relationship between Britain and its Muslim communities, as well as the attraction of the Caliphate that ISIS promised to those facing economic hardship (Yaqin 2021, 243).

passport holders of their citizenship in cases where they have acted against the vital interests of the UK” (Ibid., 205). Echoing Home Secretary Theresa May’s words in 2013, Karamat Lone states that “citizenship is a privilege not a right or birth right” (Ibid., 206). However, in *Home Fire*, Parvaiz’s case is different from that of Shamima Begum as it is about repatriating his body to Britain, which triggers a crisis like that portrayed in *Antigone*.

When Parvaiz regrets his decision to join ISIS and wishes to return home, Aneeka tries to find a way to persuade the Home Secretary to approve her brother’s return even though Karamat Lone could not possibly agree to it. His rejection of her plea is in tune with the current mood regarding citizenship and will bring him a step closer to being elected prime minister. Although Parvaiz is murdered before the Home Secretary can take any action to prevent his return, he does stop Parvaiz’s body from being repatriated to Britain by stripping the dead young man of his British citizenship. Similar to King Creon in *Antigone*, who decreed that Antigone should be executed for her attempt to give her brother a proper burial, and in Shamima Begum’s case when Sajid Javid rendered her stateless and prevented her from returning to Britain, Karamat Lone refuses to consider Parvaiz as British, declaring that the government will not allow “those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death” (Shamsie 2017a, 193).

At this level, it is evident that Isma represents Sophocles’ Ismene as she submits to the law of the state that she criticized in the past. Aneeka feels betrayed because Isma reported their brother to the anti-terrorism authorities when he joined ISIS. Shamsie presents a lengthy dialogue between the sisters

throughout the novel, which resembles the structure of a play. Aneeka wants to bury Parvaiz next to their mother in London, but Isma, who advises her sister to “accept the law, even when it’s unjust” (Shamsie 2017a, 203), is only willing to pray for his soul. Aneeka is determined to “bring him home, even in the form of a shell”, for she feels it is a question of dignity and justice. (Ibid., 202). However, Parvaiz’s body is deported to Pakistan instead of Britain, as he is stripped of his dual citizenship.

In the novel, national identity is never stable for minorities in Britain. The impasse between Aneeka and Lone circulates in the press, including the tabloids and social media, which is perceived as analogous to the Greek Chorus. Lone not only strips Parvaiz of his dual citizenship but also withdraws Aneeka’s rights as a citizen so she cannot fulfil her family obligations. Lone asserts, “If there is an Almighty and he sends His angel Jibreel to lift up your brother and your sister [...] I will not let him enter” (Shamsie 2017a, 251). When events escalate, Isma cannot help but say that they were “[a] pair of nineteen-year-olds, one of them dead” (Ibid.). At this juncture, the deaths of Aneeka and Eamonn represent Antigone’s suicide which triggers the suicide of Prince Haemon, the son of King Creon and Antigone’s lover, whose death in turn leads to the suicide of Haemon’s mother, Queen Euridice. The gradual stripping of one’s rights, as we see Lone announce loudly, and which is fully supported by the state, is perhaps one of the most serious consequences of the post-9/11 political and journalistic rhetoric in Britain.

The implications of contingent (conditional) citizenship can be seen in Mondal’s cryptic other. He traces the direct connections between Jews, communists and Muslims, and the limits of liberal tolerance, which have



historically excluded them through a “discourse of abstract citizenship” (Mondal 2018, 44). This contingent citizenship is reminiscent of the “Jewish Question” when British Jews were granted their civil and political rights only on the condition that they “assimilate”; in other words, by giving up their Jewish cultural practices (Brown 2006, 49–50; Beller 2015, 33). Lone asserts that the body of Parvaiz is not to be buried on British soil, and this position is strengthened by the appearance of xenophobic slogans on Twitter, such as the trending hashtag “#GOBACKWHEREYOUCAMEFROM” (193).

The Twitter and tabloid backlash that ensues demonstrates the negative consequences of the polarisation of public dialogue through policies like “Prevent”. It raises the troubling question of belonging—What place are they supposed to belong to? Shamsie’s depiction of the animosity towards British Pakistani-Muslims by people on social media alludes to a specific viewpoint in Mondal’s analysis, which states, “In order to be tolerated, Jews had to become assimilated and yet still marked as different” (Mondal 2018, 44). Such liberal discourses of tolerance have prompted increased forms of labelling and regulation, specifically because inclusion threatens to remove “the subnormative status of the excluded” (Ibid., 70). As a result, Lone, who represents the state, expels Aneeka and Parvaiz from their country of birth and marks Isma’s existence as irrelevant when she asks for permission to join her siblings in Pakistan: ““Will you allow me to leave tomorrow?”” she said. “You won’t matter tomorrow. Do what you want”” (251). The consequences of resisting assimilation can be severe, as seen when Aneeka and the deceased Parvaiz are made stateless. Surveillance and securitisation do not stop recruiters like Farooq, and Shamsie shows that surveillance systems, such as those depicted in the novel,

concentrate more on the politics of identity than on confronting terrorism. If confiscating passports and rendering people stateless is the initial move towards the seclusion of specific communities, and the increasing denial of rights and marginalisation is rationalised and becoming the norm in twenty-first century Britain, perhaps this indicates the potential descent into authoritarianism.

Indeed, labelling Parvaiz as a terrorist strips him of his humanity. Pakistan is viewed by Karamat Lone as a land of brutal savagery that enforces Islamic law. The Home Secretary becomes infuriated when Aneeka states that she is leaving for Karachi in search of justice after Parvaiz has been murdered. Lone's logic, which rejects any devotion to his Pakistani heritage, is devoid of justice. He also regards the East as "a place of crucifixions, beheadings, floggings, heads on spikes, child soldiers, slavery, and rape" (Shamsie 2017a, 262). Despite her description of Lone's views, Shamsie is cautious not to stigmatise the issue of radicalisation and has Parvaiz to speak for himself, showing his inner voice and rage when he leaves Britain and his sisters for Syria.

In several interviews, Shamsie declares that vulnerable young men, such as Parvaiz Pasha, are seduced into joining ISIS. Often, they are attracted not by an opportunity to fight but by subtle propaganda that promotes a better life in a new state. They are attracted by a sense of belonging and "state building" (Shamsie 2017b). Indeed, Farooq describes ISIS to Parvaiz as "a place where migrants coming in to join are treated like kings [...] where skin colour doesn't matter. Where schools and hospitals are free, and rich and poor have the same facilities" (Shamsie 2017a, 147). Shamsie's characterisation of Parvaiz reveals a sense of humanity as well as empathy. Even though she thinks that she can be

“accused of sympathising” if she says that a young man like Parvaiz “is anything other than a monster”, the author demonstrates the process of radicalisation by conveying the story from the protagonists’ perspectives, even revealing the exploitation they experience (Shamsie 2017b).

The Pasha family knows little about their father, Adil Pasha, and his disappearance suggests that the state has prevented them from asking questions. This has led the family to fear expressing their grief or objecting to the state’s actions. To remain in their London community, they must accept the legality of their father’s case and give up their search for answers. Shamsie explains that the family has sacrificed their right to seek answers, so no one would “suspect our sympathies” (Shamsie 2017a, 50-15). Shamsie shows that minorities must always reaffirm their allegiance to the state. Although Isma refers to the “British men who’d been arrested in Afghanistan”, it seems that when her father is killed, he is no longer considered a British citizen (Ibid.). This idea is further illustrated when Karamat Lone states that Parvaiz, as Pakistani-British, is a “peculiar case” compared to youngsters from Preston Road because to him terrorism is a “family trade” (Ibid., 110).

Moreover, he and his father are considered as “enemies of Britain” who must be excluded, and their family has no right to grieve for their deaths (Ibid., 242). They are not even given the same rights as non-Muslims to express their opposition to terrorism. They cannot join anti-terrorist protests because the protests are anti-Islamic, organized by far-right groups, such as “the English Defence League”, “Britain First” and “PEGIDA” who create Islamophobic slogans, such as those that were painted near the North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre in

south London in January 2020 (Griffin 2020). *Home Fire* reveals the misconceptions of Britishness and national identity. The Britain that Shamsie portrays is highly diverse but fails to achieve its presumed multicultural ideals.

It is misleading to insist that Britishness or citizenship can be a substitute for multiculturalism, as implied in Prime Minister David Cameron's 2011 speech (Cameron 2011). To give all British citizens a sense of belonging, a common national identity is as important as the elimination of racism. Karamat Lone's mono-nationalist understanding presumes a fault line in British society. This problematic mode of thinking, which grants him power and authority, also leads to his downfall. The novel ends with the depiction of Aneeka with her brother's rotting corpse in Karachi's hot weather, and Shamsie demonises the Home Secretary, portraying him as a "wicked tyrant" through his brutality (Shamsie 2017a, 237). The author questions and reviews how civic and political discourses fix national identity, threaten the construction of Muslim minorities and increase the uncertainty of the law as applied to Muslims. The task today is to connect individuals who perceive themselves as having a mono-nationalist perspective with people who see themselves as having a bi-nationalist perspective (Modood 2018, 286).

Multiculturalism implies that, as part of a broader, heterogeneous British identity, more is required than simply fostering a shared sense of national identity. Ethnic minority groups have emerged as a vital link between English mono-nationalists and the English British. Therefore, governmental support is needed to achieve anti-racism and multiculturalism. According to Modood (2018), "The first New Labour term (1997–2001) has probably been the most multiculturalist

national government in Britain—or indeed in Europe” (286). To boost trust, the Labour government established all faith-based schools according to the same rules, whether the schools were Christian, Jewish or Muslim. British Muslims in the Muslim Council of Britain were also engaged in governance. To achieve multicultural Britishness, English consciousness should not take the form of a reductive nostalgia (Gilroy’s postcolonial melancholia), majoritarianism and ethno- nationalism. Multiculturalists must resist reacting to increasing “English Consciousness” through approaches that increase division and distrust (Modood 2018, 291). On the one hand, they should seek to include rising English consciousness in Britishness, encouraging it to adopt and support rather than ignoring minorities and cultural alienation (Ibid.). On the other hand, the British Muslim community must rethink its position, make necessary reforms and pay more attention to its youth rather than relying solely on victimhood (Ibid.).

In this sense, *Home Fire* urges careful reading and paying close attention to “the cryptic other” to move beyond dangerous binarisms. Tracing the cryptic other through antisemitism, anti-communism and the current Islamophobia uncovers the fact that liberal discourses continue to regulate difference. It is obvious that the cryptic other “cryptically” disturbs liberal equality, and “liberalism’s professions of openness, transparency, and visibility, producing and reproducing racial imaginaries within liberal-democratic social orders” (Modood 2018, 47). The following chapter will cover a discussion on Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017), focusing on how the novel portrays the exclusionary immigration policies and counterterrorism measures against refugees enforced by the state, particularly in Britain. My argument is that the novel proposes a shift in the way governments in the Global North approach immigration, advocating for greater

acceptance and the development of strategies to manage and accommodate refugees rather than resist their presence.

## Chapter Four: Extreme Counterterrorism Measures in *Exit West*

Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, published in 2017, presents the experiences of individuals who are forced to flee their homes due to violence and destruction. The novel addresses the issue of refugees and how the Global North responds to their plight. The story revolves around Nadia and Saeed, two young adults who become refugees from their war-torn city and face the challenges of living in an unstable environment. They escape their nameless country through magical doors that transport them to various locations around the world. Hamid's novel essentially disables the logic of a closed-border policy with its use of magic realism.<sup>22</sup> These doors disrupt the regional structures of the nation-state and immigration, making it difficult for governments to maintain closed-border policies. Hamid does not specify a particular year and instead tells the story of Saeed and Nadia, who are the sole named characters in the novel. As Claire Chambers (2019) highlights, the author engages in onomastic play by choosing the names of the characters, as the initials of "N" and "S" in their names complement the absent compass points suggested in the book's title, *Exit [East] West* (216). Chambers further explains that Nadia is associated with generalizations about the global north, while Saeed corresponds with those about the global south to some degree (2019, 216).

However, a number of recent studies have examined various aspects of

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<sup>22</sup> Magic realism is "a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the "reliable" tone of objective realistic report. The term was once applied to a trend in German fiction of the early 1950s" (Baldick 2004, 146).

*Exit West*. For example, Aziz Huq (2018) and Amanda Lagji (2019) explore mobility and representations of political populism, while Paula Brauer (2019) focuses on magical realism and Chambers (2019) explores its interweaving with digital technology. Sonia Shah (2020) examines the natural and universal nature of migration, while Knudsen Eva Rask and Ulla Rahbek (2021) explore how the novel stages the process of worlding and highlights the normative efficacy of postcolonial literature. Additionally, according to Lagji (2019), readers of *Exit West* must attend to shared time despite divided space as part of the new mobilities paradigm. However, these studies have not fully considered the exclusionary immigration policies and counterterrorism measures against refugees that the state enacts, particularly in Britain, where the middle section of the novel is set. Although *Exit West* has been referred to as a “Brexit novel,” (Shaw 2018, 26), it was actually written before Brexit, and can be better understood as engaging with the development of hostile immigrant policies from the early 2000s to 2017. I argue that the novel suggests that governments, particularly in the Global North, must embrace increased immigration as the new baseline and develop strategies for managing and accommodating refugees rather than resisting their presence.

Robert Young (2010) argues that the “fear of migrants and illegal immigration has turned out to be one of the most consistent terror effects of all” (322-3). In the realm of nationalism and extreme right-wing parties, the notion that such migration poses a threat to the West has been a key element in anti-migration discourse. In accordance with Boehmer and Morton’s (2010) concept of the “boundaries between the rule of (international) law and the declaration of martial law” (8), the novel *Exit West* explores the “vacuum” between law and



guidance in the juridical system, which can be exploited to create a “state of exception” (Scott-Baumann, 2018, 54). The media often characterizes the influx of refugees as a state of emergency, allowing the state to override the rule of law in the interest of public safety. As Hamid notes, the media described Westminster, where refugees were pouring in, as “the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation” (Hamid, 2017a, 126). The temporary “state of exception” that British authorities in the novel declare (Hamid, 2017a, 55) has the potential to become a permanent government technique, as seen in counterterrorism, and may support the use of extreme violence. Xenophobic rhetoric encourages overt racism and legitimizes terrorizing the “Other,” as exemplified by the demand “to reclaim Britain for Britain” (Hamid, 2017a, 132), which evokes a colonial ideology. As a result, the host community in London constructing the body politic in *Exit West* participates in state terrorism, enacted by state forces such as the army, policy, and government agencies.

The section of the novel set in London, on which this chapter mostly focuses, depicts counterterrorism measures as a sign that “colonial formations of sovereignty, policing, and surveillance” have been revived through dramatically increasing security apparatuses (Boehmer and Morton 2010, 7). The “War on Terror” engenders a new imperialism, not only abroad but also in national settings: “Their street was under attack by a nativist mob with iron bars or knives, and she and Saeed turned and ran, but could not escape” (Hamid 2017a, 131). Terrorism is the consequence of a variety of acts of violence committed by both state and non-state entities. In the first part of the novel, set in Saeed and Nadia’s home country before they flee to London, Hamid graphically illustrates how the unidentified city collapses due to the increasing clashes between the state and

the militants. It is a place in which the threats surrounding “a young woman living freely” are no longer “manageable”, funerals are “rushed affairs” and “large bombs [...] exploded with an awesome power” (Hamid 2017a, 73-76). In *Exit West*, state and non-state terror are inextricably linked, and citizens are the primary targets of this conflict. The government seems interested in asserting its authority and not in safeguarding those trapped in the conflict zone. It targets them in the same way as the militants. The government of the country might represent any postcolonial country that has corruption and dictatorial governance. When the “militants” take control of the city’s stock exchange and when national security is threatened, the government decides it is worth sacrificing the lives of the hostages (Hamid 2017a, 40). In the end, the government “exterminated” the militants, as well as the captives, to prove that it is still in “complete control” (Ibid.).

Scott-Baumann (2018) explains that people trust each other to behave reliably in a procedural sense, yet “there is a paradox at the heart of trust [...] Reciprocity is the key to trust and therein lies the paradox: how can we trust each other and those in power, given that reciprocity is often weakened by an imbalance of power in relationships?” (51). This imbalance could become deeply rooted in “norms”. In this sense, the state’s authority and supremacy could necessitate the use of violence, irrespective of its legitimacy or form. This is also seen in Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* (2017), when the state fully supports the Home Secretary who strips certain “British passport holders”, of their citizenship, such as citizens whose activities are considered “undesirable”. Hamid indicates how a government can directly victimise citizens in the name of regaining and asserting the state’s control and regulation. In this context, the protection of the people and the safeguarding of their benefits become

secondary.

*Exit West* explores the relationship between sudden displacements and the opportunities offered by virtual reality in our globalized world. The novel portrays phones as doors to faraway countries that collapse the borders of nation-states and connect distant places and people. Hamid writes, “the phones” antennas “sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic, a world that was all around them, and also nowhere, transporting them to places distant and near, and to places that had never been and would never be” (Hamid 2017a, 35). Liliana Naydan (2019) and Claire Chambers (2019) have analyzed the significance of digital technologies in *Exit West* as a way to connect people beyond national borders while also causing disconnection by “dividing users’ attention” (Naydan 2019, 434). Saeed and Nadia, for example, “live as simultaneously connected to and yet disconnected from one another, their homes, and the nations to which they migrate” (Naydan 2019, 434). Chambers (2019) points out that their phones “help them keep their distance while at the same time connecting them” (Chambers 2019, 220). The scholar Arjun Appadurai had already drawn attention to similar types of instability generated by migratory movements and digital processes, noting that “when [the story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced)] is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities” (Appadurai 1996, 4).

For instance, the government of Saeed and Nadia’s home country implements counterterrorism measures that cut them off from communication via cell phone and internet, causing them to feel isolated, alone and scared in the unmade city (Hamid 2017a, 55). The government’s attempt to combat terrorism

ultimately leads to an increase in terrorist activities, as the lack of access to the internet not only prevents the spread of information but also hinders citizens from connecting with each other. Similarly, the government in Hamid's portrayal of London possesses advanced counterterrorist troops with exceptional powers, which allows them to surveil and terrorize the targeted communities. The London Eye and other devices monitor people through an "invisible network of surveillance" that captures and logs everything (Hamid 2017a, 188-89). In this environment, the nativist mob, encouraged by authorities, attacks those perceived as a threat to London. Thus, both promoting and repelling terrorism become necessary for survival in Hamid's London. (Ibid., 132).

In the novel, a new sense of sovereignty has arisen where certain members of the host society in London have taken it upon themselves to "protect" the city from refugees, causing refugees to feel isolated, anxious, and fearful about what the future holds. The novel brings attention to the debates surrounding counterterrorism measures, which have become confusing in political discourses after 9/11. When the government reinforces counterterrorism measures and resorts to extreme violence against defenseless refugees, including children, the legitimacy of the government's authority is called into question. For instance, in the novel, there is a rumor that over two hundred migrants, including women and children, were killed in a cinema fire, raising doubts about the government's actions. (Hamid, 2017a, 160-61). The rumors suggest the violent consequences of using force against unarmed refugees. The idea of using "counterterrorism" measures against civilians is frightening. The novel indicates that an assessment is made by the military and police during a "pause" after the attacks.

According to Butler (2004), if a humanitarian crisis is seen as a national security issue, the state can justify its denial of human rights by citing “self-defense.” In the novel, the British government resorts to the use of force, endangering refugees and even encouraging the terrorism perpetrated by the host community. As a result, “three lives were lost” and many people were wounded during such attacks by the host community (Hamid 2017a, 131-32). In this sense, the novel depicts forms of state-led or state-sanctioned terrorism. The state controls the rhetoric used during periods of conflict. As the novel indicates, the authorities apply what they call “a temporary anti- terrorism measure, it was said, but with no end date given”, and without clarifying what it means (Ibid., 55). In this sense, counterterrorism measures are exploited to legitimize the government’s actions towards refugees who are perceived as a threat.

Similarly, in his novel, Hamid avoids using specific terms like “Islam” or “Muslims”, and “terrorism” and “terrorist” in his descriptions of events and characters when discussing themes of terror and migration. The main characters, Saeed and Nadia, are Muslims from a Muslim majority country, yet Hamid does not mention their religion or the country’s name. This narrative technique helps to avoid generalizations and provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of the issues being explored. Edward Said, in *Covering Islam* (1981), notes that “malicious generalizations” of Muslims and Islam in Western discourse is “the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians” (xii). The West often misinterprets Islam as the opposite of Western values, which has become more common after 9/11. Hamid’s novel

provides a different perspective on these concepts and debates. By avoiding terms like “Islam” and “Muslims,” the novel may be a response to the overuse and exploitation of these terms in Western narratives.

The novel depicts a period of calm before the conflict between the government and “fighters” or “militants” escalated into a civil war, during which only minimal violence occurred in the city, such as occasional shooting and car bombings. Mohsin Hamid’s novel reflects the concept of “moral equivalence” as described by Judith Butler, which suggests that acts of violence are described in a neutral and unbiased manner, without considering the cultural or ethnic background of the individuals involved (2004, 14). In the context of the post-9/11 terrorism narrative, this means that all acts of violence against the state and its people are portrayed as equally reprehensible, regardless of who the perpetrators are (Butler 2004, 14). By avoiding the use of terms like “terrorist” which are often applied exclusively to Muslims, Hamid challenges the idea that acts of violence can be defined by the perpetrator’s identity rather than the act itself. This disrupts the power structures associated with these problematic concepts as both the state and militants are shown to commit acts of violence, but neither are specifically labelled as “terrorists”. The state claims to be acting in the interests of national security, while the militants claim to be fighting for liberation. Within the discursive limits of fiction, the omission of these concepts allows Hamid to disable counterterrorism rhetoric and resist common stereotypes about Muslims.

Furthermore, Arabic expressions that garnered attention in the post-9/11 era, such as “mujahideen” and “jihad” that feature in Shamsie’s *Home Fire* (2017), are notably absent in *Exit West*. Such a narrative choice is effective for creating

a different perspective on the Other, calling into question binary stereotypes that pervade the predominant narrative about terrorism and counterterrorism. In this manner, the novel seems to create space for the voices of migrants and refugees who are exposed daily to different forms of terror. In the novel, Hamid makes reference to the importance of the characters' birthplaces and residences. The home of origin becomes an important element of their existence and can have an impact throughout their lives. Saeed and Nadia try to find a place of safety to live freely, but they have lost this "luxury" because of the extreme levels of violence that exist in their home of origin (Hamid 2017a, 1). Violence, oppression and fear drive them and others from various countries to flee, turning them into refugees. The relationship between the immigrant or exile and the host society, as well as the resultant concepts of home and identity, frequently change.

As a result, home is transformed into a "contested space" where "conflicting discourses of race, gender, class, and nation meet and merge" (Santesso 2013). The "contested" home profoundly influences the formation of a sense of home and identity. The concept of home as a private rather than a public sphere, according to Santesso (2013), may no longer be viable or durable. Instead, in fiction that focuses on home and identity, home becomes a space that exists somewhere between private and public, permitting or encouraging the individual to reflect on his or her connection to both. This fundamentally destabilized perspective is summed up by the term "disorientation" which "challenges the fixity of identity" (Santesso 2013, 11). However, there might be serious flaws in terms of inclusion and representation, leading to the formation of an identity based on the notion of unbelonging.

The novel not only disrupts notions of home but also location. In

geographical terms, one's location can be a question of "life and death". According to an interview with Hamid, "When relations between people start to break down, when suspicion and xenophobia grow, and when schisms start manifesting themselves, the exact location where you are from can take on deadly forms" (Hamid 2017b). Hamid observes that while "home" has traditionally been thought of as a stable location, this sense of home is no longer viable due to the "unrootedness" of modern life and its unsettling influence on the individual (Ibid.).

Indeed, by employing episodic chapters (vignettes), or what Claire Chambers (2019) calls "cut-piece scenes", Hamid disrupts the sense of one's current location and transports the reader to diverse contexts outside Saeed and Nadia's situation (236). These Vignettes are similar to the cut-piece films found in Pashto and Bangladeshi cinema (Chambers 2019, 236). These scenes, which sometimes feature nudity or sexual encounters, provide a sudden shift to a different setting and characters before jumping back to the primary narrative (Chambers 2019, 236). The cut-piece scenes are either separated by a line break or continue directly from the main text (Chambers 2019, 236). Furthermore, the narrator employs the pronouns "we" and "our" instead of "them" and "their", indicating the universality of migration (Hamid 2017a, 94). Shifting between first- and third-person plural pronouns elicits a common feeling of the struggles that besets the migrants' struggles; the journey of Saeed and Nadia is not unique.

The novel emphasizes common experiences—migration influences not just Saeed and Nadia but also others who are less fortunate. Indeed, "the whole planet was on the move" (Hamid 2017a; Chambers 2019, 237-8). For example, Hamid chose to set the first vignette in Australia, where a black man who is trying



to escape death in his homeland, appears through a magical door in a closet of a white woman's bedroom. According to the narrator, the man is aware of "the fragility of his body," which conveys the refugee's "perilous circumstances" (Hamid 2017a, 6-7). The man understands how easily "to make a man into meat" (Ibid.). The violence in his situation has significantly affected his body, making his vulnerability apparent. The first chapter illustrates how witnessing violence can make someone acutely aware of the precariousness of their existence.

According to Butler (2004), this focus on "a primary vulnerability to others" is a fundamental aspect of human existence (xiv). The novel depicts life as fragile and ultimately lost because it depends on the human body's ability to endure and survive in a dangerous environment. Conversely, the image of the sleeping woman alone creates a feeling of security in her surroundings. In an interview, Hamid (2017c) discusses the doors as symbols, saying that they "already exist", and they represent "the technological reality" in which we live.

In the novel, the doors appear to be a magical solution for individuals trying to relocate. This device allows Hamid to avoid writing about the migrants' dangerous journeys, which are filled with tragic stories. Importantly, Hamid does not underestimate the dangers of migration, which can become an entire story in itself. Instead, he concentrates on "what makes someone want to leave [...] and what happens to them in the new place, which is the life after migration? [...] so the doors allowed me to focus on parts of the migration narrative that often get de-emphasized" (Ibid.). Thus, the novel concentrates on portraying those who are about to be migrants as regular individuals with families. Before their lives were reduced to the status of refugees, they had dreams and everyday challenges, reminding us that there are adversities beyond the terror that people

face as a result of forced migration. The dreadful conditions migrants and refugees experience may alter how they are seen as humans, transforming them into something different—the Other.

As a result, Hamid imagines the disintegration of the gap that divides individuals. Avoiding the depiction of the journey itself calls into question concepts of prejudice towards migrants as the binary of “us” and “them”. Nadia and Saeed, for example, live in their country of origin with aspirations and obstacles that are comparable to those faced by other adolescents in the West. They merely shift their location via the magic doors to escape unrestrained violence. The doors also allow Hamid to make the narrative change locations by using the form of vignettes. Not only is crossing the doors immediate, but the transition between different scenes, settings and characters is instant as well. This technique explains the dynamics of the doors while also emphasising their magical aspects.

Furthermore, the narrative uses elements of magic realism through the use of magical doors, which are invested with remarkable power. Magic realism has been particularly useful to writers who work under extreme political circumstances, allowing them to engage with realities so extreme that they seem unreal. In discussing postcolonial fiction, Zoe Norridge (2015) states that it is uncomfortable to have a complete knowledge of events in “novels of conflict” (70) because violence as a leitmotif can be difficult to represent in fiction. The same can perhaps be said about fiction that is set in a multicultural context with a postcolonial legacy and navigates “appalling violence” (Ibid., 67). Therefore, introducing magical aspects into the literary narrative has become a main form of “postcolonial writing” (Ibid., 72). Almost all critics who write about “magical realism” indicate that the concept is an “oxymoron” because the magical and the

real are inherently at odds (Ibid.). However, it is exactly this paradox that is the focus of authors and academics, and definitions of magic realism emphasize the levels of equivalency between the supernatural and the real.

The novel's doors represent what Wendy B. Faris (2005) calls an "irreducible element" of magic (167). By refusing to rationalize the doors, Hamid "normalizes the supernatural", portraying both the real and the magical in a cohesive and equivalent manner (Warnes 2005, 6). Suzi Feay (2018) considers the doors to be more problematic, describing them as an "ingenious conceit" that resembles the real journey of migrants by "merely eliminating the time-consuming travel part" (31-2). The use of "merely" in Feay's statement obscures a problematic issue. In the novel, no character dies because of travelling through the doors, but in the real world, many refugees die in trying to reach Europe. Despite the novel's focus on the doors' darkness and their "ingenious conceit", the doors may risk minimising the significance of the extremely dangerous, traumatic and sometimes fatal journey. One might argue that *Exit West*, as a novel about the "European migrant crisis", suggests that replacing overloaded small boats with magical doors allows the novel to effortlessly avoid the misery of individuals at the heart of the crisis.

Conversely, Hamid's constant focus on the darkness of the doors could be interpreted as a concession on his part that such inconceivable agony cannot be represented in narrative fiction. Hamid does, however, represent the harsh realities of migration and border crossings by exposing the migrants' hazardous journeys. As Nadia nervously approaches the door, she was "struck by its darkness, its opacity" (Hamid 2017a, 98). The portal's fundamental darkness, unfamiliarity and mystery produce a dramatic and horrifying experience even

before walking through it. The crossing is abrupt and difficult, as if undergoing the process of rebirth (Chambers 2019, 236). The novel describes the immediate experience of migration as “both like dying and like being born, [...] she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it” (Ibid.). Nadia and Saeed’s physical struggles emphasize the hardships experienced by migrants and refugees. The doors in the novel don’t provide a miraculous solution but rather offer an escape from one perceived threat into another (Hamid, 2017a). However, the characters find hope through the portals and start viewing ordinary doors as potential gateways (Ibid., 70). This highlights the idea that refugees will do whatever it takes to survive and suggests that closing borders will not deter migration.

The fact that individuals are swiftly transferred to different locales significantly influences the narrative’s causal effect, offering the novel a universal perspective of varied viewpoints on migration and its outcomes on individuals, countries and communities. In the first vignette, Hamid portrays the magical door in the form of a closet door, which opens to a location in Sydney, Australia where an Australian woman is asleep in darkness, and a dark migrant enters her bedroom through the wardrobe door and exits through the window (Hamid 2017a, 6-7) Hamid highlights the stark contrast between the two worlds connected through migration. The man who enters the bedroom is described as having dark skin, while the woman in bed has pale skin. Despite his wish to remain unheard, the narrator shows empathy towards the struggles and difficulties faced by “the migrant plight”: “The silence of a man struggling in an alley, on the ground, late at night, to free himself of hands clenched around his throat. But there were no hands around this man’s throat. He wished only not to be heard” (Hamid 2017a,

7, Chambers 2019, 241). In her analysis of Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, Claire Chambers (2019) notes that Hamid portrays the dark man "as the victim of structural inequality, while the white woman is oblivious to his suffering and remains unharmed" (2019, 241).

Interestingly, Hamid's narrator does not display a clear judgment, which reflects a reassessment of ideas, as seen when the narrator changes his initial certainty about the man's eyes to uncertainty: "His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly" (Hamid 2017a, 7). This might be an instance of one of the literary techniques used by authors such as Joseph Conrad, which is described by Ian Watt as "delayed decoding", a form of "literary impressionism [which] combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning" (quoted in Poyner 2020, 249). Similarly, in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, the certainty of the stereotypical portrayal of the Other is used to emphasize the actual ambiguity that distinguishes such unexpected encounters (Parry 2004). Hamid's narrative reflects a reassessment of ideas, as seen when the narrator changes his initial certainty about the man's eyes to uncertainty. This ambiguity challenges the reader to question their own assumptions and judgments.

In a sense, Hamid's portrayal of darkness and paleness challenges colonial notions of the Other. The dark man is not a danger to the helpless, sleeping woman. The second depiction of his eyes, which only looked around the room, reveals the influence of colonial stereotypes of the Other in the West. In Norridge's (2015) critique of colonial ideology, she notes that some types of fiction can be "destructive" in their normalisation of imperial ideologies because they

adopt a specific point of view about the world and seek to persuade readers that this is “the only plausible viewpoint” (63-4). Postcolonial critique tends to suspect individualistic points of authority in such a context. Hamid’s novel presents various views of the world while challenging colonial images of the Other in the West.

Obviously, Nadia and Saeed are both victims of forced displacement, which is mirrored by Boswell’s (2002) argument that the degree of violence in the homeland reflects the extent of displacement (5). This idea addresses the xenophobic clichés of “they (migrants) come here”, suggesting that refugees do not choose their destination in the first place, but instead they are fleeing the horror of war to the next safe exit, regardless of where the magical doors take them. The narrator recounts Saeed’s father’s plea for Saeed and Nadia to leave him behind when escaping the city, saying “when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind” (Hamid 2017a, 92-4).

Leaving loved ones behind is akin to killing them, highlighting the agony of migration. Saeed’s father is left behind, a sick old man in a deadly city, and the narrator suggests that Nadia and Saeed effectively kill him by abandoning him. This leaves Saeed to face the consequences of leaving his father in “this death trap of a country” (Hamid 2017, 70). In a sense, the novel raises concerns about the disastrous consequences of migration on refugees’ identities, as they are physically separated from their previous lives. According to Hamid, identity includes the notion that England is a temporary home, and refugees must continue to migrate until they find a true sense of belonging. The narrative’s fragmented nature and diverse locations leave open the question of whether a sense of home and identity is only possible through the narrative’s uncertainties

and gaps.

The novel explores the challenges faced by migrants after their arrival, including survival and combating societal fears fueled by chauvinism (Young, 2010). As refugees, Saeed and Nadia carry a tent and set it up when safe to sleep (Hamid 2017a, 113). They seek out opportunities to relocate to safer areas and share the fears of being “trapped here forever” with other refugees when they run out of money (Hamid 2017a, 110). Their experiences echo those of migrants in their city pre-conflict who were not viewed as threats but rather were trying to recreate normalcy or displaying various emotions, such as “anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others didn’t move at all” (Hamid 2017a, 23). The lack of basic necessities, including shelter, exacerbates the trauma and terror of displacement and the threat of deportation to dangerous countries (Hamid 2017a). When Saeed and Nadia discover an empty house with other refugees, they opt to stay indoors, having spent months without proper shelter (Ibid., 128). The novel highlights how the human right to adequate housing becomes a priceless yet temporary possession in such circumstances.

Hamid’s novel, *Exit West*, envisions London as a metropolis where refugees transform abandoned spaces into makeshift homes and large-scale migration is facilitated by magical doors. The novel presents a disturbing portrayal of London where, according to Hamid (2017a, 126), “All over London houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way, some said by a million migrants, some said by twice that [...] Between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few” (Ibid.). This suggests that the migrants and refugees have outnumbered the host society, creating a sense of alienation and fear among the citizens. Hamid explores how

the mere presence of migrants and refugees in London's "empty spaces" can be perceived as a threat to British citizens and the entire nation. The media reinforces this image of refugees by referring to the area as "the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation" (Hamid 2017a, 126), promoting the political rhetoric used by the state.

The rhetoric that justifies hostility towards the Other is normalized through a colonial mindset that seeks to "reclaim Britain for Britain" (Kundnani 2001). Such a sentiment reveals a belief that asylum seekers are dominant and combative and plan to invade the country, beginning with London. The very existence of refugees, such as Nadia and Saeed, on the streets of London provokes those whom Hamid describes as a "nativist mob" to commit acts of terror (Hamid 2017a, 131). This group regards Nadia and Saeed through the eyes of "a strange and violent tribe, determined on their destruction" (Hamid 2017a, 31). Such violence becomes self-perpetuating and represents London on the verge of war, similar to Nadia and Saeed's unnamed city in their home country.

As the situation worsens, the authorities attempt to remove the refugees from the house by force. From this, the concept of "unity", as opposed to conformity, emerges as "something they could never have expected happened" (Hamid 2017a, 125). For instance, as the authorities tried to forcefully remove the refugees from the house, a surprising turn of events occurred. People from the neighborhood, of different skin tones and backgrounds, came together in solidarity with the refugees, forming a crowd that chanted and banged cooking pots. The police eventually withdrew and the house remained calm, with occasional beautiful singing in Igbo heard until late at night (Hamid 2017a, 125).



This interpretation aligns with research on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance as a means of promoting social change and challenging systems of oppression. According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), nonviolent resistance is more effective than violent resistance in achieving strategic goals, eliciting international support, and preventing retribution from the state. Similarly, Martin and Patrick (2017) argues that nonviolence is not only an effective means of challenging power dynamics but also a moral imperative, grounded in principles of human dignity and respect for all individuals. In the novel, the unity demonstrated by individuals who resist violence against vulnerable members of society, such as the refugees in the house. The nonviolent resistance against state violence leads to a sense of calm and security, evidenced by the beautiful singing heard in the house. Moreover, the people who gather in the streets of London in solidarity with the refugees challenge the anti-terrorist rhetoric promoted by the media, promoting peace instead of hostility towards migrants. This suggests that the host community recognizes that newcomers are not terrorists and that violent attacks against them only escalate the cycle of violence.

Hamid (2017a) demonstrates the differences in the migrants' ideologies, with some advocating armed revolt against state brutality and others preferring peaceful protest, thereby upsetting the modalities of the Other and avoiding stereotypical portrayals of the West. The animosity of those who take a stand against migration is perhaps a form of "aversive racism" or it may simply stem from a sense of fear, as Nadia justifies the attack by telling Saeed, "Imagine if you lived here. And millions of people from all over the world suddenly arrived"

(Hamid 2017a, 162).<sup>23</sup> As the novel shows, fear partially motivates the categorisation of the Other and influences policies of exclusion rather than accommodating minority groups within society. The author of *Exit West* questions various forms of terror, such as those perpetrated by religious militants, the state, and the host society. This prompts readers to go beyond the prevalent rhetoric and gain a new perspective on the issue, as Gauthier (2015) notes that it results in “a shift in perspective” (6).

For instance, in the novel’s unnamed city, a militant described as a “brave man” was “ready to die” and “did not plan on dying, he planned on living, and he planned on doing great things while he did” (Hamid 2017a, 64). Through complex characters, including militant fundamentalists, Hamid shows that they commit atrocities but also have agreeable aspects to their personalities. By offering these characters a voice, Hamid seeks to explore their minds and motivations, as their desire to achieve “great things” drives them, believing they are fighting for a “righteous” purpose (Hamid 2017a, 49). The monopolisation of morality justifies both state and non-state terror while overlooking the underlying reasons for violence and hatred, such as fear and the misuse of power. The same rationale is used to explain why violence emerges in Hamid’s London. The state and the anti-migrant nativists’ justifications for terrorising the refugees and migrants stem from negative representations in the media, which foment a mood of anti-immigration sentiment, British nationalism and increased national security measures.

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<sup>23</sup> This idea is mostly driven from “aversive racism”, avoiding interacting with people of other races and ethnicities (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986).

London has clearly become a hotspot of terror towards migrants. The narrator, for instance, makes specific reference to the consequences of conflict, especially when both sides turn to violence. Regardless of why the nativist mob retreated, the presence of newcomers is perhaps becoming accepted, or at least managed (Hamid 2017a, 164). Moreover, the narrator explores questions of identity in relation to the anti-migrant mob and state authorities. They stopped attacking migrants, perhaps, because of the terrible moral ramifications, where “decency” and “bravery” triumph (Ibid., 164). The novel’s “dialogic mode” presents multiple perspectives of the conflict, preventing readers from embracing a limited view (Gauthier 2015, 7).<sup>24</sup>

In his depiction of the ceasefire in London, Mohsin Hamid employs a literary device that allows for multiple perspectives to be presented without dictating a single point of view. This approach obscures Hamid’s position on the issue, and instead provides several explanatory views. The term “perhaps” implies a sense of tentativeness, challenging the truisms and clichés associated with violence during the refugee crisis (Hamid 2017a, 126). Furthermore, the novel reveals that just as many people “venture out” of London as those who “poured into” it (Hamid 2017a, 126), and doors leading to countries in the Global South offer an exit for people living in the Global North, providing new options for a different or potentially better life. *Exit West* challenges the binary between “migrant” and “native” by presenting the contested nature of both concepts). The way “natives” treat newcomers reveals that in Britain and in the metropolis of

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<sup>24</sup> If the novel presents multiple perspectives through a multiplicity of voices, we could say it is dialogic, a form of competing voices within a narrative theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Bakhtin 1984).

London culturally entrenched imperial ideologies still exist (Oyedeji 2013, 51). Hamid illustrates how in London, even legal inhabitants and immigrants can be considered “natives” by some, while others strictly define “natives” as those who were born and raised in Britain. This is exemplified by the character Nadia who encounters a woman in the labour camps whom she regards as a “native” but who had arrived in Britain from another country two decades ago (Hamid 2017a, 181). The novel shows that natives can also be the descendants of migrants who arrived long ago, highlighting the fluidity of the concept.

The novel further complicates the notion of “native” when British protestors, of various races and backgrounds, are depicted protesting against the influx of refugees (Hamid 2017a, 125). The narrator also points out that in migrant camps in Marin, California, “there were almost no natives,” referring to the exclusion of native Americans (Hamid 2017a, 195). However, the narrator acknowledges that being “native” is a relative matter, as demonstrated by the diverse reactions of the “natives” of Britain to the influx of refugees (Hamid 2017a, 196). In the novel, an additional “layer of nativeness” comes from Africans who were transported to the United States as “slaves”, people who substantially influenced the construction of the American collective and individual identity (Hamid 2017a, 197). This idea refers to the political connotations of “nativeness” as a concept and relates it to specific rights and entitlements, such as the right to “exercise suffrage”, where “it was hoped a greater justice might be less easily denied,” and that justice might be achieved in the long term (Hamid 2017a, 219).

Therefore, the novel seems to contemplate the influence of migration on the demographics of a country’s population, blurring the distinction between being a native and a migrant, where no one is genuinely a native or even a

migrant of any given locale. By using the term “native”, the novel refers to colonial history and includes the continuing war on terror in the current context, which is infused by counterterrorism measures accompanied by an obsessive fear of external aggression and the disintegration of identity. Unlike many novels situated in the contemporary context, the use of terror as a leitmotif in *Exit West* is pushed to the background of the narrative, focusing instead on the agency of the main characters. Violence has not disappeared in Britain, but for most migrants and the host society “existence went on in tolerable safety” (Hamid 2017a, 169). Hamid envisions a future in which Britain and America will welcome refugees and illegal immigrants, regardless of their numbers. Currently, they accept them for labour and taxes. In fact, the “illegal” magical doors obscure the newcomers’ position in the narrative.

The doors serve as an analogy for what is happening today in many countries; refugees and asylum seekers are given asylum regardless of the legality of their entry into the country. Even so, the author does not depict a utopian society in *Exit West*. Hamid also explores the processes and effects of surveillance in London. The third-person narrator in the novel’s chapters is used specifically as a tool for observation, with access to Saeed and Nadia’s emotions and thoughts, and their physical and virtual daily activities, as well as accessing a group of minor characters. The narrator, for example, has access to a security video of a Tamil family arriving at an upscale hotel in Dubai, and even some “camera feeds of various tourists’ selfie-taking mobile phones” (Hamid 2017a, 88, Chambers 2019, 237). Drones, cameras and other surveillance devices are in use across the country, not just in London. Checkpoints and the police are everywhere, trying to stop the flow of people coming from “the doors from poorer

places” (Ibid., 101).

The power of the state in Hamid’s novel is seen through the efficiency with which migrants are segregated, controlled and violently attacked in the neighbourhoods where they live. Furthermore, the state makes sure that refugees are integrated into the city’s labour force through its agents. In Mohsin Hamid’s novel, the state’s response to global migration is to initiate a project called the “London Halo”, which aims to expand the city by creating a surrounding area that is not officially part of it (Hamid 2017a, 109) . This project is carried out with the help of refugees who are promised a meagre reward of a small plot of land and access to modern utilities in exchange for their unpaid labour. As Claire Chambers (2019) notes, the promise of “40 square metres and a pipe” is a pointed parallel to the 40 acres and a mule promised to African Americans after emancipation, highlighting the refugees’ vulnerable position and the exploitative nature of the project (239). This depiction of migrant labour as a commodity is especially important in light of the reference to blossom in London resembling cotton waiting to be picked by brown bodies, which emphasizes the racist undertones of the project (Chambers 2019, 239).

In *Exit West*, the newcomers to London were subjected to terror and extreme violence that echoed colonial practises, such as segregating the newcomers from the host society by reallocating them to various work camps under the supervision of “nativists”. This individual control of nativist supervisors replaces the collective control exerted by drones and the police, reducing newcomers to mere biological bodies in work camps. In this sense, the novel demonstrates that such control and regulation are a continuation of colonial terror. According to Frank (2017), narratives that deal with terror fall into two

genres, “narratives of trauma” and “narratives of terror” (75). The first genre sees 9/11 in the United States as a “collective trauma” while the latter is more focused on contemporary British novels “concerned with the possibility of another attack, this time in London” (Ibid.). However, novels like *Exit West* and *Home Fire* go beyond these two generic categories through storylines that seek to show that the endeavours of counterterrorism are an extension of the analysis of colonial terror. Both novels consider terroristic behaviour as a radical response to injustice through stories that disrupt the reader’s comfort. This is accomplished through the novels’ literary styles and subject matter.

*Home Fire* employs devices such as stream of consciousness, while *Exit West* uses a detached tone, short passages, and sketches that seem out of kilter with the rest of the narrative. In both narratives, counterterrorism measures constitute a powerful leitmotif, challenging the ideology that regards any threat as external. Both novels attempt to upset the long-established view of terrorism as entirely foreign to the nation. Since both narratives are situated within the current context of the refugee crisis, they challenge categories associated with static identities like “natives”. Rather than showing inflexibility, both illustrate how identity is disrupted by terror and incapable of being fixed when examined within the ethical framework of multiculturalism.

Both *Home Fire* and *Exit West* seek to show that in contemporary fiction, violence cannot continue to be covert, justified or normalized. Novels like *Home Fire* and *Exit West* offer a counter-narrative that sheds light on the systemic violence of the state through the use of Islamophobic and anti-immigrant discourses. This perpetuates the idea that migrants and refugees are potentially radicalized individuals and undermines those who conform to this view, leading

to a diminished sense of self (Scott-Baumann 2018). Such mechanisms create a distorted view of social trust and reciprocity between “the cryptic other” and “the diminished self,” which poses significant obstacles to establishing trust in multicultural societies. The depiction of “the cryptic other” and “the diminished self” in these novels challenges the formation of trust in today’s multicultural societies. In *Home Fire*, the “cryptic other” disrupts the liberal principles of equality, openness, and transparency and continues to perpetuate racial imaginaries within liberal-democratic social orders. *Exit West* raises important questions about trust and cooperation in the face of conflict and upheaval. The Hermeneutics of Suspicion can be a useful lens through which to analyze the power dynamics at play in the novel, particularly in the way that the state exploits the gap between the law as a norm and its application, resulting in a state of exception that perpetuates exclusionary practices (Agamben 2003; Scott-Baumann 2018, 54).

In *Exit West*, this crisis is exacerbated by a tendency to associate unity with uniformity. Again, the crisis of trust forms an obstacle to the plurality of contemporary societies in which religious communities begin to demand equal recognition and accommodation of their political views, which is not usually given, especially in places where Islamic culture is considered alien and where individuals regard themselves as secular. The concern here is how to build trust among all segments of British society. The central message is reinforced—the basis of this trust is the acceptance of the idea that “the cryptic other” is becoming part of “us” and enjoys the same rights and courtesies as all members of society. Throughout the narrative, we see how Saeed and Nadia experience this process, which appears to be associated with both culture and gender. Both are thrown



into unfamiliar cultures, but follow different routes. Saeed is characterized by his passiveness in the face of various forms of persecution. In the refugees' house in England, which is full of Nigerians and other communities from the Global South, Saeed is "less comfortable" because "he was the only man from his country" (Hamid 2017a, 145). Consequently, he moves to a nearby house occupied by "people from his country" and tries to convince Nadia, whom he refers to as his wife, to come with him, but she refuses (Hamid 2017a, 148).

Conversely, Nadia, with her more independent spirit, makes a positive adjustment where she is living and develops her own social agency, as seen in her relationship with the Nigerians in the refugees' house, among whom she has "acquired a bit of a special status" (Ibid., 145). The author states that "Nadia looked forward to them. They represented something new in her mind, the birth of something new" (Ibid., 144). Unlike Saeed, Nadia is not consumed by the desire to return to the home of origin. Rather, she takes small, gradual steps towards deeper communication in the new community in which she finds herself. Significantly, Nadia does not completely abandon the values of her culture of origin. She does not veer from one extreme to the other. She retains elements of her culture of origin that are central to her sense of self while being open to new experiences, as seen through her intimate relationship with the female cook in Marin.

Nonetheless, the values inherent in Hamid's portrayal of Nadia and the depiction of her journey are open to examination. There is no doubt that the Nadia who is represented as liberal, independent, and fundamentally more "Western" at the end of the novel is not so different from the Nadia we saw in her homeland at the beginning of the novel—a person who is self-reliant, rides a motorbike, and

lives alone. Nadia does not go through a maturation process in terms of her opinions, ideas and attitude. That Nadia prefers to continue to wear her black robe, even when she leaves her city of origin, does not contradict the idea that she rejects apathy and submission, an essential part of a Muslim woman's education and the role she is expected to perform. She is noticeably more "Western", regardless of her traditional attire.

On one hand, it is uncertain whether Hamid feels that the adoption of "Western" cultural elements is defined as progress or improvement. On the other hand, Hamid paints a vivid picture of the possibility for the East and the West to intersect. Nadia selects options between the Global South and the Global North, and perhaps Hamid's most significant contribution to the discussion of home and identity is that she makes a personal decision, unattached to anyone else's and distinct from that of any other migrant. Adversity leads to the re-evaluation of values, such as wealth and marriage within the South Asian community in England. As seen in *the Year of the Runaways*, despite his success and wealth, Dr Cheema laments his country of origin; Narinder's acquiescence to her family's wishes demonstrates a valuation of family loyalty and a daughter's duties to her father at the expense of falling in love.

These perplexing shifts and discontinuities of the overall social behaviour of members of the South Asian community are reminiscent of is seen through *Exit West's* apparent lack of a clear social structure. This observation shows the extent to which migrant labourers and refugees are marginalized as social agents, which is highlighted in the aesthetic structure and social formation of both novels. The journey of Saeed and Nadia through the magical doors is reflected in the narrative form, "so the doors allowed me to focus on parts of the migration

narrative that often get de-emphasized” (Hamid 2017b). The structure and aesthetics of both novels are influenced by the real and surreal journeys of their characters, which highlight how migration and forced displacement can disrupt social conventions and hierarchies. This reveals gaps not only in the theory of multiculturalism but also in the international political economy, as migrants and refugees expose the divisions within society.

Therefore, in the upcoming chapter, I seek to challenge the notion that multiculturalism limits freedom and misrepresents the nature of personhood by analyzing Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2006) and Guy Gunaratne’s *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). These two novels contest the idea that personal identity is entirely distinct from society and instead suggest that communal and personal identity are constantly evolving. I examine how the novels explore the balance between individual choice and state intervention. While state intervention may be necessary to protect vulnerable members of a minority community, it can also encourage more diverse forms of identity.

## Chapter Five: The Neoliberal Multicultural Market: Transformations of Home and Identity

Examining the transformation of home and identity, this chapter explores current arguments regarding multiculturalism and neoliberalism as they are figured in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) and Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). In his acclaimed first novel, *Londonstani*, published in 2006, Malkani explores the possibilities and often unanticipated outcomes of mixing ethnic and cultural identities. He explores the world of teenage British South Asian rudeboys, who live in a world of flashy cars, name-brand clothes and self-conscious attitudes. Insights into the representation of home and identity in *Londonstani* and *In Our Mad and Furious City* can be found in *After Empire* (2004), in which Paul Gilroy calls for "articulating cosmopolitan hope upward from below rather than imposing it from on high", and valuing "the politics of multiculturalism [...] in its refusal of state-centered-ness and in its attractive vernacular style" (74). This call, in a sense, distorts prior top-down multiculturalism and emphasizes it from below, which may be found among today's refugees, exiles, and migrants.

Rather than focusing on a single character, Malkani chronicles the poignant stories of four protagonists, Jas, Amit, Ravi, and Hardjit, and their experiences as young British South Asian second-generation immigrants in an ethnically charged enclave. The novel is set in Hounslow, a west London neighbourhood close to Heathrow Airport, where the protagonists' cultural identities, economic activities and ethnic groups are formed and develop. The "rudeboy-desis" depicted in the novel attempt to create "cut-and-paste identities" by removing themselves from mainstream culture (Malkani 2006b). Their

pastiche identities fuse American hip-hop culture, Bollywood and bhangra music. the eighteen-year-old narrator, Jas, whose white identity is only revealed near the end of the narrative, joins the “baddest” crew in Hounslow.<sup>25</sup> As a result, he changes his identity from a studious white geek to a tough rudeboy-desi, who fails his finals and must retake his A levels at a community college. Even though the boys behave like an untouchable mafia, wandering the streets of Hounslow in Ravi’s BMW M3, they still live with their middle-class families and the car belongs to Ravi’s mother.

In *Represent and Destroy* (2011), Jodi Melamed examines the transformation of what she terms “official, state-sponsored antiracisms” since the end of WWII. In tracking this transformation, she divides it into three chronological stages: racial liberalism (mid-1940s to 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s to 1990s) and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s). Melamed argues that race has been disarticulated from material conditions by what she calls “race-liberal orders”, which circumscribe the limits of racial expression and the probabilities of the eradication of racism. Melamed coined the term “neoliberal multiculturalism” in an effort to illustrate how these ideas create the perception that racism is vanishing. Engaging with David Harvey’s statement that “freedom’s just another word” under neoliberalism, she shows how abstracting antiracism from the history of race benefits the prevalence of

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<sup>25</sup> Jas’s white identity is only revealed near the end of the narrative on his “medical chart: Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, aged nineteen, white, male” (Malkani 2006a, 340).

financial capitalism:

[The neoliberal–multicultural discourse has abstracted race issues to such a [...] degree [...] that sometimes, as in the ubiquitous discussions of diversity, the racial context is more residual than overt. [...] It has been, in fact, a kind of multicultural formalism that is able to circumvent traditional knowledge systems by placing their objects within a system of rationality that calculates with formalized and ideological representations of difference. (2011, 43)

Since multicultural homes and identities are often understood as collective products of race, gender, sexuality, religion and class that are constantly in flux, the interchangeable understanding of the concepts of multiculturalism and neoliberalism becomes more crucial in the ethnically charged context of diaspora. In this chapter, my argument is that the current Euro-American race politics give rise to the possibility of constructing a deracialized version of British South Asian identity in *Londonstani*. In an interview, Malkani (2006b) states that *Londonstani* shows the transformation of the British South Asian boys' identities:

from victims (as represented by the word Paki) to aggressors who volunteer for segregation (as represented by gangs such as the Sher Punjab—which means lions or tigers of the Punjab) and finally the transformation of an ethnic identity into a youth subculture that exists in equilibrium with mainstream society and other subcultures (as represented by the word Desi, which is often used like the word homeboy). Indeed, the

difference between Desi and South Asian is similar to the difference between the words Latino and Hispanic. One is a subculture; the other, an ethnicity. That's why the three parts of the book are called Paki, Sher and Desi.

During the process of their transformation, the rudeboys develop identities by giving a series of hostile lessons to those whom they regard as "goras" (white people), "gorafied desis" (British South Asians who behave and dress like the English), Muslim British South Asians and their parents. For instance, the first-person narrator, Jas, explains the characteristic features of the gang's identity, "[we speak] in sync like we belonged to some tutty boy band", and Hardjit, the gang leader, "always knew exactly how to tell others that it just weren't right to describe all desi boys as Pakis", considering this job as a "civic duty to educate others in this basic social etiquette" (Malkani 2006a, 3–4). According to their rules, it is permissible to be identified as a "Paki" by someone else who might also be called a "Paki" (essentially, a derogatory term used against British South Asians, and which in this novel is reappropriated). The novel starts with Hardjit giving a lesson about identity by beating up a "gora" for calling them "Pakis": "An dat's da rule. Can't be callin someone a Paki less u also called a Paki, innit. So if you hear Jas, Amit, Ravi or me callin anyone a Paki, dat don't mean u can call him one also. We b honorary Pakis n u ain't" (Malkani 2006a, 6). It is obvious that the four boys are struggling to break free from the shackles of an identity crisis. From the outset of the novel, Jas quickly succeeds in making the reader realize that dissatisfaction and differences occur among second-generation British South Asians born and bred in Britain.

The novel exposes the relationship between the language and the

behaviour of British South Asians, along with the differences between their ethnicities and religions. The boys are fuelled by disenchantment as they either feel marginalized or they voluntarily marginalize themselves to seek answers to their identity crisis. Generally, they distance themselves from the three main representatives of mainstream culture: “gorafied desis”; their white teacher, Mr Ashwood, an advocate of multiculturalism; and their parents’ generation, the first generation of immigrants. For instance, when Hardjit inflicts his identity crisis on the gora, the narrator, Jas, who is more articulate than the rest of the gang because of his intellectual background, expresses their disenchantment eloquently whilst bearing in mind the need to not sound “poncey”: “People’re always tryin to stick a label on our scene. That’s the problem with havin a fuckin scene. First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits” (Malkani 2006a, 5). Indeed, such disenchantment is an integral part of any diasporic experience.

In *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007), Vijay Mishra offers a quote from Shakespeare’s Prince Hamlet as an epigraph to his introduction: “[t]here needs no ghost ... come from the grave to tell us [that] all diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way” (1). The second chapter in *Londonstani* begins with a similar lesson (scene) as the first chapter, but this time the boys verbally abuse a desi man. They pull up in their car to a red light and stare at and taunt the British South Asian man in the car next to them, calling him a “coconut”: in their eyes, his skin may be brown, but he is white inside. Based on his car and clothing, they regard him as an Indian who has embraced English appearances and manners, so they classify him as a “gorafied desi” and accuse him of being “embarrassed to b a desi [...] embarrassed a your culture? Thing is,



u is actually an embarrassment to desis” (Malkani 2006a, 21–22). Although the boys see it as unquestionably crucial that they preserve their distinct differences from both “goras” and “gorafied desis”, the “Paki” label seems to include all British South Asians.

Even so, this classification collapses when deep-rooted values from the originary culture, such as honour, become involved in matters of religion and interfaith relationships. Here, the Muslim–Hindu and Pakistani–Indian distinctions sharpen, as represented by the Sikh Hardjit and the Muslim Tariq’s “big fight” to “teach Tariq a lesson or two for going out with a Sikh girl an then tryin to convert her to Islam” (Ibid., 80). These distinctions became more acute and are further amplified between British South Asians in times of extremity, such as the Partition, the aftermath of the *Satanic Verses* controversy, 9/11 and 7/7, which aggravate their interreligious tensions. These complex relationships and distinctions are also evident in the racist slur “Paki”. Despite Hardjit’s view on who may or may not use it, Jas exhibits a more exclusive understanding: “Hindus an Sikhs’d spit blood if they ever got linked to anything to do with Pakistan” (Ibid., 7).

All the British South Asian characters in *Londonstani*, both the first and the second generations, exhibit a sense of self-imposed exile, contradiction and confusion in their religious and cultural identities and in their interpretations of desiness. As Jas says: “There in’t no point tryin to talk to your mum or dad bout religion, innit. They don’t know jack bout religion” (Ibid., 81). A great deal of critical attention has been given to this generational gap in terms of the different interpretations of religion by second generation immigrants. This theme is present in almost every work of British South Asian literature. It is an integral part of the immigrant’s experience, and one of “the spectres” that haunts them, especially

the first generation. The second-generation British South Asians in *Londonstani* see themselves as the defenders of faith and the custodians of religion and view their parents as negligent or sinners in religious matters. For instance, Hardjit “didn’t like the way his [Sikh] mum had hung up pictures a Hindu Gods on their landing at home next to their pictures a Gurus”, although “he always used to go on bout how Sikhs an Hindus fought side by side in all them wars” (Ibid., 79-80). She “always sends out Christmas cards with a picture a the Nativity on them” and “puts up a plastic Christmas tree with an angel on the top, right next to the Buddha statue they got in their living room” (Ibid.). Hardjit hates his mother’s definition of Sikhism, as she believes that all deities are “parts of the same crew”, and hates that his parents for mixing Sikh Gurus with Hindu Gods (Ibid., 51).

Similarly, Amit and his brother Arun despise their mother’s definition of Hinduism. As Jas puts it, “If Hardjit didn’t like his mum’s definition a Sikhism, Amit and his older brother Arun hated their mum’s definition a Hinduism” (Ibid., 81). Arun’s mother sees Hinduism as mutually beneficial and, when Arun marries a lower-caste woman, she wants both castes to follow Hindu conventions, which require the lower caste to show more respect to her family. After an argument with Jas, Arun is trapped in a liminal position between conforming to rational, modern thinking and the parental and traditional religious pressures represented by the principle of “showing your elders respect” (Malkani 2006a, 21). This tension, fuelled by ambiguity and disorientation while attempting to form a coherent sense of home and identity, becomes so unbearable that Arun commits suicide (Ibid., 264–265).

Not surprisingly, like Chanda’s brothers in Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*, who act out a fanatical version of religion by committing murder to preserve their family’s honour, the rudeboys’ version can hardly be called authentic (pure) or

orthodox. They sound enthusiastic (fanatic) when they talk about religion, yet they resort to their religious identities (appearances) simply to project violence. Hardjit's version of Sikhism is to be "the warriors of Hinduism [...] like the SAS but in a religious way" (Ibid., 9-81). Unsurprisingly then, he does not wear the most essential religious Sikh garment, the turban, even though he still wears the karha (bracelet), using it blasphemously in fights. Confusion regarding values is also seen when Jas's devotion to his friend's Hindu identity does not keep him from breaking the rules and crossing the red line of interfaith relationships between British South Asians to go out with Samira, a Muslim.

As the narrator, Jas has the most contradictory identity in the novel, and towards the end, we learn that he is a "gora" (white) who is determined to embrace desiness. He even shortens his long name (Jason Bartholomew- Cliveden) to Jas to sound like a desi and avoids his parents, white society and anything related to mainstream culture. He seems to be passionate about desi religious and cultural matters and even learns Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. Ironically, he becomes a representative of modern rationalism, rejecting desi (British South Asian) conventionality by dating a Muslim girl. Despite his loyalty to his Sikh and Hindu "brethren", he mocks and criticizes caste-based reasoning and blind obedience to elders, and prompts Arun to defy his mother. Jas becomes the source of misery and violence in the novel. He manipulates Hardjit into turning against his mother for blending different deities, plays a role in Arun's decision to take his own life, and commits the crimes of burglary and arson against his father's warehouse. Jas was supposed to guide his friends away from blind respect to their elders and British South Asian traditional norms and help them navigate their liminal position, form a sense of identity and finally achieve full participation and agency in society. Instead, he

paradoxically misleads them in his attempt at cultural and ethnic transformation into becoming a desi; he is self-deceived, completely denying his ethnic identity, which his father only reveals as the novel ends.

Jas's relationship with the Muslim Samira indicates that he fluctuates between his white and desi identities based on which one helps achieve what he wants (self-interest). Samira identifies this double-identity performance in his argument with Arun and his worries about her family's conservatism and how it might threaten him, by saying:

So what did you think, just because you're not Muslim my dad's going to grab a butcher's knife and turn you into halal meat? You've been watching the news or listening to all those Hindu elders too much. (Ibid., 51)

Since Jas's desi identity and engagement with its subculture do not free him from the mainstream ideas and positionalities of neoliberal multiculturalism, he thinks Samira's family is inherently oppressive to women. His romantic involvement with Samira proves that he never discards his white identity and might even use it as a fallback option because he is not British South Asian after all. Indeed, this assumption shows how Jas exploits the unstable positionalities of neoliberal multiculturalism. These positionalities regard some, such as Jas, as law-abiding, rational and feminist and thus fit for neoliberal subjectivity but stigmatize others, such as Samira's family, as a product of a monoculture, retrogression, irrationality, patriarchy or crime and delinquency. Melamed (2014) states that, to some degree, this individualization disguises "the structural and material relations positioning persons within modes of production and structures of governance" (148). Despite Jas's attempt to create an authentic desi identity,

his white identity is always present in the background as a resource for a cultural emergency, which illustrates how unevenly neoliberal multicultural capital is distributed.

In his article “Bling-bling economics” and the cultural politics of masculinity in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*” (2011), Jas’s relationship with Samira represents a rejection not only of desi rules but also of British South Asian codes of honor, as noted by Kasim Hussain (2014) (559). Samira’s comment also refers to Hussain’s (2014) observation of “the historical intensification of constraints on British Asians’ capacity for self-definition” (559). As Jas’s supposition illustrates, this is because the Muslim household is overdetermined as an example of inherent violence in the media’s coverage of events such as the Satanic Verses controversy and the Bradford riots of 2001, and the London riots of 7/7, 2011 and 2013, along with many factors that have contributed to Britain’s current cultural climate. Hypothetically, if desiness is an inclusive identity anyone may achieve, then Malkani’s attempt to make his literary subjects in *Londonstani* identify by unconventional methods is characterized by a representation of “multicultural-formalism”, which circumvents conventional forms of knowledge by situating its objects into “a system of rationality that calculates with formalized and ideological representations of difference” (Melamed 2011, 43). This approach is similar to the “conviviality” that Gilroy advocates for contemporary culture in Britain, which turns attention toward “the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification” (Gilroy 2004, xi). Desi masculinity situates *Londonstani* within a discursive terrain of neoliberal multiculturalism and highlights the current neoliberal cultural politics inflecting British South Asian immigrant identity. Many scholars have written about the increased global flow in the twenty-first century of people, capital and

commerce, and it is this terrain that constitutes the setting for *Londonstani*.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) urge additional investigation of what the status quo of neoliberal globalisation means for masculinity since it “has made gender [...] an important political and cultural issue” (854). Obviously, the masculinity of the rudeboys is influenced by this global context, as can be seen in their encounters with Sanjay, and especially in Jas’s eventual arrangement to join Sanjay in the cell phone shipping fraud. In speculating about the meaning of neoliberalism for British South Asian teenage masculinity, it is essential to further contextualize an aspect of the cultural topography that neoliberalism may not directly influence, although it is obviously crucial to Malkani’s rudeboys, especially when they are represented as students resitting their A levels.

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) suggest that neoliberalism views people as responsible for their “self-invention and transformation” to make them “capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system” (3). They show that “the social and psychological mechanisms by which [people] deal with the complex demands of neoliberalism are often difficult and sometimes contradictory” (Ibid.). Adding to these findings, Ann Phoenix (2004) analyses what it means for boys “to negotiate masculine identity in a neoliberal knowledge society” (227). She emphasizes four subcategories of “change, choice, chance, and competition” that rest on the idea that people are “identical in important ways”, which requires naturalising the application of neoliberalism to the social world and viewing it as clearly rational (Ibid.).

The rudeboys’ compulsive attempt to fit in by removing themselves from mainstream culture, seems to be an axiom of juvenile behaviour. Nevertheless,

Hussain (2014) notes that neoliberalism aggravates “the onus placed on them to manage without others” and aids in “the contradiction between individuality and conformity” (560). As long as the rudeboys marginalize themselves from everything white, even their school life, they are compelled to adapt to what Phoenix (2004) calls “the dilemma [...] of masculinity versus schoolwork” (239). Jas may have joined the rudeboys precisely to overcome this predicament, as indicated by his intellectual background, the stammer he struggles to eliminate, his involvement with Mr Ashwood, and his white friend Andy Marsh. To break free from these labels, Jas is expected to reject his former scholarly attachments and embrace the desi identity.

According to Sanjay, *Londonstani* is not “about society becoming more affluent; this is about a subculture that worships affluence becoming mainstream culture” (Malkani 2006a, 171). To some extent, it is no surprise that neither Sanjay nor Jas’s crew fully participate in such a subculture that merely worships affluence, because they imitate their fathers’ culture. However, Sanjay’s statement, which places the common concept of subculture in a binary opposition with the mainstream, is not different from Hardjit’s “designer desiness”, which determines the scope of his engagement in neoliberal culture and his antipathy towards what he considers to be mainstream for his crew. In an attempt to steer the crew to the right path, Mr Ashwood promotes “neoliberal multiculturalism”. After bailing them out of trouble, Mr Ashwood offers additional sessions to “try and get you boys interested in our mainstream, multicultural society again, in books, plays, politics, public institutions like the BBC” (Ibid., 128). In the process, he questions and perhaps doubts his own liberal political beliefs as he predicts the outcomes of these sessions, saying “maybe we’ll find that deep down you

boys just don't believe there's such a thing as society. Maybe the Iron Lady [Margaret Thatcher] was right all along?" (Ibid., 128).

Mr Ashwood convinces them to meet with Sanjay, a stellar former pupil who is a Cambridge graduate in economics and now a "stockbroker [...] earning a packet" in London (Ibid., 131). Mr Ashwood hopes that Sanjay will inspire them and lead them in the right direction. Later, when they meet, Sanjay counters Mr Ashwood's thoughts with his own:

You do have the option of listening to Radiohead, taking a relatively low-paid job and reading lots of books to make you feel like you've got a wealthy mind or soul or whatever. But if that isn't the path you choose, then I'm afraid this is it, guys. It's not greed; it's just the way it is. Believe me, I've thought a lot about this, I used to be Mr Ashwood's favourite dork, remember. But there's no Marxist alternative anymore. The fall of communism, the rise of bling. (Malkani 2006a, 168)

Sanjay's claim, the failure of the "Marxist alternative", means that anyone who does not embrace the bling-bling theory deserves to be exploited. In this sense, Mr Ashwood's ostensible fascination with Sanjay indicates how *Londonstani* expands the mechanism of neoliberal masculinity. Instead of inspiring the rudeboys, Sanjay exploits their immorality and desire for up-market goods. Through Sanjay's theory of bling-bling economics, the author offers a new perspective on what motivates today's educated malcontents. Sanjay collects money through a carousel fraud in which mobile phones are imported from false companies across Europe that he and his partners control. Mr Ashwood's enthusiasm for Sanjay's success (trap) and Sanjay's enthusiasm for his scheme



show that neoliberalism remunerates breaking the rules (its rules) as long as its dealings appear to be legitimate. Although Sanjay advocates for a government economic strategy to address urban class conflicts, his scam profits from the neoliberal economic policies of the European Union. These policies coordinate and dictate free trade and austerity measures in EU countries. Consequently, this overtly undertakes a class project similar to the materialistic and arrogant vision of bling-bling economics. As Gilroy (2004) states, this view necessitates re-examining the concepts “of public good and the practice of politics” in Europe, as they seem to be “in irreversible decline—undone by a combination of consumer culture, privatization, and the neoliberal ideology” (155).

Indeed, “to be British in a post diaspora Britain is to be conscious of multiple heritages of peoples” (Mishra 2007, 229). In my view, “home” is a complex and ever-changing concept. Although it’s often thought of as the place where one belongs, it can also refer to where one starts from. As Nasta (2002) points out, the idea of home is multifaceted, encompassing aspects of the past and present, the local and global, and the traditional and modern (244). It’s a perception that is constantly shifting, as memories of the past and connections to diasporic history inform the ways in which second and third generations of immigrants understand and relate to their sense of home. Nasta notes that this can result in a sense of being drawn towards “fictional homes without walls” that are anchored in the past, emphasizing the ongoing influence of the diaspora. (Nasta 2002, 244). By separating race from the material histories of racial trauma, *Londonstani* seems to express neoliberal multiculturalism in which structural antiracist analysis regresses and “designer desiness” progresses to become essential to prosperity in the new free-marketcapitalism of bling-bling economics.

## The Transformed Self

Stuar Hall (1990) regards transformation as essential for diaspora identities to “produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew through transformation and difference” (235). In literature, the concept of self-transformation takes us beyond the restrictive binary understanding of the immigrant’s experience and its fictional renditions or performances. Transformation, in fact, challenges the common binary of submission or transgression in terms of hybridity. In doing so, we learn that Malkani’s rudeboys transform from “Pakis” to “wannabes” and from “shers” to “desis”. During this four-stage process of transformation, we learn about identity and what lies beyond a prescribed or expected persona, starting with the “Paki” category, the point zero that renders them as victims or people who are perceived to be barely human. They become more determined in wanting to change, which is characterized by faking a new identity in the “wannabe” stage. It is at this point that they find the strength to transform themselves. Indeed, their pre-text (traumatic) experience during the first stage seems to lead them into an uncharted second stage. Detecting the characters’ unforeseen fragments or impacts is no longer applicable to the stereotypical approach that the second-generation British South Asian would try to follow in order to assimilate into the mainstream culture, such as studying law, medicine or business.

Interestingly, the renditions of the transformed identity are depicted with awareness of the British South Asian experience and the after-effects of trauma, especially on the second generation, because *Londonstani* is based on Malkani’s undergraduate research on gender identities at Cambridge, when he explored why British South Asian youths distance themselves from their parents and form new identities based on cultural differences (Malkani 2006b). What also

contributes to Malkani's familiarity with the subject is that he was born in London in 1976 to an Indian mother who emigrated from Uganda to the United Kingdom, and he was raised in Hounslow where British South Asian subcultures are forged based on cross cultural flows. Therefore, Malkani's obsession with the rudeboy scene comes from his British South Asian school mates who suddenly decided "to distance themselves from the 1980s stereotype of the British South Asian boy as untroubling, conscientious, somewhat subservient, and extremely studious" (Malkani 2006b).

The imperial and the host society hold the power in both the metropolitan and colonial settings, even though the situation and roles of the postcolonial subjects in immigrant literature are transformed from a colonized majority in former colonies to a minority in the countries of former Western colonizers or other Western societies where the hybridity of the immigrant's identity develops. Even so, the experience of the second-generation British South Asians might be more complex because they find themselves in a condition where they are immersed in different cultural norms and power structures: the host culture, their home country, and the marginalized expatriate community. This is clearly seen in the seven rudeboys' rules, which oppose the conventional rules of the first-generation immigrants and mainstream culture. However, these seven rules encompass opposing forces of self-determination. For instance, Jas might be gratified to follow Hardjit's example and adopt his seven rudeboy rules, although I believe Jas invented rule number seven in order to go out with Samira. The subversive nature of the desi identity starts to disclose itself:

*It's Basic Bollywood for Beginners. In situations that involve defending or rescuing a fit lady, you can stand tall with your front intact even if all your*

*crew walk out on you or try an thapparh (slap) you. They call it being a hero.* (Malkani 2006a, 61)

Indeed, after coming up with this rule, Jas immediately defensibly says “I wanted to get off with Samira since the first time I saw her” (Ibid.), challenging rule number six, which states that Samira is “bad news” and he “shouldn’t even b finking of her” (Ibid., 60). However, finding Sanjay, who becomes his new desi mentor, is a blessing to him in terms of carrying out Rudeboy Rule #7 while still a desi. Jas admires how Sanjay can use elegant words “like gratification without sounding dickless,” and how he intimidates the rudeboys with his knowledge. Instead of copying Hardjit, Jas begins to copy Sanjay instead. Sanjay encourages him to go out with Samira and teaches him how to treat women. He books tables under Jas’s name in London’s best nightclubs and allows him to drive his Porsche so he can impress Samira.

In an attempt to persuade Jas to “rip off [his] own dad”, Sanjay’s belief of how the desis define themselves in relation to their absent “desi dads” who “spend all [their] time in the office” and “drop you [...] if you do anything that detracts from a desi dad’s prestige” supports Jas’s belief that the desi must define themselves in opposition to the overbearing mothers who are always present (Ibid., 307). To them, mothers are “Always tryin to control us so they can live out their dreams through us” (Ibid., 197). Jas functions as the catalyst that aggravates Arun’s situation, making him move away from deep identity formation and revolt against his mother and the Shaadi tradition that leads him to suicidal thoughts, such as “I want to cure my headache with a fucking gun” (Ibid., 264). The overpowering presence of their mothers is apparent from the outset of the novel. For instance, Amit compares the strictness of Samira’s three brothers with his

mother's strictness, in terms of holding on to traditions:

One a dem even belongs to Hizb ut-Tahir or Al-Muhajiroun or one a dem groups. Dey stricter bout keeping their sister halal than my mum is bout keeping her shit vegetarian so you jus best shut da fuck u. (Ibid., 49)

What I have previously called the four-stage process that the rudeboys undergo is similar to what the first generation of Asian immigrants in the United Kingdom went through; they experience racism and feel alienated from mainstream British society from "mid to late 1980s" (Modood 2005, 193). In this period of time, "there has also emerged an identity based on a hybrid South Asianness rather than a regional, national, caste or religious identity" (Ibid., 193-94). Tariq Modood calls the process of this first generation "ethnic assertiveness" (Ibid.). The difference between the four-stage process that the rudeboys follow and the ethnic assertiveness that the first generation followed is that the rudeboys voluntarily adhere to it in order to reach the ultimate category of desiness. However, the elements from which this desi identity is created are contradictory, as in the previous scene showing the rules of Hardjit and Sanjay, and Jas's selective adaptations. Neither success nor survival is guaranteed as their identity formation moves towards or away from the formation of a deep identity. Jas's selective manner, to a great degree, proves that desiness is problematic and unsettled for the rudeboys themselves, and it is formed by antagonistic components derived from behavioural solutions and cultural taboos. However, their self-prescription is rational in an ethnically charged enclave. Jas is finally disenchanted with the rudeboys' code of conduct that he so tirelessly and diligently adhered to before.

Although the novel's timeframe concentrates on Jas's coming of age, *Londonstani's* fluctuation between the conflicting factors of self-determination and external influence suggested by the ethos of neoliberalism in terms of constant self-fashioning: "neoliberal ideology does not produce its subjects by interpellating them into symbolically anchored identities (structured according to conventions of gender, race, work, and national citizenship. Instead, it enjoins subjects to develop our creative potential and cultivate our individuality" (Dean 2009, 66). Because of his necessity for self-identification, it becomes obvious that Jas is shifting from a blind devotion to Hardjit's principles that regulate his behaviour as a rudeboy to a more complete adoption of the principles that he has created for himself. Even though Jas gradually learns the rudeboys' rules, they do not serve him since external disruptions (e.g. Bling politics or neoliberalism) prove the discursivity of desi identity. Indeed, since the formation of the desi identity occurs within a given discursive system, its meaning bears similarities to Hall's observation that "the meaning can never be finally fixed, there can never be any final victories" (Hall 1997, 274). If "designed desiness" is not inherently antagonistic the novel's deployment of the stereotypical categories of British South Asian identity might not function in a subversive manner, possibly serving as a code of conduct for an imaginary home life.

However, Malkani's characters do face personal trauma and loss, specifically after Auron's death: the loss of a son for the family, a brother for Amit, a friend for the rudeboys, and Jas's painful memory of being accused of participating in his friend's suicide. This one distinguishable traumatic event is a possible precursor to the emergence of a transformed self. Of course, the experience of personal trauma is universal and not limited to immigrants,

refugees or those who have a culturally diverse background. In certain contexts, immigration induces trauma, and can produce a fragmented, less functional self unless the underlying issues are resolved. As in the aftermath of the argument between Jas and Arun, and with Sanjay's last lecture to Jas, suicide is not always the result of trauma, showing that identity formation lies in the radical, the often unanticipated, and the sometimes joyful, reinvention of the self.

Jas might have a mixed racial background; he struggles with his identity and strives to find an authentic self amid the contradictions and confusions among mainstream society and his new desi society. Along with the other rudeboys, he has nearly completed the process of resolving his fragmentation by building a completely new identity. I would submit that these identities have been galvanized; they are not a compromise between disparate parts, but something whole and new. Because this newly created self is full of possibilities, it does not mean that it is free from complexities—it is not easy to navigate nor is it inherently empowering to the rudeboys. Since they must navigate a world in which expectations are few and contradictory, even the process of maturation becomes unlikely.

As Parekh has argued, some immigrants are “cross-cultural navigators” (2000b, 29), capable of manoeuvring between the inconsistent and the self-contradictory zones of their lives. Arun is perhaps the best character to represent Bhabha's Third Space of Enunciation; he creates his identity in a space where opposing and ambivalent effects occur. He argues with Jas in a debate about culture. Even though just before this debate Jas has formed an almost complete (and perhaps tolerant) hybrid identity, he suddenly becomes an essentialist, glorifying his own culture and regarding hybrid cultures as tainted. Conversely,

Arun perceives them as an outcome of hybridity, as does Bhabha. Arun's tragic end demonstrates that being a cross-cultural navigator does not guarantee survival. Creating a new self by combining fragments of cultures and elements of identities is more problematic than merely following a code of conduct.

A mention of the tradition of music in literature is relevant in the context of hybridity, as it provides an alternate method of contextualising Malkani's work; the place of bhangra in British South Asian literature may help explain their sense of belonging. Through urban subculture's popular music that is influenced by music from around the world, such as Bhangra, hip-hop, Arabic music, R&B and funk, desis successfully identify with something larger than themselves. This fusion music is distinctly "local" and arguably "British" since it could not have been created elsewhere. This is the exact combination of background music played when Jas takes Samira to a "posh" London night club (Malkani 2006a, 205). Jas says during his argument with Arun that white people refer to mixed music as Asian Underground:

The tune is "Signs" by these guys called Badmarsh & Shri. They're part a the desi scene that some gora people like to call the Asian Underground. Arun's really into that kind a stuff stead a proper hardcore bhangra cos he's a semi-coconut. (Ibid., 223)

Even though this form of music is attributed to British South Asian artists who fuse influences from traditional Asian music with underground dance music, Jas believes that this makes it the opposite of conventional "hardcore" music. He disapproves of it because it has become one of the "poncey gora stuff", meaning that it has become too mainstream (Ibid., 234). The way in which they define



themselves in relation to bhangra does not necessarily make it an ethnically defined culture, but a subculture. In the British context, bhangra is associated with Punjabi communities, similar to the way in which jazz literature is associated with African Americans in the United States. For example, James Baldwin (2011) uses jazz and blues music as leitmotifs in his novels, which Theriault describes as a “vehicle to gain identity” (1-2). As a complement to jazz literature, music helps to narrate stories about the struggles and triumphs of black people in the white world order. As with the literary works inspired by jazz, one might argue that Bhangra, in the British context, “creates a space for multiculturalism” (Ibid.). Accordingly, Malkani uses bhangra as a thematic and organising force to enter the current discourse about culture and identity. For instance, Jas believes that he keeps his identity intact by listening to hardcore Bhangra, while Arun urges him and the rudeboys “to go beyond bhangra, open up your mind, break free.” (Malkani 2006a, 232). At this point in the novel, and before listening to Jas’s views about revolting against the Shaadi traditions, Arun realizes that the mixture of diverse elements is what forms a culture. Jas defines culture in an archaic precolonial fashion, wanting it to be authentic, intact and pure. He is completely naïve about the impossibility of his view. Nevertheless, *Londonstani* shows a reconsideration of identities as ambivalently constructed and performative, which are neither fully unaffected by normative dominant discourse nor exclusively complicit with its existing norms.

*Londonstani* clearly shows that no political perspective can be assumed to be based solely on gender, race, religion or class. This viewpoint indicates that the current British neoliberal state of affairs calls attention to the representation of young adult literature that overlaps with twenty-first century British South Asian

youth culture. To a great degree, *Londonstani* highlights the increasing fragility of what Gilroy calls the convivial culture in Britain. Regardless of Malkani's opaque critique of the imminent derivation of hypermasculinity, the novel highlights its complexities, whilst presciently distilling anxieties about identity deepened by the cultural context of the 2011 riots in cities across Britain. On the other hand, the media's rhetoric centred on acts of senseless violence and the looting of local high street stores (Al Jazeera English 2011; The Guardian 2012). Participants in the riots encompassed the spectrums of both gender and race (Ibid.).

*Londonstani* fetishes youth commodity culture and suggests that the rioting was a consequence of joblessness among ethnic minority communities. The risk of a simplistic approach to identity is stressed in the binary choice offered by Sanjay to Hardjit's crew "listening to Radiohead" or complying to "the way it is" (Malkani 2006a, 167-68). Such choices speak not only to the reduced agency in the self-styled cultures of middle-class British South Asian youth, but also to the fewer numbers of contemporary youth who follow the traditional paths to a better life. Riots in the 2010s deserve further evaluation, like the 2011 and the 2013 riots, following the (real-life) murder of a white soldier (Lee Rigby) by a "black" extremist British Muslim. This incident is a central theme in Gunaratne's novel *In Our Mad and Furious city* which will be discussed in the following section. This novel reveals through engaging with these tragic events an urgent need to consider (intersections of) class, race, religion and gender as obstacles that British South Asian youth face today.

### **The Imposed Self**

Guy Gunaratne's debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*, published in 2018,

offers a distinct and perhaps even unique perspective on Pakistani, Caribbean, and Irish immigrants living in Britain today. The concept of place is central to this novel. Attempting to show how racial tensions explode in times of civil unrest, Gunaratne (2018) sets his novel in the Stones Estate, in North West London, “a city that taints its young” (1). In this place, “there is always a spark that begin it” (rioting) (Ibid 106). In its attempt to create a successful and deep intercultural dialogue and somehow establish an understanding between multicultural subjects, each chapter is narrated by a different character through a stream-of-consciousness mode. The book is structured into three primary parts: “I. Mongrel” (7), “II. Brother” (117), and “III. Blood” (221). Within these sections, thematic elements are presented, which further divide the book into sub-sections. The sub-sections are titled with the names of the characters in a random order, creating a third level of titling. The majority of the novel is written in a sharp and distinctive first-person language that the author refers to as “road dialect”. The narrative of the novel takes place over two days and is seen from two main perspectives—the first-generation immigrants, Caroline and Nelson, and the three second-generation street-wise youths, Yusuf, Selvon and Ardan. Caroline, Ardan’s mother, was sent to live in London by her family, who were deeply involved with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during Northern Ireland’s Troubles. Nelson is Selvon’s father, an old man with probably a “total locked-in syndrome” from the “Windrush Generation”. He immigrated from Monserrat to help rebuild Britain after WWII and became entangled in strained racial tensions, discovering that “the threat was Britain itself” (Ibid., 129).

Yusuf, the main protagonist, is the son of a Pakistani Muslim immigrant whose struggle begins from being raised in the shadow of 9/11. He takes care of

his anguished brother Irfan and struggles against the fundamentalism of his late father's mosque. Selvon is an aspiring Olympic runner while Ardan is an aspiring rapper and a lover of Irish grime. The narrative follows the experiences of these three second-generation immigrants who are united by their love for football and music. In the first section named "Mongrel", Gunaratne describes the challenges they face, which include the possibilities and limitations imposed by how one conceives of and experiences the notion of home. In this multicultural home "struggle was a standard echo in [their] speech, in thought, in action", but this struggle became severe when "a black boy [...] killed an off-duty soldier" (Gunaratne 2018a, 1).

This murder, which sparks riots that put their friendship to the test, is based on the (real-life) murder of a white soldier (Lee Rigby) by Michael Adebolajo in 2013. This murder has distressed Yusuf as the murderer reminds him of himself. Even though the boy calls himself "the hand of Allah", he looks and sounds like any youngster from the Stones Estate. What shocks Yusuf and the Muslim youth is not the blood, but the striking resemblance that they share with this murderer, "For us it was his face like a mirror, reflecting our own confused and frightened hearts" (ibid., 2). In this novel the sense of belonging that some of the characters attain rests on new and complex cultural combinations of race, religion, class and ideas of home, with the novel illustrating the many factors that impede a sense of belonging. However, there is also a sense that a place possibly exists for these multicultural subjects if they can take advantage of the opportunities available to them. As Selvon states:

This Stones Estate got madness in it, everyone knows it. It don't touch me-tho [...] this place owns a part of me too-tho, with its silence and grey [...]

I have to continue this habit. Push myself and earn it, ennet. Earn my place and make my way out. (Ibid., 10-11)

Perhaps, this is where Gunaratne differs from novelist Nadeem Aslam, and chimes with Gautam Malkani's work. Aslam holds the contrary point of view with his fundamentally problematic depictions of multicultural subjects who are incapable of finding a successful resolution. Despite all the "silence and grey" *In Our Mad and Furious City*, Gunaratne's novel seems to either hint at the possibility of heterogenous or culturally diverse identity formation, or at least show new forms of Britishness by presenting various models of such integration, if forming a culturally diverse identity is the characters' objective. One can be both black and British, Asian and British, or British South Asian Muslim and LGBT+. It is crucial to realize that these new forms of identity will not be fully accepted and easily integrated within one culture, and one may argue that these new forms cause new forms of racism. This failure to accept these new forms of identity can lead to "neo-racism" or cultural racism. Rattansi critiques this concept: If a purely cultural or religious argument devoid of any reference to biological relations is made, can it be called "racist" without stretching the meaning of the label to a point where it becomes too wide to be useful as anything but a rhetorical ploy (Rattansi 2007, 104)

He proposes that views which claim that group identification impose performing cultural traits such as specific clothing, language, traditions, and religious beliefs "might more properly be subsumed under the ideas of ethnicism or ethnocentrism", and hostility to foreigners "may be said to border on xenophobia" (Ibid.). The emphasis of "neo-racism" on culture overlooks issues of inclusion and exclusion from the society in terms of race (Ibid.). It fails to provide

explanations for discrimination towards minorities like British South Asians and Black British, and LGBT+ communities who share a common culture with the dominant White British population. Indeed, as with any national identity, Britishness has a transnational dimension, and is therefore subject to transformation and renegotiation. This gives rise to the multicultural question, which raises problems that were thought to be solved. The best illustration from the novel is when the riots summon class, race, religion and radicalism to the surface. Yusuf says:

On that final day when flames licked the domes of our painted Mosque, we were all far beyond saving [...] Muhajiroun were herding our people along August Road and had us stand on the burned earth like a testament. There was violence in our brotherhood, that much is clear, though we never knew how much of that violence came from us or the road beneath our feet. (Gunaratne 2018a, 2)

Therefore, the re-emergence of such issues seems to make Western political institutions and think tanks reach breaking point, especially since these matters were considered to be settled in the late 1990s, which some consider the golden age of multiculturalism in Britain. However, this is not a surprising consequence for Yusuf since “violence made this city” (Gunaratne 2018a, 2). Yet Gunaratne seems to be an author who attempts to create a different type of subjectivity. An examination of the identity formation of Gunaratne’s characters, add significantly to our understanding of their self- determination. Yusuf, Selvon, and Ardan are young men trying to discover their identities and social agency during a time of rapid change—the turn of the millennium. This period is unique due to the rapidly accelerating pace of technological innovation, which has

caused a sudden shift in society. As an example, the news of a murder spreads quickly through society via the phone and media, with the story repeatedly played in an “endless loop.” This time of transformation provides a crucial backdrop for Gunaratne’s exploration of the characters’ struggles to find their place in a rapidly changing world (Gunaratne 2018a, 2). Furthermore, in terms of a generational gap, this technological progress not only creates a gap between generations, but also creates a gap within the same generation that grows up together in the same place. This can be seen in Yusuf’s relationship with his brother, Irfan; Yusuf remembers that as soon as “Abba bought us a family computer, [...] The battles under the dining table ceased soon after that [...] Over one summer, Irfan had grown out of being a child. [...] Slowly we drifted” (Gunaratne 2018a, 113).

Much of the novel’s concerns are not determined by the end of the character’s journey, but by the course of the action – the process. How does Irfan become the person he becomes, someone who burns a mosque even though he is Muslim? How does Yusuf end up trapped, rioting against “the infidels” after the arson attack even though he has been (almost) ready to assume a hybrid identity? How do Selvon and Ardan achieve their career goals, which facilitate social agency? What obstacles must they overcome before establishing a workable personal and culturally diverse identity? Forming unique identities seems inevitable because each person’s world is becoming so different and ambivalent during the process. Yusuf and Irfan’s searches for identity are often cultural and multicultural, and always defined by race, ethnicity and, especially, religion. These elements can be viewed as the intersection of two major themes—the coming of age in the 21st century and the integration of Asian cultures into the cultures of London during the 2000s and 2010s.

Even though a lot seems to have changed in the British South Asian experience, the theme of arranged marriages to cousins is present in the novel and usually has devastating consequences. Irfan's anguish begins after his wife, Muna, leaves him after reporting him to the police – she had found on his computer “pornographic images of teenage girls [...] amassed over so many years, that had shocked her” (Gunaratne 2018a, 175). Things become complex, especially after their newly deceased father, the previous “moderate” imam of the mosque, is replaced by the new imam, Abu Farouk, who espouses a fundamentalist religious discourse that he promotes to his followers, the Muhajiroun (the Immigrants):

After Abba died the Mosque took over the responsibility for my family. Irfan and I were presented to the Umma to raise. [...] Amma was kept away from it all [...] so now everything came under the claim of the frowning uncles at the mosque. [...] I thought about how it was that my brother and I ended up here, with the Muhajiroun as our keepers. I knew that there were darker corners to those memories that had never become illuminated until now. (Gunaratne 2018a, 91, 97)

Yusuf's awareness of his own and his brother's vulnerability and of the discrimination seen in the marches against Muslims after the murder of the white soldier give Yusuf a negative, even destructive, self-image. During the process of identity formation, Yusuf constantly self-identifies based on what he has missed (his father) or lacks and what he is not, rather than what he has and who he is. The limitations of this approach, which is built on “fear” and “some desperate hope”, show that Yusuf and Irfan are willing to accept one form of violence in order to avoid something they would like even less, desperately



hoping that Abu Farouk might help them with Irfan's case (Gunaratne 2018a, 146). This approach adversely affects the characters' self-conception to the point that Yusuf and Irfan agree to join the Muhajiroun because they provide "sanctuary" and "an embrace that would finally make sure no harm would come" to them (Gunaratne 2018a, 216). This desperate hope makes them accept the imam as their "authority and father" (Ibid., 146). Their absolute submission is further emphasized when the "Muhajiroun" brings them to the imam to be lectured and scolded for what Irfan did, and to hear the imam harshly criticize their "father's ways" in bringing them up, and in wanting the Muslim community to "live side by side" with the host society (Gunaratne 2018a, 148).

This principle of submission and acceptance of the most negative elements of the identities that others may impose upon them leads Yusuf and Irfan towards a negative self-identification. This negative "self-fashioning" stems from "intolerant images and pronouncements". As Morey and Yaqin (2011) put it:

Muslims are positioned as an irretrievably Other presence [...] But at the same time, when certain Muslims position themselves, often in direct answer to these images, as the pure antithesis of a corrupt, materialist modernity, they both stereotype the West on its own terms—take it too much at face value, shall we say—and stereotype themselves too. (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 3-4)

Similarly, Gunaratne's implied message is that the immigrant character's "self-fashioning" depends partially on his successful avoidance of the burdensome elements of identity that others may wish to place upon them. Yusuf and Irfan do not avoid what Abu Farouk imposes on them to stereotype themselves:

You cannot be both. [...] You do not see these thugs marching, shouting insults at our beliefs? The only path now is the true path. [...] Our Muslim brethren will soon be the whip hand in the East. They are building schools. A new generation. He went on then to talk of the West, Irfan's corruption and my own failure as a brother. [...] Open the drawer and take out the things. (Gunaratne 2018a, 149)

Avoiding the collapse into this imposed identity would have opened, or at least prevented closing, the path to new elements of identity that might ultimately empower the multicultural subject. This type of negative identity, formed from the idea that you cannot "live side by side" with non-Muslims and "you cannot be both" Pakistani and British in terms of identity performance, is constructive in the sense of selectiveness, which is crucial to a culturally diverse identity formation. Symbolically, by opening the drawer and taking the "folded salwar kameez and topis" that Yusuf recognizes as "the Muhaji dress worn by the young men of the new Imam's order", and by Irfan as he bends to pick the religious extremist "black booklet", they both succumb to the imam's judgement and accept the newly imposed Muhaji identity: "You will return to Pakistan [...] This has already been agreed with your mother. You both will continue your education in Lahore with your Muhajiroun brothers" (Ibid.). The process of self-definition occurs through a series of conflicts and rejections of identities that are externally imposed upon the character. For example, throughout much of the novel, after meeting the imam Yusuf defines himself and Irfan as the West, asking his brother to take responsibility: "It weren't the west bruv. We are the fuckin west Irfan. It was you" (Ibid., 157). However, he then remembers the imam's words about his brother: "*His blood is your blood*", and "*Evil breeds in a nest that has no discipline*",

and he decides to join the Muhajiroun.

At the outset of the novel, there is a conflict between Yusuf's self-definition and how he is viewed because he considers himself as one who has "an elsewhere in their blood" (Gunaratne 2018a, 3). He is clearly subjected to self-othering when he exotically emphasizes his qualities or flaws as one of "some foreign origin" having "ancient callings to hear" (Gunaratne 2018a, 3). To him, this means "going to mosque and dodging the Muhajiroun" (Ibid.). On the other hand, he alienates this ancient calling and the way in which he describes Muna is reminiscent of Edward Said's conception of the Oriental identity imposed by the West. He imposes this hyperbolic image onto Muna, who was born and bred in Pakistan, saying that "Muna had a Pakistani accent which Irfan probably took as exotic but for me she sounded stush" (Gunaratne 2018a, 172). The competing claims of his cultural/plural identities, originating in Pakistan and Britain and examined through Yusuf's identification with and denial of both, initially pave the way to a cosmopolitan identity formation. To a great degree, he is aware of this from the beginning, and defines himself as moulded by many things and perhaps alienates the host society in this process. He wonders "how would it have felt to come from the same story? To have been moulded out of one thing and not of many?" (Gunaratne 2018a, 4). However, the identity that emerges at the end of the narrative is more or less a simple integration of "many stories" and has much to do with the multicultural setting of London, the place that Yusuf eventually exonerates by saying "it's not the city but us. We let ourselves be beaten. We allow it, ennet" (Gunaratne 2018a, 296).

However, the significance of London as a pluralistic society for twenty- first

century immigrants cannot be overstated. Through the competing claims of cultural/plural identities, Gunaratne occupies an in-between position among authors who conceive London as either a uniquely appropriate or inappropriate setting for the multicultural subject. In his extensive post-novel essay “the Englishness of street verse”, Gunaratne (2018b) discusses William Blake’s *Jerusalem* as a major influence on his novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*. At primary school, Gunaratne was asked to memorise Blake’s *Jerusalem* and imagined England as described in the poem, a fixed “place of pleasant pastures and clouded hills” (Gunaratne 2018b, 291). However, Gunaratne’s everyday England can never be “easily reduced to one singular thing; a flag, say, or a song”, as the Englishness he is familiar with is the “mottled language” of “abrasive narratives competing to be heard [...] especially when [this] narrative has been one of migration” (Ibid., 291-92). Therefore, because his experience of the unique qualities of London has always been of “multiplicity” in terms of “language”, “tradition” and “identity”, he allows some characters, such as Selvon and Ardan, to uncover strengths that may otherwise be inaccessible, while preventing other characters, such as Yusuf and Irfan, from achieving the same (Ibid.). Gunaratne’s characters tend to use the appearances, behaviours, and language associated with youth subcultures or minor communities, in addition to racial and religious elements of identity, to ascend or descend the social scale. This tendency can certainly be observed in the character of Yusuf.

At the outset, Yusuf’s initial rejection of externally imposed identities is due to his lack of acknowledgement of both his Pakistani identity and the “the same story” and “one note” identity that he regards as “void of new feeling and any sense of place” (Gunaratne 2018a, 4). This process of positive identity

formation is taking place before the murder of the “soldier-boy”:

This place. Whether we heard the whispers of our older roots never mattered. What mattered for us was the present, terse and cold, where we would make our own corase music. This was where we found our young madness [creating] a world we could never hope to claim. (Gunaratne 2018a, 4)

Identifying more with the minor community, Yusuf tends to view his involuntary affiliation with Pakistan as a kind of flaw or barrier that prevents him from gaining social agency in this diverse space. The very “young madness” that created this place leads to butchering the “soldier-boy” “by a homegrown bredda” (Gunaratne 2018a, 4). At this point Yusuf says: “Terrorism never felt so close. Even when the hijab lady was slashed [...] and Michael was knifed in the north, the swell only peaked after that soldier-boy’s killing” (Ibid.). So riots blew up, “the Umma” came out and “the union jack burned in the June air” (Ibid.). Consequently, he starts to descend the social scale and identifies more with the murderer as he wears the same trainers and speaks the same road slang. Here we certainly see a drive to forge identity on many levels, and a burning desire to leave this contested society for a more upscale society. Even Yusuf’s father is planning to leave: “Abba used to say that we would leave Estate as soon as he was done being imam” (Ibid., 27).

As discussed above, this is a wish that all those who take part in a diaspora have in common. Like the older characters, the young struggle to belong to the dominant culture, yet unlike their elders, their struggle is not only because they do not wish to emulate the centre. They want to create another centre, and then

compete with, surpass or simply transform the dominant centre, as seen in *Londonstani*. For instance, Malkani's characters tend to use the appearances and manners related to the desi subculture, and to their identity performance which is based on ethnic, racial and religious fragments to ascend the social scale. This tendency is seen in the case of Jas who changes from a studious white geek to a tough rudeboy- desi.

There is a sense that the entire culture is changing in London during the 2010s and the individual is striving for fulfilment in the midst of it all. The determination that Selvon and Ardan exhibit seems less conscious in terms of identity formation than what Irfan and Yusuf show, as theirs takes the form of goals and desires and the drive to fulfil them. As a result, Selvon and Ardan struggle with and navigate the various opportunities and the obstacles that class, race, family and their own aspirations and talents present. For instance, when Selvon listens to motivational tapes, his positive identity formation is shaped by the "if your mind can conceive it, you can achieve it" philosophy, even though he is aware that it is not an easy process in this place that "got Madness in it" (Ibid., 10-11). On this basis, he comes to the realisation that he must continue this habit, "Push myself and earn it, ennet. Earn my place and make my way out" (Ibid., 11). Likewise, Ardan realizes how mad and depressing this place is, but as a potential artist, he has a unique conception as he forms his own positive identity based on the unique philosophy that American rappers are born in "places of pain" like the Bronx and Brooklyn, which are more like "this drab and broke-down place":

*Easy-peasy to write anything when I'm up here. [...]I just wrote them and  
I know there ain't nuttan there. I read them aloud: North Block rooftop*

*spitting early Nobody sees me, nobody hears me[...] t's me with only the sky and its phases. The Square and the people down there, they don't know me. I owe them nuttan. Invisible, ennet, how I like. (Ibid., 19, 20, 22)*

For Ardan, if the case is merely about gaining agency in the dominant society, nothing would make it easier than hiding behind the Caucasian label, but this is more complicated. He is ultimately successful in his quest to forge a novel, culturally diverse identity with relatively few limitations to his self-expression and self-actualisation. He uses the fact that he is anonymous, saying “they don't know me. I owe them nuttan. Invisible, ennet, how I like” (Ibid., 22). However, Selvon and Ardan's formation of a sense of identity is not straightforward, and they encounter numerous barriers and conflicts related to race and background since they also live in a place that can easily “be torn to pieces” — the Square, the Ends and the Estate (Ibid., 285). However, these obstacles do not prove insuperable. At times their race and ethnicity even open doors for them. Unlike Yusuf and Irfan, who have extended family in the community, Selvon and Ardan are less exposed to any racially or culturally imposed elements of identity. However, the difference between both concepts is controversial because the extent to which one's actions are constrained by social systems is unclear.

Drawing a contrast between the characters in this novel who form a sense of identity and those who do not reveals many of the influences that Gunaratne considers important for identity formation. Gunaratne's first-generation characters should not be overlooked as they lead us towards a consciousness of a different structuring of home and identity. Selvon and Ardan gain a sense of identity; Nelson and Caroline do not. The contrast between the sons and parents demonstrates that the principal issue does not seem to be integration, social

acceptance or the presence of opportunities for success. Rather, what is needed for identity formation is the sort of flexibility that belongs especially to the multicultural subject.

Meanwhile, the cultural malleability demonstrated by the first-generation characters, especially Nelson, cannot be ignored. One might argue that Nelson is almost addicted to a self-imposed exile, having left his “home” and culture not once, but multiple times. He goes back to Monserrat, returning with Maisie to start a life with her in London after finding that “the Mother Country” and the “great and grand old Britain” was the threat itself. After joining the Coloured People Association (CPA), and seeing the “Keep Britain White” (KBW) graffiti, he discovers that “Britain does not love him back” (Ibid., 72, 129, 29). The process of his identity formation starts by joining CPA to clear up the racist graffiti, and ends with his involvement in a war against other “white” associations and gangs, such as “Mosley Speaks” and the “Teddy Boys”, especially after the killing of one of the Teddy Boy’s dogs that was used to attack “coloured” people. He finally realizes that violence is never a solution:

I will abandon them, for me, my Lord, for I. Call me a coward. Call me a soft heart then. For the cruel world is too close in this city [...] I will leave this grove behind, I shout, I will find another patch to finish what I began. I will begin again. (Ibid., 212)

Although Nelson abandons the CPA and its cause, his new self-image must, logically, be fragmentary, and his claims and wisdom are worthy of observation. He cannot articulate his inner sense of self and the philosophy that underscores what it means to live in this place through the fulfilment of one’s own



needs and desires, regardless of duty and obligation. This gives him self-assurance, especially after he escapes the segregated “black Community” represented by the CPA to Neasden, a multicultural haven where he feels “lonely among plenty others who want be left alone”; they are of all races and he feels “Kinship with” them (Ibid., 236). The key point is emphasized: the formation of a sense of identity is a process that takes place from the inside out. It is contradictory, indeed, that Nelson maintains a rigid adherence to his identity as a “Black man” despite his malleability (ability to change).

However, his liminality, the fact that he has left the old community and he is incapable of communication, exists primarily as a device that makes Selvon’s identity development possible. Even though Nelson’s experience is rich, by muting Nelson, Gunaratne seems to be against any kind of imposed identity even if it is potentially helpful. He makes this point clear with Selvon’s one memory of his father, when he told him to stop “bopping [his] head to music [...] [because] Greatness will not wait for ones pecking them heads like a pigeon, he’d say” (Ibid., 226). This idea is also seen in the following passage:

My arm too weak, my tongue too dumb to call she name [...] The boy is growing up now in a city we barely recognize [...] And me, the infirm father. How I can raise the boy when I cannot raise my own arm? (Ibid., 33-34)

The society described in the novel is characterized to some extent by a deep sense of ambivalence regarding class and culture, and by a desire to belong, which takes place with the drive to either preserve or recombine aspects of one’s originary culture. Occasionally, aspects of the originary culture are deployed in new ways. For example, Ardan’s use of Irish grime and his belief that

“these Ends can rival [the Bronx and Brooklyn] that kind of romance too” seem to bring him closer to his origins, but it also fuels his drive towards positive identity formation (Ibid., 20). Other aspects that affect the drive towards identity formation include generational, racial and religious issues. Although there are several points of resolution, each seems to present challenges, as if the formation of identity is happening at the cost of suppressing or neglecting other aspects of one’s self. The recently forged identity might also be disrupted, as in Yusuf’s case. Characters borrow freely, almost unconsciously, from the several cultural identities that are open to them. The drive for a sense of belonging by joining with another is frequently manifested through a sexual relationship: “I think about that lighty girl, Missy. Her body. How I need to smash it soon, else I’ll go mad. I think about my family too” (Ibid., 11). Through Selvon’s attraction to Missy, Ardan gains an opportunity to perform before “that the music label. Jamie Bar” (Ibid., 171).

According to Gunaratne, the significance of the multicultural setting demonstrates that identifying with it can either free the multicultural subject or impede the formation of a coherent sense of identity. There is little pressure to adapt to a truly multicultural setting and, therefore, identity is neither preordained nor subject to rejection. Indeed, Gunaratne’s rejection of Blake’s *Jerusalem* is due to his idea “that it has left us with an image of England that is an imposed coda” (Gunaratne 2018b, 292). This view confirms my view that there is a clear rejection of any imposed elements of identity in the novel that promote “motifs of nostalgia and rural idealism” from both the originary and the host culture:

Blake’s poem, long appropriated, and fiercely conserved as a myth has narrowed in meaning [...] the poem’s motifs of nostalgia and rural idealism serve today as a kind of flag that draw us together in the fields of art, music

and sport. But they also feed into xenophobia, and the very worst kinds of nationalism. (Gunaratne 2018b, 292)

Blake's poem converges with the current "essentialist theories of racial theories", which Gilroy regards as "symptoms of a loss of certainty around "race"" (Gilroy 2001, 8). This powerful appeal can be achieved by breaking "the restraining hold of nationalist history and its frozen past upon [...] the political imagination" (Ibid.). Even though the cosmopolitan setting is sometimes regarded as uniquely suited to identity formation, the limitation of the cosmopolitan London setting is one that Gunaratne consciously engages with, almost to the point of wondering whether he is demonising it. It seems that the Stones Estate society—and to a lesser extent British society as a whole—is not capable of defining itself in terms of plural cultures but is more likely to exist in a single set of exclusive norms. Most of the British South Asian writers I consider in this thesis identify themselves as Londoners rather than as British. This is seen even in the characters of the novels, as shown by Nelson's final statement:

I was an islander no longer. And in London, it was worth the fight to live, to have a family in the city. We can know the storm of the place, I will say, fight the tide together and someday, raise a Londoner of we own. (Gunaratne 2018a, 283)

The creation of an internationalist identity forged in London and the rejection of British identity is based on a sense of disappointment, which is expressed in the novel that "the threat was Britain itself", as it perhaps converges with the notion of the "English as a superior being", the position made and promoted by colonialism; the multicultural subject searches for an experience of

culture that typical British society is incapable of providing (Ibid., 129). The need to “fight the tide together” might be defined as a need for the kind of growth expected to emerge from a multicultural consciousness. Certainly, if this need is unreachable in British society, London is perhaps the exception. London is a place that is “continually reinvented, reimagined from different locations, perspectives, and subject positions” (Ball 2004, 12). At the conclusion, Yusuf’s final words about the transforming nature of London converge with Ball’s statement:

So here it all is, this London. A place that you can love, make rhymes out of pyres and a romance of the colours, talk gladly of the changes and the flux and the rise and the fall without feeling its storm rain on your skin and its bone-scarring winds, a city that won't love you back unless you become insoluble to the fury. (Ibid., 288)

London is constructed as an independent and unique entity, “not fully attached or detached from either British nation-space or some nationless world-space” (Ball 2004, 9). It is typically multicultural and not limited to any racial or cultural “rhymes” that may characterize the rest of Britain or other nations of the world. According to geographer Anthony D. King, “the closer one moves to the centre of Greater London, the smaller the proportion of the population born in the UK” (quoted in Ball 2004, 19). The resident British population has not been changed by a specific culture but by dozens, generating dynamism and the loss of stasis regarding cultural mores and practices. Diversity is a central theme in the discussion of Multicultural London English.

In both *Londonstani* and *In Our Mad and Furious City*, the characters

predominantly use MLE as their language of choice. MLE is primarily spoken by young people in London, with a significant proportion of them born to immigrant families from the Caribbean or South Asia. According to Eleanor Case (2005), MLE evolved from the combination of several cultures and can be considered a “new transnational idiom” (50-1). The fusion of cultures that characterizes MLE is not limited to racial boundaries, but also extends across class lines, making it prevalent among young white speakers from middle-class backgrounds. The surprise ending of *Londonstani* is particularly effective because it skillfully conceals the true identity of the main character, Jas, throughout the novel. Jas is not a British Asian, but a white boy who paradoxically assumes a unique and “peripheral” subcultural identity to mature into adulthood. Jas’s perfect performance of MLE makes the camouflage credible, as he describes the evolution of youth language: “First we was rudeboys then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits. These days we try an’ use our own word for homeboy an so we just call ourselves desis” (Malkani 2006a, 5).

According to Harrison (2006), the characters in *Londonstani* speak a London slang that is a mixture of various cultural elements, including text messaging shorthand, MTV gangsta rap, and subcontinental slang. This dialect includes unique word substitutions such as “a” for “of” “buff” for “good-looking,” and “fit” for “sexy.” However, while Punjabi phrases are frequently used throughout the novel, it is unclear if the characters are genuinely multilingual. Malkani portrays the British Asian adults in the novel as attempting to speak “proper English,” while the younger characters utilize a “rudeboy desi-ness” dialect that seems to limit their agency and decision-making (Gunning 2010, 120).

In this context, language control and Malkani's portrayal of the desi dialect are critical factors in the discussion of who speaks for whom in *Londonstani*. As Gunning notes, "The adoption of this rudeboy desi-ness consists of an eschewal of agency; decisions are taken away from the individual who may find solace instead in predetermined codes of behavior" (2010, 120). While Malkani is explicit about the rules he uses to define the language and actions of his characters, it remains a point of debate as to whether this dialect accurately represents the experiences of London's multicultural youth. Malkani elaborates on how he depicts the specific slang used by each member of the crew on his website. He uses the term "proper English" to refer to the dominant culture and portrays the rudeboys as purposely distorting the English language to show their disrespect for mainstream society.

The novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City*, is notable for its use of a strong first-person slang referred to by the author as "road dialect," which has also been called Multicultural London English. This dialect serves as a creative inspiration and gives rise to ghetto songs, making significant parts of the novel read like a long ghetto lyric. The novel employs a stream of consciousness style and openly rejects sophisticated literary aesthetics, including the canonized writings approved by tradition. For example, Malkani celebrates William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* for restoring its original meaning, which Gunaratne argues has been distorted to promote an Englishness that the poet himself never intended. Gunaratne notes that "The whittling down of the ambiguity of Blake's original verses has left us with an image of England as an imposed coda" (Gunaratne 2018a, 292). According to Gunaratne, contemporary street lyric-writers such as Wiley, Lowkey, Little Simz, Kano, and Wretch32 share similarities with past poets

in their use of rhythm in their verses. Gunaratne draws parallels between the visionary poet William Blake's use of fantastical imagery and the lyrics of JME, the younger brother of Skepta.

The novel prominently features grime, a musical genre that reflects the gritty reality of life in inner cities. Despite the bleak surroundings, Gunaratne notes that grime can still have a lyrical quality. The genre's use of improvisation is a key factor in its expressive power, with each performance being unique and characterized by uncertainty, transience, and reliance on outside influences (Gunaratne 2018a, 294). Furthermore, grime music exemplifies the unpredictable nature of city life in at least two ways. Firstly, it creates brief and spontaneous opportunities for social interactions, despite the genre being heavily focused on violent lyrics, "The powerful conviviality and kinship in a genre where lyrical threats of violence are one of the primary means of communication may be surprising, but it's all there" (Hancox 2018b, 4). Secondly, it mixes various cultural and musical elements such as hip-hop, jungle, R&B, and reggae, which constantly evolve. Moreover, grime reflects the contradictory nature of multicultural neighborhoods because it is simultaneously limited to the local and connected to other nations through cross-cultural flows, "postcodes and poverty corral[ed] young black lives into ever smaller spaces" (White 2017, 259). In the novel, Ardan establishes his credibility with the owner of a boxing club by demonstrating his knowledge of the grime music scene in Paris (Gunaratne 2018a, 138).

Therefore, for characters, such as Selvon and Ardan, who are not adequately represented by any set or intact cultural identity but by the rejection of such static standards, London offers the freedom to create an identity based

on individuality and the opportunity to identify with elements of the external culture. However, because of the proliferation of elements that form the cultural setting and its relentlessly transforming nature, each individual's experience is not necessarily the same nor even similar. Diverse cultural identifications abound, adding to the larger culture. These subjects often find "home" through the process of contributing creatively to its formation. It is interesting to note that despite the openness of the multicultural and cosmopolitan society with which most of the characters, including Yusuf, identify, their own sense of home and identity is strengthened by their opposition to other cultures.

Although Yusuf's death during the riots becomes racialized, and leads to even more riots under "Justice4Yusuf", his voice and gaze are brought back after his death to complete the intercultural dialogue on which the novel rests. This serves to reinforce the importance of his identity and to highlight the positive identity formation of Selvon and Ardan. As indicated in their final comments, Selvon, who "never ran for no-one", is now running for Yusuf and Ardan is scraping out Yusuf's name in "the concrete" (Ibid., 276-78). Interestingly, through mourning for his alive brother Irfan, Gunaratne shows Yusuf's close identification with the multicultural society of London and its role in providing a site for the creation and expression of diverse and "unique identities".

Time never felt like an enemy to my brother, losing his battle to some ceaseless djinn. My father's light never touched him as it did me.[...] But like my city I mourn him with all the love I can gather. Nothing in these Ends can last so easy, not even love. [...] Sometimes I'm angry for falling, at the fixed circumstance in which I fell. Other times I remember the summers previous where I'd ping the ball across the Square for Selvon to



smack it past Ardan in goal with a worldly. [...] The only ones that can save us in the end are the heroes. (Ibid., 286, 287, 288)

For the multicultural subject, forging an identity and a sense of home is always complex. Issues of race and class are significant, but mostly as a subtext to larger societal change. The multicultural figure is perhaps able to navigate the changes that the era demands because of his (apparent) multicultural status. Of course, the stakes are also greater for such a character if the home that he comes from is already fragmented or otherwise limited. Characters who are unable to adapt effectively fail to forge a sense of identity. Selvon and Caroline's relative helplessness and lack of agency, even though they have (by some measures) reinvented themselves, sends a powerful message regarding the dangers of an identity that is not sufficiently complex in nature.

Although the timeframe of both novels focuses on identity formation and a character's coming of age, the ethos of neoliberalism is always present as an external influence, disrupting the process of self-determination and making it more contradictory. This is perhaps why the British Pakistani Yusuf's self-fashioning is as discursive as the white Jas's formation of a desi identity; they both share the antagonistic nature that almost all second-generation subjects in the novels have in common. Their gradual positive identity formation as the narrative progresses does not protect them from the disruption made by neoliberalism, represented by modes of consumption of consumer culture. For instance, because a man wears the same trainers, Yusuf identifies with him, even though the man is a murderer who calls himself "the hand of Allah" (Gunaratne 2018a, 2). Similarly, Jas does not find the rules that Hardjit has for the rudeboys sufficient to satisfy his needs, so he adopts more rules from Sanjay and ends up

robbing his own father.

Multicultural policies overlook the fact that geopolitical and material conditions are constantly changing, causing conditions from which cultural formations inevitably emerge. Consequently, these policies are ineffectual in responding to new cultural formations, incorporating difference and dealing with conflict. When race is disarticulated from material conditions by the general application of multicultural policies that are represented in neoliberal multicultural discourse, the result abstracts race issues by denying their differences. This generalisation recalls the current secular and sometimes racist condemnation in French-speaking countries of the veil, and even the burkini, a modest version of a bathing suit that allows Muslim women to participate in water sports (Quinn 2017, François 2021). The ban of the veil and the burkini, at times the alleged symbols of oppression, at times the symbols of liberation, and at other times considered as accepted norms, challenge such “race liberal orders”. As compared to France, Britain, to some extent, has proved more capable of incorporating differences and assimilating, abstracting or formalising societal resistance. Gunaratne (2018) shows the UK government’s response during the 1950s and post-2010 to race riots, which indicates a noticeable change. While young Nelson gets “a strike to the jaw” by the police for rioting, Ardan criticizes the measures the police use to control the riots: ““Them feds are as racist as the marchers mate” [...] what are the feds doing? Fucking standing there just allowing it”” (Gunaratne 2018a, 254-63).

Although multiculturalism, in its basic sense, guarantees that fragments of various identities are generally represented in society, this simplistic view is not adequate to facilitate the formation of home and identity, as the protagonists’ self-

fashioning in *Londonstani* and *In Our Mad and Furious city* takes place in contested territories, such as Hounslow and the Stones Estate. Because “it’s not the city” but the characters who “let [themselves] be beaten”, they must take the lead in a performative process of a collective and selective dynamic identity formation, to transcend the authority of those in power, typically older men like “Abu Farouk” , within minority communities, and teachers like “Mr Ashwood” in schools (Gunaratne 2018a, 296).

Based on the ample choices both novels offer, performative identity formation, free from tainted pedagogy and illegitimate authority, may effectively build society and the identities of the multicultural subjects. Gilroy argues that announcing “the demise” of multiculturalism is a “political gesture, an act of wishful thinking [...] aiming at abolishing any ambition towards plurality” and promotes the belief that it has become “illegitimate” to believe that multiculturalism can and should be state-led (2004, 1). *Londonstani* and *In Our Mad and Furious city* show that it is not always right, therefore, to think that because identity is formed, in a strong sense, by the individual independently from society, multiculturalism can restrict freedom and misinterprets the nature of personhood. Both novels show that in order to endorse more identities, state intervention should be restricted, and individual choice should be promoted. However, until a balance is made “this is experienced as a crisis of multiculturalism” (Joppke 2009, 469).

## Conclusion

This thesis is an investigation into the literary and cultural critique of multiculturalism and has examined the representations of British South Asian identities in a range of contemporary British South Asian novels published between 2000 and 2020. It sought to relate their analyses to current multicultural policies in the United Kingdom and take account of significant events that have been seen to affect notions of multiculturalism in Britain during the last two decades, including 9/11, 7/7, the 2011 England riots and Brexit and their aftershocks.

In the introductory chapter, I presented the theoretical framework of the thesis and its primary concerns with the representation of British South Asians in fiction, particularly their connection with home and identity concerning race, class, religion, and multiculturalism. In Chapter One, I examined Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and how it offers a critical perspective on the ongoing debate in the UK about diversity and assimilation. My goal in this chapter was to contribute to the discussion on cultural identity in the novel and argue that it presents an individualized and liberal viewpoint on the failure of multiculturalism in a community that is both secular and religious. My argument is based on the idea that Aslam's portrayal of British South Asian identity, particularly those with a Muslim background, aligns with classical liberal principles of multiculturalism that emphasize assimilation. I sought to demonstrate that Aslam's depiction of identity is a strong critique of multiculturalism because it regards identity as an internal process that should not be influenced by cultural communities. However, I acknowledge that Aslam's significant contribution is in the artistic sphere, where the voices of the most marginalized individuals in society can still be heard, as

stated by Moore (2009, 17).

Through this prism, in Chapter Two, I extended the analysis to Sunjeev Sahota's novel, *The Year of the Runaways* (2015), which explored the journey of runaways from India to England and demonstrated how centering the discussion on the center can lead to a reimagining of the periphery. I critiqued the concepts of "precariousness", "precarity", and "cartographic anxiety" in relation to the novel, drawing on Judith Butler's (2009) distinction between these terms. These concepts signified power hierarchies between the North and South and affected the lives of migrants. I discussed how Sahota's relocation of the novel's protagonists from North India to Northern England challenged this binary and illustrated how critically examining the center can lead to a new vision of the periphery. I argued that the characters' process of identity formation required them to define themselves in relation to the Other and that including marginalized identities in multiculturalism depictions was insufficient if the "image" of the Other remained metaphysically linked to the dominant culture, which raised concerns about social trust.

In Chapter Three, I focused on examining the link between multiculturalism and trust in *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie. Specifically, my focus was on the breakdown of trust between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the UK, and the impact of civic and political discourses on shaping national identity, which poses a threat to the integration of British minorities and increases the insecurity of Muslims under the law. I maintained that Muslim minorities are targeted by the surveillant gaze, which casts them as "the cryptic other", trapping them within a limited role and framework. I used Anshuman Mondal's (2018) theorization of this concept, which is manifested through different types of prejudice and

discrimination, such as antisemitism, anti-communism, and Islamophobia. While my analysis centered on *Home Fire*, my objective was to demonstrate that liberal discourses often only divert the surveillance spotlight without addressing the deep-seated issues in liberal social systems that perpetuate racial imaginaries and further marginalize minorities.

This point led to a discussion, in Chapter Four, of how liberal discourses enact laws, such as counterterrorism measures, against refugees by examining Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2018). I argued that blindly adhering to government directives on radicalization fuels distrust towards Muslims. I drew on Paul Ricoeur's (1976) concept of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" which asserts that our interpretation of information is influenced by our biases, beliefs, and viewpoints. This results in a decrease in social trust and dehumanization of those tasked with implementing these measures, which can lead to a "diminished self" for public servants and law enforcement personnel (Scott-Baumann 2018). I align with Scott-Baumann in advocating for a balanced approach to literary interpretation, and in my analysis of *Exit West*, I specifically apply this approach. However, while I acknowledge the limitations of skepticism, I also believe in the importance of understanding and gaining insight through interpretation. Therefore, I sought to demonstrate how "trust within reason" can challenge the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and encourage diverse interpretations of texts and concepts. Using *Exit West* as an example, I concluded that countries in the Global North should prioritize developing strategies to accommodate refugees rather than opposing their presence.

In the fifth chapter, I delved into discussions on multiculturalism and neoliberalism through an analysis of *Londonstani* (2006) and *In Our Mad and*

*Furious City* (2018). Within this context, I explored three key concepts: “neoliberal multiculturalism”, “self-transformation”, and “submission and acceptance”. The first notion highlights the evolution of universalist multicultural policies but cautions that the term “multiculturalism” can create problematic discourse. The second idea challenges binary perceptions of immigrant experiences, while the third investigates how second-generation individuals are burdened with negative identities imposed upon them. To address this, I propose the principle of “imposed self” to understand how second-generation individuals accept these negative elements. My argument suggests that by avoiding identity imposition, multicultural individuals can develop new and empowering aspects of their identity. I argued that individual engagement and choice, rather than conventional norms, shape identity, leading to the emergence of a unique British South Asian culture and convivial and cosmopolitan identities (Gilroy 2004; Vertovec 2007; Modood 2012). However, I concluded that to prevent a crisis of multiculturalism, as noted by Joopek (2009, 469), there needs to be a balance between state intervention and individual choice.

The thesis has employed a mixed-method approach that has explored multicultural discourses and theories of race and class in conjunction with a close reading analysis of literary texts to examine the value of the critical conceptions that theories of multiculturalism offer in relation to current British South Asian writing. Through its thorough analysis of the selected novels, the thesis has demonstrated that theories of multiculturalism are more relevant if approached through their intersections with more culturally specific theories of race, ethnicity and class to shift the focus from terms like diaspora, migrancy, hybridity and liminality, and towards critical, non-celebratory concepts of multiculturalism. Such

mapping has made it possible for the thesis to approach these theories, especially multiculturalism, as a critical concept rather than a state-led policy.

In light of the changing representations of multiculturalism, home, and identity in British South Asian fiction, the critique by Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in 2011 is highly relevant. They argue that intolerant images and statements lead to a distorted one-sided dialogue in which Muslims are represented and spoken for, but not allowed to change the conversation (2-5). This concept is crucial to the current exploration of home and identity for British South Asian individuals, especially Muslims. By speaking for themselves, they can participate in a dialogue that allows them to effect change and achieve a sense of belonging that is different from dominant cultural representations. The selected novels show characters who attain a sense of belonging by merging aspects of various cultures to form a unique identity, which seems to be a shared goal among British South Asian authors or at least the ones studied in this thesis.

The transformation of home and identity is a central theme in the works of Nadeem Aslam, Gautam Malkani, Guy Gunaratne, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Sanjeev Sahota. These authors are actively involved in and reflect the multiculturalism present in many contemporary Western societies. In the novels discussed, the formation of a British South Asian identity as culturally diverse takes on various forms, demonstrating that such an identity can lead to a sense of belonging. Rather than a process of adapting to a loss of identity or home, a culturally diverse identity can embrace multiple articulated identities, fostering creativity and critical examination. However, it may be oversimplistic to suggest that a simple label such as multicultural, hybrid, or culturally diverse identity is expressed through character representations, as these individuals may challenge



categorization and defy being placed in a fixed cultural niche. The novels analyzed in this study showcase the possibility of creating new British South Asian identities, but they also serve as a critique. As evident in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the formation of a culturally diverse identity cannot be reduced to a simple resolution to a character's search for subjectivity. Such an oversimplified view would not do justice to the complexities of identity formation and its associated challenges. Not all British South Asian individuals can or want to adopt a culturally diverse identity that blends their old and new cultural influences. There is a possibility, as depicted in literature, to create a divide between "successful" and "unsuccessful" individuals based on their ability to assimilate into a dominant society. However, such a binary is an oversimplification and a potentially harmful one as it involves a subjective value judgement that suggests success is solely based on the ability to "adapt."

This is an example of how, through the critique and re-examination of preconceived beliefs, the public consciousness in multicultural societies like Britain may have, or should have, shifted away from imposing pressure on immigrants to simply "adapt" or "integrate". However, neither academic research nor cultural theory is transferred into practice swiftly, and the still-pervasive belief that "successful" immigrant individuals must assimilate occasionally reappears. Politicians and the mainstream media who desire to "engage" in a dialogue with immigrants, while at the same time creating a controversy using a twisted and questionable discourse tied to right-wing political agendas, make cross-cultural dialogue almost impossible. When this happens, it either generally indicates the unwillingness of new host communities to have this dialogue in the first place or reveals the immigrants' inability to participate in a cross-cultural dialogue that they

can contribute to and change.

Interculturalists have made a unique contribution to the field of multiculturalism by emphasizing the significance of cultural interactions and everyday experiences at a micro level, such as in youth clubs, neighborhoods, towns, and cities. This is in contrast to the emphasis on dialogue in the context of public discourse and political controversies, as seen in the *Satanic Verses* controversy. Interculturalists highlight the importance of interpersonal cultural encounters, group dynamics, and social trust, while also acknowledging the significance of macro-level dialogue in multiculturalism. Their contribution to diversity theory and practice is thus to emphasize the importance of both types of dialogue. At the same time, there is a tension between the urge to develop a culturally diverse British South Asian identity and the pressure to adapt to and let go of aspects of one's culture of origin perceived to be incompatible with current society. It is difficult to view the source of this tension as anything, but an imposition of dominant cultural values (assimilation) and the rejection of multiculturalism. This tension underscores the importance of interculturalists' focus on cultural interactions and everyday experiences in localities, schools, clubs, and public spaces.

This is demonstrated in *The Year of The Runaways*, when one of Sahota's protagonists, Narinder, expresses her culturally diverse identity; she abandons her religious practices and her turban and kara, yet goes to India to scatter her father's ashes. Even so, she has refused to marry the man her family chose for her and has achieved economic independence from her family, actions that are necessary for her to acquire social agency in England. We cannot condemn these individuals for forming identities in this manner, as they are clearly looking for a

level of acceptance in their society. A living experience in England necessitates, or at least strongly favours, a degree of assimilation into liberal or secular values. The critique of British South Asian identity in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for example, shows that getting along in England by leveraging one's often "exotic" multicultural identity, while fully adapting and practising secular values, can be unsettling to the individual and to the liminality where new and unique transformations occur. In fiction, as in real life, the consequences of the conflict of values can possibly be enough to destroy a person. While identity is at the heart of any study of the theories of multiculturalism, the investigation of the formation and representation of home provides much of the dynamic driving force behind such an enquiry. Exchanging one "home" for another is the impulse behind the current formation of the individual identity. Like immigrants who freely change their locale, exiled or diasporic people frequently find themselves searching for a stable identification and definition of home. This search serves as a conceptual framework for the individual's displacement.

At the start of my thesis, I anticipated that writers of British South Asian heritage would convey a sense of belonging through their depictions of home and identity. I based this assumption on Stuart Hall's idea of "transformation", which suggests a desire to overcome the challenges of cultural displacement. After examining the characters in my analysis, I found that this expectation was valid. Particularly in London, characters embraced cosmopolitan ways of life to confront cultural obstacles and marginalization. In Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*, for example, characters actively participate in English culture while embracing diversity and developing inclusive identities. Gunaratne occupies an intermediary position among authors who either consider London as a suitable or

unsuitable setting for British South Asians. While Yusuf's identity formation is balanced, characters such as Irfan and Abu Farouk cling to a static sense of home, which hinders their complete participation in English society. In Malkani's *Londonstani*, a similar division occurs, with some characters recognizing the complexity of their heritage while others are constrained by their irrational adherence to cultural values from their origin, often with tragic outcomes. In Sahota's novel, the runaways are divided between their desire to cling to a static sense of their Indian home and their wish to return with what they have earned. This phenomenon is not new to British South Asian literature; it was even given a name in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) as "the myth of going home" and "the Going Home Syndrome" (340). A similar concept is proposed in *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (1979) by Muhammad Anwar, which refers to the migrants' desire to return to their country of origin someday. However, this fixed sense of home is limiting because it prevents the desired outcome that the thesis anticipated at the introduction – the transformational development of a participatory sense of collective and personal identity, which becomes the focus and objective of these individual characters.

As an example, British individuals of Gujarati East African descent clearly articulate such forms of identity. Nikesh Shukla's recent novel, *The One Who Wrote Destiny*, exemplifies their experience of double-displacement, whereby their initial migration from India to East Africa and subsequent expulsion have disproportionately established them as influential figures in resettlement and relocation, despite their enduring pain and memories of loss and trauma (Parmar 2019, 2). Paradoxically, their successes are rooted in the legacy of pain and displacement. Due to their inability to return to India or Africa, and their loyalty to

the places where they settle, their identity as a “double diaspora” motivates them to move forward and progress. They have no illusions about the myth of return and are fully aware that they cannot go back home for political reasons. It could be argued that immigrants, in general, have some level of control over their situation and may have chosen to move to a new home. However, this may also lead to a heightened desire to “return home”, as the first home was left voluntarily and is therefore a place they could potentially return to (if circumstances allowed).

It is intriguing to note that in all the novels examined in this thesis, there are indications of a more troubling expression of the significant difficulties of adapting to a new society. At this juncture, the notion of “hybridity”, as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha, breaks down. These individuals are under as much pressure as those who seem to have achieved a sense of belonging by integrating and adapting to the cultural practises of the host society. Even these success stories, in terms of integration from assimilatory perspectives, are interspersed with failure—characters who are unable to succeed and who are left involuntarily in a perpetual hybrid state, as is Arun in Malkani’s *Londonstani*. When he marries a woman from a lower-caste family, his mother wants them to show more respect to her family, based on Hindu conventions. Arun becomes stuck in a liminal position between adapting rational, modern thinking and Hindu traditions (Malkani 2006a, 21). This pressure, fuelled by ambiguity and disorientation while attempting to construct a coherent reality of home and a hybrid identity, becomes so intolerable that Arun commits suicide (Ibid., 264–265). In the same novel, there is also the white Jas, who is unable to find a place in his own white English culture and attempts to capitalize on a stylized desi and adolescent identity to which he has little claim.

Dr Cheema's façade of a successful British South Asian entrepreneur who is conversant in English culture in Sahota's *The Year of The Runaways*, is under stress and crumbles. He becomes merely pitiable, caught between a wistful love for a South Asian culture that will never accept him and his powerless adherence to British social and cultural mores where he was born and bred. Sahota's runaways are obvious expressions of the difficulty—and even the impossibility—of successfully adapting to cultures; when they arrive in England, they are immediately marginalized, and the fate of each character speaks to the difficulty of migration. Interestingly, of all the people who attempt or dream of a happy return to India with what they have earned, Tochi is the only one who achieves it, though the reader is left doubting the authenticity of this outwardly happy end.

Far from being intact narrative representations of a world and a world view inhabited by the characters, Hamid's *Exit West* is mainly characterized by its extreme fragmentation. Nadia and Saeed are unable to settle in any one place because they are caught between the memories of their traumatic experience of war, their self-preservation of finding refuge and the haunting experience of having to leave home. All these circumstances keep them fundamentally at odds with themselves and unable to settle into a stable identity that can encompass all these diverse aspects. Hamid's discontinuous narrative, like Aslam's magic realism, is suggestive of the challenging, possibly unfathomable, difficulties facing his multicultural subjects.

The concept of the multicultural subject in relation to migration has affected how texts are critiqued, such that generational divides are perceived to be as decisive as displacement. The global phenomenon of new technologies available to these communities contributes to the ways in which identities are experienced

and received, as exemplified in the novels *Londonstani* and *In Our Mad and Furious City*. Although both novels focus on identity formation and a character's coming of age, the ethos of neoliberalism is continually described as an external effect that interrupts the process of identity formation and renders it more contradictory. This is perhaps why the British Pakistani Yusuf's self-fashioning in Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* is as discursive as white Jas's formation of a desi identity in Malkani's *Londonstani*; both share the antagonistic nature of nearly all the second-generation characters in the novels. The progress of their positive identity formation does not protect them from the impact of neoliberalism, represented by the modes of consumer consumption culture.

For example, Yusuf identifies with a terrorist who calls himself "the hand of Allah" because they wear the same trainers (Gunaratne 2018a, 2). Likewise, Hardjit's regulations for the rudeboys do not satisfy Jas, so he adapts to what Sanjay calls the "bling-bling theory" (capitalism, neoliberalism, and consumerism) and eventually robs his own father. Through this theory, Sanjay develops his belief that "there's no Marxist alternative anymore. The fall of communism, the rise of bling" (Malkani 2006a, 168). Malkani provides a new viewpoint for what inspires today's educated malcontents. Sanjay makes money by running a carousel scheme in which he and his colleagues oversee the importation of mobile phones from fictitious companies throughout Europe. Mr Ashwood's excitement for Sanjay's accomplishment, as well as Sanjay's enthusiasm for the project, demonstrate how capitalism rewards breaking the rules (even its own rules) if business dealings are ostensibly legal. According to Sanjay, anyone who does not adhere to bling-bling politics is ripe for exploitation. He exploits Jas and makes him rob his father. The journey for Yusuf and Jas, and

in each of the novels explored in this thesis, encompasses physical, psychological and emotional timeless questions of who or what I am, which encourages the characters to form place-based identities, like the desi identity, and as suggested by the title of the novel itself, *Londonstani*.

The forging of a London-based identity and the rejection of a British identity stems from a sense of disappointment, which is clearly stated by Gunaratne's Selvon, who says that "the threat was Britain itself", a position created and endorsed by colonialism. Selvon perhaps wants to experience a culture that conventional British society cannot provide in any way. The lack of "deepening" may be defined as a lack of growth expected to stem from a multicultural or cosmopolitan consciousness. If this is inaccessible in the rest of British society, London might well be the exception. Most of the multicultural subjects in the narratives examined here gravitate to London as a locale where new identities may be formed. Some identify themselves as Londoners rather than as British, as represented by Nelson's wish as a father to raise a Londoner of his own (Gunaratne 2018a, 283). This distinction reflects Gunaratne's awareness of London as a culturally diverse locale that is constantly reinvented and reimagined from various viewpoints, places and subject positions. The evolution of culture affects not only the immigrant subject but also the local English population.

When an immigrant lives in England, both opportunities and threats are amplified. Several academics have addressed the question of "Englishness" or the English identity, sometimes in opposition to the "still monarchical, imperialistic, hierarchical, unequal" concept of Britishness (Aughey 2007, 108), which could be regarded as censurable with its connections to the colonial past. In contrast, Englishness is thought to have the capacity to become "international,



cosmopolitan, and egalitarian" (Ibid.) to the degree that Black and Asian minorities who were "disenchanted with Britishness" as an affiliation appeared to be willing to identify with their compatriots in their respective regions of Britain as "Black Englishmen", "Welsh Muslims" and "Scottish Pakistanis" (Kumar 2003, 261–2).

However, the idea of inclusive English nationalism that emerged in the 2000s has not come to fruition, as evidenced by the increasingly exclusionary views of English nationalism today. Brexit was initially driven by a desire to create a unified political, social, and cultural entity, but it was also fueled by xenophobic sentiments that have continued to shape immigration policy under Prime Ministers Boris Johnson, Theresa May, and David Cameron. The slogans used in the Brexit campaign, such as "taking back control" and "making Britain great again", tap into the cultural memory of the Second World War and evoke emotions of national unity, strength, and sacrifice associated with that time in British history. However, the reality of the current political climate suggests that the hopes for inclusive English nationalism were overoptimistic.

Indeed, following the 2016 EU Referendum and increasing anti-immigrant attitudes, nationalist rhetoric has gained prominence, with the UK Independence Party and its leader Nigel Farage playing a significant part in the discussion. Leave.EU employed far-right tactics, including using a photograph of refugees in a manner resembling a Nazi salute (Stewart and Mason 2016). Stratton (2019) asserts that Britain's understanding of current events, such as Brexit, has been influenced by the cultural memory of the Second World War (242). Brexit is viewed as a loss of safety and a violation of the unity and peace established after the war, resulting in a feeling of loss that is conveyed through the language used

to describe it. This sentiment is part of a broader trend of cultural trauma associated with the decline of Britain's global power.

The rise of populist discourse has gained traction in UK politics, with race remaining a crucial issue even if not always explicitly defined. However, some on the left viewed Brexit as a sign that the concerns of white working-class voters could no longer be ignored. Studies suggest that the rise of far-right parties is due to the idea that white working-class individuals have been "left behind" (Bhambra 2017, 218). These parties use socio-cultural issues such as immigration, rather than economic concerns, to shape political discourse and gain power. By presenting themselves as protectors of national identity and culture against external threats, they have successfully redefined politics. Bloomfield (2020) notes that the far-right's focus on immigration presents a challenge for progressive parties in balancing public safety concerns with freedom of movement. Populist parties have criticized the Left for prioritizing immigration over the needs of the general population, leading to a decline in support for social democratic parties. Attempts by left-wing parties to appeal to voters by addressing concerns around national security, identity, and job opportunities have not been successful, with radical right parties being favored by voters who prioritize national identity and security. Social democratic parties have had a varied stance on immigration and multiculturalism, with some supporting Labour migration but also advocating for restrictions and regulations on immigration.

The plight of refugees has become a central issue in the political agenda, with populist parties gaining support and power, but unfortunately, it is the refugees who suffer the most. Contrary to popular belief, the decline of social democracy cannot be solely attributed to the support of working-class voters for

the populist right. While social democratic parties were once dominant in European elections, their decline began in the 2000s and has continued with their percentage falling below 20% in the 2017 elections. Left-wing parties often prioritize avoiding defeat rather than winning elections, leading to their diminishing popularity (Benedetto et al. 2019, 9). The changing attitudes of the working class, including the loss of support for the Labour Party in deindustrialized regions, have contributed to the Conservative Party's victory in the 2019 UK general election.

Interestingly, in his article, "The English Question", published in 2006, Robert Hazell anticipates that "the future will see further development of regionalism in England" because of the apparent disintegration of and consequent protectiveness of English identity as opposed to a British one (36). With England's devolution of power to other nationalities, a programme from which England was excluded, political and identity issues have arisen. British identity encompasses all the United Kingdom's nationalities; even though it is a national identity that is most strongly associated with colonialism. The questions of "Who are the English?" and "What is Englishness?" (Reviron-Piégay 2020) are being explored urgently. There are predictions of Welsh and Scottish independence and the dissolution of the United Kingdom. England, perhaps, has lost a "sense of their own selfhood" while reclaiming an intrinsic identity (Hazell 2006, 52).

Therefore, it might be over-simplistic to believe that any surge of English national identity is anti-multiculturalist. Multiculturalism is the notion that individual rights cannot accomplish equality, which is perceived as uniformity in the context of diversity. Multiculturalism as a concept and a socio-political management

exercise must be developed to encompass the positive inclusion of marginalized minorities, defined by race, ethnic and cultural identity (Modood 2018, 286). Interestingly, exclusion reinforces ethnic and cultural forms of identity, although it may also be important to many people as a sense of belonging. Multiculturalism thus evolves from a devotion to racial equality, the eradication of discrimination based on colour—such as the kind outlawed by the Labour government in the 1960s and 1970s—into a viewpoint that permits minority groups to openly denounce their negative stereotypes and define themselves positively (Ibid.). The significant change that occurred in the 1980s, encouraged by the Black Pride movement, primarily served as a vehicle for the rights of South Asian minorities. the *Satanic Verses* controversy in the late 1980s was a watershed moment in this change, forming a politically oriented British South Asian Muslim identity campaign.

In any case, can Britain promote a sense of belonging and allegiance by instilling citizenship tests and other symbolic and national measures like flags, oaths and anthems, particularly when the newcomers might have endured violence, marginalisation and discrimination, or will shortly experience such issues? The de-nationalisation and de-ethnicisation of these issues are proper alternatives that have been incorporated into government projects in the United Kingdom already and outlined in public discourses of citizenship and rights and duties, recognising a civic commitment and acknowledging broad values, such as democracy and equality that are consistent with these forms of identities. The emphasis of multiculturalism on the equality of citizenship, the diversity of identities and on the reformation of national identity to be more inclusive of current diversity demonstrates how UK society might be equally receptive and open to

diversity and unique identities, and the necessity to increase the understanding of the emotional impact of belonging. Cross-cultural trust develops a strong sense of belonging. Consequently, scholars interested in this area of enquiry, rather than responding to the increasing wave of English national identity in a way that increases divisions and tensions, should seek to include English identity in the British array of national identities, accepting rather than rejecting both Britishness and minority identities (Modood 2018, 291).

The novels analysed here implicitly show us that forging a culturally diverse British South Asian identity is neither a guaranteed nor an anticipated outcome for the multicultural subject. Furthermore, even when a sense of belonging is achieved, there is no guarantee of consistent or durable outcomes, which requires that their identity formation is more than simply avoiding known missteps.

An examination of the narrative forms employed in selected novels reveals how they relate to the characters' identities. One example is *Londonstani*, which follows a linear narrative where the characters' self-conceptions and sense of home are constructed sequentially. The novel's protagonist, Jas, has a fragmented identity influenced by his English roots and South Asian community, which results in a communication gap. However, as the narrative progresses, Jas explores various identities, such as Pakistani, Sher, and Desi, before developing a "desi identity." This linear narrative technique encourages this way of searching and its conclusion. In contrast, *The Year of The Runaways* by Sahota uses a nonlinear narrative technique with few interruptions. The voice of the protagonist, Narinder, is inconsistent but reflects her initial naivety as she tries to adjust to a new environment before maturing towards the end. The narrative is interspersed

with shorter, disconnected sections that read like shadow-stories. These stories serve as subtle reminders of what the characters left behind, intruding into their sense of self and belonging in England, despite remaining in the background.

The surprising ending of *Londonstani* is due to the fact that the novel skillfully conceals the fact that the central character, Jas, is not a British Asian but a white boy who must adopt a unique subcultural identity to mature into adulthood. The use of language and portrayal of Multicultural English (MLE) in the novel is a point of debate about who has the authority to speak for whom. Gunning (2010) argues that adopting the rudeboy desi-ness involves surrendering agency and following predetermined codes of behavior, as exemplified by Hardjit. Malkani, on the other hand, is clear about the rules he uses to define the actions and language of his rudeboys, and he portrays them as disrespecting mainstream society by intentionally manipulating the English language. He refers to the dominant culture as “proper English.”

Furthermore, *In Our Mad and Furious City* is notable for its use of a strong first-person slang that the author refers to as “road dialect”. Although officially recognized as Multicultural London English (Armistead 2019), it is the slang that inspires “ghetto songs” and turns a substantial portion of the novel into a lengthy and significant ghetto lyric. It could be argued that Gunaratene romanticizes the moment when the text first appears, the raw lyrics of the ghetto as they emerge before they solidify into art. This is significant in reference to Blake, as Gunaratene explains in the essay “The Englishness of Street Art” which is included in the novel. Gunaratene believes that the true spirit of Blake, as seen in his poem “Jerusalem”, has been lost and replaced by a nostalgic celebration of rural idealism. However, the Blake that Gunaratene is interested in is the one

who was influenced by popular songs, street ballads, and Methodist hymns of the time. In today's world, there are countless voices, and the possibilities for improvisation are limitless, even if the end result may be incomplete and uncertain. As the novel suggests, Ardan is unlikely to become a successful commercial grime artist, and his raw ghetto lyrics are likely to remain fleeting echoes of the chaotic city.

British South Asian fiction has a social as well as a literary and artistic significance. From the outset, drawing on a point raised by Morey and Yaqin (2011), I question whether British South Asian Muslim minorities are invited to cross-cultural dialogue to which they can contribute and change, and if they are provided a framework for examination within these British South Asian novels. To some degree—given the culturally diverse identities of the selected authors and the fact that they offer well-substantiated literary representations of the struggles of marginalized and minority subjects to a general audience—it is reasonable to respond to this questioning in the affirmative. Indeed, the authors whose novels examined in this thesis raise questions and anxieties and concerns in Britain that will eventually increase cross-cultural understanding. These authors sometimes seem to speak for their minority communities. However, due to the significance of this social role, it is necessary to analyse the claim. Each work of literature examined here seems to offer a common voice for a particular class of minorities. For instance, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Aslam represents those who are inclined to adopt individualistic liberal values, while Hamid's *Exit West* and Sahota's *The Year of The Runaways* give voice to those who are less represented by such individualistic liberal values, such as refugees and the precariat, people who are satisfied with just having a safe place to call home.

The constant process of critiquing culturally-biased perspectives has begun with an analysis of concepts tied to the formation of individual and collective identity. There are cases in which the multicultural subject, rather than integrating or unquestioningly assimilating by adopting secular values to achieve social agency, refuses to change strongly entrenched values or practices in the culture of origin and yet achieves agency and participation in society, causing a shift in the conceptualization of the multicultural society. In this way, the novels suggest that multiculturalism can develop only by being subjected to constant pressures and challenges. Identity is never “an already accomplished fact”, but a “production” that is “never complete [and] always in process” (Hall 1990, 222). Under such circumstances, there is no guarantee that the voices of British South Asian minorities will be clearly represented, yet the continuous interrogation of values and cultural productions of home at least guarantees the possibility of diverse expression, which is central to any conception of multiculturalism.



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