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Deconstructing Race, Gender, and Class: An Investigation of Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

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Abstract

This thesis takes its point of departure in the deconstruction of contemporary literary representations of race, gender, and class that are produced by ideologies of the neo-colonial, neo-imperial, neoliberal, and patriarchal discourses embedded in the societal norms, with particular reference to Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). These concepts can be traced back to the ideas proposed by theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Judith Butler, David Olusoga and Ania Loomba. While each theorist argues one argument in relation to their respective fields, one common conclusion between them is the fact that the concepts of race, gender, and class are socially constructed. Based on this main argument, I investigate how these concepts relate to experiences of inequality and otherness in British society.

This thesis argues that despite the fact that one's identity is constructed through normative narratives, it is possible to challenge such established norm imposed by the discourses of certain ideologies. For this reason, this thesis will address the subjugations that are caused by identity politics, focusing on, the individual's race, gender preferences, and social class. Through a close reading of Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), the analysis will cooperate in a dialogue with primarily postcolonialism, feminism and cultural studies.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: The complex representation of race, gender, and class

Identities are the markers of who we are in society. They are significant to us because they help us to understand not only who we are but also who others are. While identities function to define the "self", it also functions to imprison "the other" in a classification. The leading identity markers of our society are race, gender, and class, which are all based on the idea that societal expectations already determine the fates of individuals. Although these issues of identity markers assist in recognizing ourselves, they also operate as categories for subjugation and oppression. The individuals who encounter persecution are primarily people of colour, women with different sexual orientations and the working class. This thesis is a study of how certain ideologies, such as racism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism, restrict the agency of individuals. I will explore the connection between the complex and ambiguous portrayal of these ideas through two novels by Zadie Smith and Bernardine Evaristo with a particular focus on the characters' language as they attempt to define themselves while being marginalised due to their identities.

Throughout history, individuals from marginalised groups, such as people of colour, women, and lower classes, have been subjected to societal norms that dictate expectations and ideals. These norms can be restrictive, often limiting the individual's agency by grouping everyone of a particular race, gender, or class into a single, homogenous category. This gives rise to a hierarchical society, with those belonging to marginalised groups being relegated to the position of "other". These societal discourses further restrict an individual's agency and self-expression, as they must conform to the moral and ethical standards set forth by society. This creates a dichotomy between the individual's implication of self and the societal "other", which influences their behaviour.

The concept of otherness is often accepted without question and is assumed to be a natural state of being. However, social identities are not natural but established through a social order that places certain groups above others in a hierarchy. The novels analysed in this thesis explore three significant discourses colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism and their impact on characters, particularly women of colour and women from different social classes. The novels also explore the history of Britain's relationships with its former colonies and involvement in the slave trade, which results in social and political turmoil in Britain with immigration, Brexit, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Finally, through the

intersectionality of various identities, the novels portray contemporary Britain and its struggles with the concept of otherness.

Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) is a novel set in London that explores the themes of class, race, gender, and ethnicity through the lives of four characters Leah Hanwell, Natalie Blake (formerly known as Keisha), Felix Cooper, and Nathan Bogle. The novel depicts at working class view of immigrants and ethnic identity and shows how past and future events converge in the characters' lives. The novel is situated in the imaginary Caldwell estate in Willesden, a place that is a constant reminder of the characters' working-class origin and their sense of social marginalisation. Each character experiences a clash of identities as they struggle to find their roots. Zadie Smith explores the subjugation carried through constructed discourses about class, race, and gender, which function to imprison individuals. She challenges the validity of concepts like social mobility, meritocracy, and individual improvement within class, race, and gender in a society that is divided by wealth and power. In this sense, the novel highlights the interconnectedness of subjugating ideologies in establishing themes under representation of the four characters formed by boundaries of their identities but who also challenge those limits points to the difficulties faced by many contemporary European minorities.

The second book analysed in this thesis is Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). While both *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other* address issues of gender, race, and class, they focus on these topics to a different extent. In *NW*, class is emphasised more than in *Girl, Woman, Other*, so this chapter will focus on analysing gender and race to highlight the identity, otherness and (in)visibility of the characters in Evaristo's novel. The lives of the twelve Black British women characters: Amma, Yazz, Dominique, Carole, Bummi, LaTisha, Shirley, Winsome, Penelope, Megan/Morgan, Hattie, and Grace, in the book reflect their heritage of British colonialism and the African diaspora. Evaristo questions the life of a Black woman in British society and illuminates their invisibility in British literature. The novel reveals the characters' intersecting identities of gender and race, highlighting both their shared experiences and individual differences. Evaristo specifically focuses on the discrimination and racism faced by Black women in Britain drawing attention to their marginalization and shared struggles, addressing issues such as domestic abuse and gender identity faced by minority groups. Although the novel addresses issues such as motherhood, sexual orientation, gender roles, and the impact of gender on social inequality, Evaristo does not represent oppressed groups only in the category of "women", but also including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and multiple additional representations such as non- binary and pansexual. She confronts the societal norms that oppress women in patriarchal systems, limiting

their opportunities and choices. By giving voice to those abandoned by the patriarchal structure, Bernardine Evaristo provides a new narrative that illustrates the difficulties of living a in society dominated by patriarchy. The novel ultimately explores the meaning of being a Black British woman in contemporary Britain, emphasising otherness as a critical theme.

The reasons for selecting these two novels are multiple. They both depict the unequal treatment and otherness experienced by individuals in present-day Britain. The novels prompt readers to question the complex and ambiguous representation of sociological categories and to acknowledge how each character differs in their unique situations. Both also offer a large gallery of main characters. Zadie Smith's novel employs four protagonists, two women and two men, while Bernardine Evaristo's novel features twelve female characters, each with distinct narratives, thus further demonstrating individual diversity. Despite differences in their identities, however, we also see how the characters are subjected to similar societal constructs and expectations.

The first part of this thesis consists of the Literature Review chapter, which details and reviews vital terms and concepts that will navigate the reader throughout this thesis. The theory used throughout the thesis is mainly postcolonialism, feminism, and cultural studies theories. In the Literary Review, I provide information related to the novels looking at the inherited binary oppositions that create otherness. Later, I will be analysing the intersectionality of race, gender, and class within the context of the novels. The second part of the thesis consists of the analysis of *NW*, which particularly explores the significance of the place in the novel concerning its depiction of social mobility and meritocracy. In addition, this thesis will look at how postcolonial agendas of neo-colonial discourse affect authenticity in the contemporary context and the consequences of these on the characters' identity split. The effect of neoliberalism on female subjectivity concepts of gender in terms of motherhood and performativity are the last chapters in the second part of the thesis. The third chapter includes the analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* based on the concept of otherness in Evaristo's writing, race as otherness and lastly, the significant effect of gender roles from increasing persecution and discrimination of characters' identities. In the final part of this thesis, in conclusion, I will attempt to describe how identity functions to label individuals within the categories of race, gender, and class. Furthermore, this thesis will demonstrate how these concepts are instrumental in identifying Britain's current political, economic, and social turmoil.

Chapter 2. Literary Review: An exploration of race, gender, and class

As stated above, this thesis will investigate the complex and ambiguous representations of race, gender, and class in the contemporary novels: *NW* (2012) by Zadie Smith and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo.

My thesis will explore *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other* as contemporary British novels in terms of how the language of the novels deconstructs race, gender, and class. The literal-critical concepts I will engage are mainly postcolonialism, feminism, cultural studies, and neoliberalism. The focus is going to be how the language of the characters reflects their arbitrary identities. Feminism is one of the key themes underlined in both novels. Bernardine Evaristo claims in an interview with the Guardian that:

> when a male white writer writes a novel from his perspective, one does not think that is a political act, however; when a Black British woman writer does that is a subversive act (Gentleman)

In this case, my aim is to illustrate how male domination suppresses women, whether we are talking about women of colour, and women of different classes. In order to understand the beginning of these issues, I would like to go deep into the details of history, presenting the foundations of Britain's relationship to its former colonies, Britain's enrolment with the slave trade and leading up to the process of immigration, Brexit, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

2.1 Introduction to *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other*

NW is written in 2012 by Zadie Smith who is a British author and academic of Caribbean descent, who questions multiracial communities, the issue of social class, the sense of place, and questions of identity and authenticity through four characters placed in London. In *NW*, Zadie Smith uses a straightforward narrative to show the complexity of modern life. The themes in *NW* are more profound in terms illustrating issues such as social mobility and the language is more fluctuated compared to *Girl, Woman, Other*. Zadie Smith's *NW* is about four characters: Leah, Felix, Keisha who renames herself Natalie, and Nathan. They grew up in the same underprivileged part of northwest London where the name of the book comes from the

postal code for the area. Northwest London is not considered to be an area for elite or the wealthy as much as the South or West of London, it is more an unrepresentative community area where the majority of British Asian and other people of immigrant descent people live. The characters that were portrayed to us come from different social backgrounds and try to escape from poverty.

Smith describes Leah, a philosophy graduate who is the only white woman on the team where she works. Not only her whiteness is the cause of clashing cultures as Irish and English, but also her husband is a Franco-African. Zadie Smith raises a question about the taboo of life without having children as a woman. As in the case of Leah, who enjoys sexual intimacy rather than destined to be an angel in the house. While her best friend is from the Caribbean, her friend's husband comes from an Italian Caribbean family. Zadie Smith does not provide readers with an easy sense of ethnicity which makes things be questioned in contemporary Britain's binary view of the British class system where one is white, and wealthy starts life as privileged. Alternatively, in other words, her writing presents a more complex portrayal of ethnicity, leading readers to question the binary view of the British class system in contemporary Britain. For example, this system assumes that being white and wealthy equates to being privileged from birth. In this sense, Smith's work challenges contemporary Britain's simplistic, fixed categorization of ethnicity. Her writing reveals the complexity and fluidity of identity, which cannot be reduced to a simple black-and-white binary. Instead, Smith's work encourages readers to question the ways in which class, race and gender intersect and impact one's experiences in society. By doing so, Zadie Smith highlights the need for a deeper and comprehensive understanding of identity and the systems that shape it.

There is Felix, a black man who has a miserable life since his parents abandoned him. He has a drug addiction which he is reflected in the novel as in a constant movement. His posh accent is the one that always saves him before he falls into a hole in the British class system. Keisha, Leah's best friend, who renames herself, Natalie, comes from a conservative family. Her friendship with Leah, devastates her because the ability to have social and professional dominance over Leah makes things difficult for their friendship. Natalie goes into a relationship with a man who is studying in the same department. When she gets married and has children, Natalie started to see there is no more meaning in having children than extra work though financially she is more stable than her friend Leah. In the meantime, the fourth character enters the scene with a chance that brings Nathan and Felix together. Nathan is homeless, trying to take control of his life like Felix. All characters embody the struggle of this working-class

generation financially in modern-day Britain where things get worse after serious years of effects of austerity.

What Zadie Smith does in her novel is to make readers realize characters share the same feelings, despite the consequences of their background or identities such as age, race, and gender. The novel is a great example of intersectionality in which one can see the defining feature of identity was considered to be ethnicity rather than class; however, Smith reveals through Natalie's character that belonging to any specific minority group or ethnicity does not provide any solidarity. The increasing inequality in different classes in London raises tension among the immigrant community itself. Although inequality in various social classes in London, which leads to tensions among immigrant communities, does not necessarily establish a sense of solidarity, rather it emphasises the importance of class and economic factors in shaping individual's experiences and relationships.

*Girl, Woman, Othe*r is written by Bernardine Evaristo a British author and an academic of Anglo- Nigerian descent. In the novel, Evaristo presents us with the story of twelve women who intersect in discrimination and otherness many ways with their gender preferences, sexual orientations, and races. In an interview, Evaristo said that she considers her work as a distractive, radical, experimental novel that has a fragmented style called "fusion" and that includes non-binary women which made such an impact on contemporary British novels. ("Five Dials"). What Evaristo means by "fusion fiction" is that it is a hybrid style of writing which allows her to mix prose writing with free verse without using full stops. By using the fusion style, Evaristo forms an oral presentation through her characters and attempts to rebuild a female language which stands against the imperialist male-dominated discourse. As will be investigated, the absence of full stops and long sentences gives an opportunity for a reader to observe what it means to feel people who are "othered". Applying this theoretical approach of cultural studies, my definite aim is to show in these novels as Evaristo argues in her interview in *NRP*:

> Identifying myself as a black British woman writer and identifying this book as about black British women primarily because when white male writers do write from their perspective often with white male protagonists, they do not need to label themselves as such because they are accepted by the norm, they are the default. I'm not the default because what I'm doing or what we're doing as women of colour is different and I think it is very important to identify that for ourselves and for the reader (Martin)

Bernardine Evaristo identifies herself and the book as primarily about black British women. Evaristo states that white male writers do not have to label themselves when writing from their perspective because they are considered "the norm and the default". However, as women of colour, their experiences and the reader highlight the need for representation and acknowledgement of marginalized voices in literature and media. Furthermore, the issue of underrepresentation and the lack of recognition for the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities, specifically women of colour, underline the need to challenge the dominant narrative and recognize the multiplicity of diverse perspectives in literature.

Bernardine Evaristos' novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* is about the struggles of twelve different characters in modern-day Britain. Though each character has its own story, their lives intertwine in several ways. The book opens with the playwright Amma and the story ends with the interaction of all the characters who do not necessarily know one another. There is Amma, who prepares for the opening of her new play at the National Theatre and reveals her years of struggle as a young black actress. Amma's best friend, Dominique, begins a relationship with an African American woman called Nzinga. Amma's daughter, Yazz, is a university student who meets a group of friends who confront her expectations of the way the established class system works. Carole and her Nigerian-born mother, Bummi, deal with a high-rise flat in south London. Thanks to the help of her schoolteacher Shirley King, Carole has become a successful banker. Carole's school friend LaTisha works in a supermarket and has three children, struggling financially. While Carole marries with a white British man, Bummi starts to have a lesbian relationship with her employee Omofe. After a while, her relationship ends because of the taboo of a same-sex relationship. A successful schoolteacher and mentor of Carole, Shirley gets devastated by the news of her mother Winsome and her relationship with Shirley`s husband Lennox. Penelope is a significant character not only because of having white skin colour among the other characters but also her hatred towards Shirley which is related to her affection for her black students. When she learns her true identity through a DNA test, she abandons her racist attitude. Megan/Morgan discovers themselves and their self-identities as gender-free with the help of Bibi who introduces her to the possibilities of a nonbinary life. Hattie, who is Morgan's grandmother, married an African American serviceman, and Grace who is Hattie`s mother and Morgan's great-grandmother.

The choice of characters and their reflections on modern-day Britain are significant in this novel. What Bernardine Evaristo argues about her motivations in writing this work is that:

I wanted to put presence into absence. I was very frustrated that black British women weren't visible in literature. I whittled it down to 12 characters – I wanted them to span from a teenager to someone in their 90s, and see their trajectory from birth, though not linear. There are many ways in which otherness can be interpreted in the novel – the women are othered in so many ways and sometimes by each other. I wanted it to be identified as a novel about women as well (Sethi)

Evaristo illustrates how each woman has been othered based on class, race, and gender. Although the stories are all about British Black women which illustrates how diverse their experiences and their stories are, even as they share a mutual tie of being Black women. She defines what it means to be a black woman in Britain today within the contemporary, personal, and political context that she has been in since she was born as an Anglo-Nigerian lesbian woman. What Evaristo does differently is bringing the generations of women together to reflect the complexities and ambiguity of race, gender, and class. *Girl, Woman, Other* represents a multiplicity of experiences for the reader with twelve different women's stories. While she presents the reader with so many characters, Evaristo provides readers with the recognition of themselves and their lives. In doing so, she creates an astonishing book that breaks the mainstream stereotypes while also producing a representation of a variety of black British women's experiences.

These novels have a lot in common; two things they have most common is that both reflect the literary canon inherited by white male dominancy and current complex and ambiguous problems that Britain is facing today. The white male dominancy in canon is a real struggle for Zadie Smith and Bernardine Evaristo who are Black British women writers from immigrant parents. Although they come from Caribbean and Nigerian backgrounds, they were born and grew up in Britain. Finding a place as a writer of colour in Britain is challenging. In this sense, their work can be interpreted as against this establishment of white male dominancy in the British literary canon. Another concern that they have common is the current complex and ambiguous problems that Britain is facing today. The social, political, and economic problems such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, LGBTQ+, Brexit are fundamental to understand these novels. On the one hand, it is a great example of these books are an endeavour to exhibit how varied the lives of black British women are, how the black lives matter and the me-too movements really shifted people's perception of race and gender made by black British women regarding who we are in a society, on the other hand how Britain has started to become a society where the increase in xenophobia led to the Brexit. In an interview in *The*

Guardian, Evaristo claims that "Black British women weren't noticeable in literature and how this encouraged her to write this novel with its theme of otherness" (Sethi). This thesis will also discuss the issue of otherness from the perspective of race, gender, and class and it will investigate how the complex and ambiguous narrative of language intertwined and intersected in the race, gender and class in *Girl, Woman, Other* and *NW*. The analysis of how these novels is represented through the language will start with a theoretical assessment. The close readings of the two novels will take their point of departure from the intersectionality of the characters' narratives who provide a chance to readers comprehend what other people encounter in their experiences through language. For this reason, this thesis has taken some inspirations from intersectionality; however, it won't be a prominent, actively used theory. As I mentioned above, I will be discussing the concepts of race, gender, and class within these novels. In order to explain these concepts, I will be detailly analysing what they mean, how I understand these concepts, how they are related to otherness, and how otherness forms itself through binary oppositions and with the concept of identity.

2.2   The concept of othering/otherness in relation to class, race, and gender

The novels are portraits of contemporary Britain that define the intersections of several identities which brings us to the concept of otherness. The theoretical perspective of the thesis will take its departure in of how otherness is relevant and significant in terms of race, class, and gender. The definite aim is to show how otherness always emerges as a deviance from the norm, which is often related to someone establishing the norm and the otherness deviating from that. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*,

> Othering is a process whereby individuals and groups are treated and marked as
> different and inferior from the dominant social group. Disenfranchised groups such as
> women, people of divergent ethnic backgrounds, working-class people, homosexuals,
> or migrants may all be othered and, in consequence, suffer discrimination.
> ("Othering")

The concept of othering is based on a social psychological idea in which one can be excluded and marginalized because of class, race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The concept of othering emphasizes how every society produces a sense of belonging and not belonging which results in creating identity by constructing social categories as binary opposites. Twentieth century, poststructuralist theorists; Claude Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes argue that the way we comprehend certain words depends on not the direct meaning, but it depends on the opposite or in other words binary opposites which underlines this fixed relationship between contrasting ideas. (Al Saidi 96). Examples here are the social construction of gender forms and the ideas about what it means to be a "man" or a "woman." These two identities are established as opposites, without recognizing alternative gender. According to French writer Simone De Beauvoir' argument woman is considered to be "the Other" of man because society considers women as "the Other" to men, masculinity is seen as the norm that applies to everyone. In other words, society constructs gender roles based on the assumption that men are the default, while women are seen as a deviation from the norm. This construction of gender perpetuates gender inequality and limits opportunities for women while it makes masculinity as the universal norm which is socially constructed.

French critical writer Michel Foucault argues the act of othering is a manifestation of power relations. According to Foucault, othering has a great correlation with power and knowledge. He believes when "one others another group, one draws attention to its perceived weaknesses to make ourselves look stronger" (Van Rheenen). It indicates a hierarchy that serves power where it already lies. Andrew Okolie claims that:

Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the "other". So, by defining itself a group defines others. Identity is rarely claimed or assigned for its own sake. These definitions of self and others have purposes and consequences. They are tied to rewards and punishment, which may be material or symbolic. There is usually an expectation of gain or loss as a consequence of identity claims. This is why identities are contested. Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both *self* and the *other*, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities (Okolie 2)

Dichotomies of otherness are taken for granted and presumed to be natural. Nonetheless, social identities are not natural, they represent an established social order a hierarchy where certain groups are established as being superior to other groups. The binary oppositions which create this division and hierarchy result in otherness. In this sense, otherness is very much connected to the concept of identity. British-Jamaican academician and writer Stuart Hall in his article "Who needs identity?" questions how we define ourselves. According to Hall, defining identity is similar to describing a culture that is not fixed, permanent, and subject to change. He believes identity is a fluid thing that is always performed. Performance or performativity is related to how one acts in line with what is expected with certain things from "the norm". There are certain expectations of how women are supposed to behave or act depending on different circumstances, for instance. Basically, most of the time we do perform by certain standards. How do different identities come together and constitute the self? For example, if one says she is a feminist what kind of qualification does she have? While it is the internal "self" from outside it is "the other" because the self is always defined through "the other". In this thesis, I will utilise cultural studies in order to unpack the following questions: how the binaries are constructed, and there are attempts to deconstruct them, how the black empowers to represent his voice to be seen and heard, what is it to be a woman of colour coming from a different economic class. These are the questions that are raised in both novels where one can belong to any kind of subgroup which is the reason why identity politics never end.

The idea of performativity can be also applied to all sorts of identities such as national, religious, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class. Unless one accepts the performance, one believes is essential, one has the ability to cause others to discriminate against others and inherently feel superior by implication. The more one perpetuates any kind of distinction based on superior naturalness over one to other, it ends up sooner or later discrimination. This discrimination brings inequality in every sense from macro to micro scale in daily life.

Colonialism, capitalism, and sexual orientations are ideologies which constitute such examples of the powers of othering race, gender and class creating subgroups within identity politics. Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane state in their book, *Cultural Studies*, that "[…] race is understood as an ideological construct in the service of world capitalism". (Barker and Jane 296) In this case, the overall aim of this project is to demonstrate not only that the notions of gender, race and class are constructed through history but also how the normative language coming from patriarchy, serves the ideological/political agenda of "the normal". In that sense, race, gender, and class are important concepts that I will unpack these issues by looking at the

language of these novels and questioning what is important about the concept of othering in terms of language. "Language constructs meaning. It structures which meanings can or cannot be deployed under determinate circumstances by speaking subjects" (Barker, 394). In this sense, language is not just an instrument for communication but also a system that shapes how we understand and describe ourselves. It impacts what can be said and how it can be said, and what meanings can be conveyed in specific contexts. Furthermore, the use of language is not neutral, as social, cultural, and historical factors influence it. Therefore, the way we use language is not just a reflection of our thoughts and ideas but also a product of the social structures that shape our lives. Language is not a neutral, but it is constitutive. Foucault considers language as an autonomous system with its own rules and functions (Olssen 7). It grows and produces meaning under specific material and historical conditions which can be resulted in the construction of certain concepts within a cultural sphere.

In the novel analysis, I take into consideration the narrative of the language in the characters through the emphasises on the inequalities. By doing so, I wanted to demonstrate how:

> language is seen to *construct* the subject. Perhaps the most radical result of these interconnecting but diverse ways of thinking about language was that no human utterance could be seen as innocent. Any set of words could be analysed to reveal not just an individual but a historical consciousness at work. Words and images thus become fundamental for an analysis of historical processes such as colonialism. (Loomba 57-8)

As a result, the importance of language lies in the idea that it is something individuals create on their own. However, they become a speaking subject by learning and conforming to a socially determined linguistic rules and expectations system. In other words, we do not invent language; instead, we learn and adapt to the language already established by society. The root of the problems concerning racism, gender, and class is the lack of recognition and acknowledgement of their existence. They are deeply embedded in cultural practices, language, and social relations. The use of discriminatory language and patriarchal systems lead to feelings of exclusion, alienation and "otherness" experienced by marginalised individuals. Today there is global anxiety regarding the LGBTQ+ community, which people see as a threat to the norms of society.

2.3 Class in Britain and its relation to colonialism and patriarchy

"The British, we are often told, are a people uniquely obsessed by class" says Jon Lawrence in his article "The British Sense of Class" (307). Lawrence believes that class is generally understood by sociologists, not as the structural inequalities in social capital but more like "distinctions based on perceived social difference" (307). He gives an example from David Cannadine's book called *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (1998), the reason why many Britons continue to conceptualize social inequality in terms of class is related to not seeing the constructed nature of class and class identities (308). Cannadine argues that this distinction is recognized by many historians as in the case of gender and race is very much similar to the distinction between class and socioeconomic position (Lawrance 307). David Cannadine claims that politicians have played a prominent role in developing influential rhetoric regarding the class and the language of the class from the nineteenth century reconstitution of social understanding to current events such as Brexit (Lawrance 308). Cannadine argues that the concept of class in Britain is mostly concerned with "reconstructing popular perceptions of the social order". (Lawrance 308). This idea relies on the belief in "hierarchy" which brings stability to the idea of persistent working class "deference" (Lawrance 309).

American historian and professor of history Paul S. Seaver claims in his article "Power Rankings" in the *New York Times* where he discusses about the book *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, the way English has been understood to view their society as an aspect of the Great Chain of Being (Seaver). He believes this hierarchal structure became more permanent and dominant within the effect of the industrial revolution which created momentum in the 1770s and 1780s that Britain's social and political structure was more severe and more enduringly transformed (Seaver). Paul Seaver provides example from the book of Cannadine, claiming that English society is hierarchical very much depending on part on "ideological need" (Seaver). His argument is based on the idea that the Industrial Revolution transformed this traditional society into the "class-dominated society of modern times, a development leading to the rise of modern parties" (Seaver). Since late 19th-century dehumanization of the working class in the Victorian era has brought its issues within the social structure until this day. For this reason, British society has a strong hierarchical structure based on ideological factors. Mainly the Industrial Revolution established class dominated society which impacts on social structures still. In this sense, my fundamental aim here is to demonstrate shortly the emergence of class and its implications today with neoliberalism and capitalistic ideologies. Moreover, what is

significant regarding the issue of class is that it operates as an intersection of oppression with race and gender.

Current economic policy takes place in almost all around the world is neoliberalism which is embedded in the capitalism. The advancement of capitalism has enhanced economic disparities more visible between the wealthy and poor. In this sense, capitalism on inequality has led to an increase in economic and social polarization. Despite the wealth gap has widened, capitalism surrenders and keeps exploiting many other social forces such as race, class, and gender. Nathalie Sokoloff and Fred Pincus believe that there is a great correlation/interrelation between all these social forces (of race, class, and gender) and contemporary capitalism (4). They consider socially constructed and culturally dominating systems of late twentieth century, and early twenty-first century capitalism to be based on the intersection of race, class, and gender (4). Akeia Benard argues in his article, "Patriarchal Capitalism: Feminist and Human Rights Perspective" that:

> Patriarchal capitalism and colonialism differ very little in structure, ideology, and method of conquer and oppression. Both are systems of White patriarchy. Both systems are violent and exploitative. Both rely on "ownership" of brown and Black bodies. Both are ultimately about profit-making. And both are systems of structural violence that routinely violate human rights. (Benard 2)

According to Akeia Benard, the ideology, structure, and method of oppression between patriarchal capitalism and colonialism are strikingly similar. Both systems are based on the supremacy of white patriarchy and rely on the exploitation and ownership of black bodies. They are both violent and exploitative and are centred on profit-making. Furthermore, both systems perpetuate structural violence. In this sense, they are the systems of oppression that rely on white male dominance and the exploitation of marginalized communities for profit. Both systems are based on a hierarchical structure where those in power exert control over those without power, and both systems use violence to maintain that control. This violence does not necessarily mean physical violence but rather symbolic. In *Girl, Woman, Other* and *NW*, this exploitation of labour was shown through different forms of oppression: patriarchy and racial oppression incorporating capitalism. (Berberoglu 1) As Berch Berberoglu states in his article:

Patriarchy and racial oppression, which developed with the emergence of class divisions in society, have become the twin pillars of capital accumulation process to generate greater profits for the capitalists, racial and gender oppression have thus become part of the process of capitalist development to maintain the system and to secure its future (76)

The intersection of patriarchy and racial oppression, which occurred alongside the emergence of class distinction in society, has become essential to the capital expansion and capitalists' pursuit of greater profits. Gender and racial oppression have been incorporated into capitalist development to ensure the system's continuity and stability. Berberoglu suggests that capitalist exploitation and oppression are indistinguishably linked with gender and racial oppression. His statement regarding capitalism confirms how it is inherited through social forces in our daily life. Although my starting point of this project is to show how language function to imprison women while at the same how language can be a tool for liberation, my aim is also to demonstrate how the narrative of the novels function to deconstruct structures of race, gender, and class. Hence, the importance of the way we use language can affect the policy of culture in this sense culture is political because it is expressive of relations of power so does the way we use the language. "The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force" (Marx 93). German Philosopher Karl Marx argued the priority of human beings is the production of their means of substance through labour. Marx claims that labour and all forms of social organization are about the relations between people and the hierarchy. What matters is power and conflict within the class division. Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane discuss in their book *Cultural Studies* "different forms of material organization and different social relations characterize each mode of production" which brings us to the fundamental class division in capitalistic dynamics: those who own versus those who try to survive (15). According to Marx, the ruling ideas of any society are those of the ruling class, meaning the class that holds the most material power also holds the most intellectual power. The primary goal of human beings is to produce the means of survival through labour, and social organization is based on the relationships between people and their hierarchy.

Therefore, the most essential aspect of society is power and conflict within the class division. Various forms of social organization and relations characterize each mode of

production. It leads us to the fundamental class division in capitalist dynamics: those who own the means of production and those who struggle to survive. Thus, the connection between patriarchy, racial oppression, and capitalism has become intertwined in society to ensure continuity. The system's stability is very much interrelated with the importance of language in shaping cultural policies and power relations. In this sense, Karl Marx's argument about the ruling ideas of any society is those of the ruling class, which holds both material and intellectual power explains that social organization is based on the relationships between people and the hierarchy, and power and conflict within the class division are essential aspects of society. Moreover, this hierarchical division can also be applied to the concept of race.

2.4 The emergence of race in terms of otherness

Theories related to the concept of race will take its departure points from Ania Loomba, Homi Bhabba, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said and David Olusoga. This thesis will use Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998) as a main book which provides an accessible overview of the historical, theoretical, and political aspects of colonialism and postcolonialism. Loomba gives a detailed insight of intersection of race, gender, and class with ongoing struggles around the world. She explores colonial and contemporary forms of racism, ideologies, and history of colonialism. She illustrates the relationship between colonial discourse and literature pointing issues of sexuality, and colonialism under the category of the intersection of feminism and postcolonialism. This chapter will provide an overview of an emergence of race in connection to othering/otherness.

The concept of race takes its origins in the discourse of Darwinism that distinguish types of people according to skin pigmentation. The attribution of these discourses is related to the abilities, used to rank racialized groups in a hierarchy of social superiority and subordination (Barker and Jane 296). Discourses such as Darwinism' characteristics attributes to the practise of placing people of colour into a different racial group of hierarchy of social dominance and subordination. In this sense, it is the language which assigns racialized groups into subordination. The concept of racialization is founded on the basis of race is a social

construction, not a biological or universal norm. Nasrullah Mambrol argues in his article "The Other, The Big Other and Othering", how critical theorists particularly oppose the binary oppositions such as Indian Postcolonial professor Homi Bhabha explains:

> The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. Often borrowing manoeuvres from deconstruction, critical theorists seek instead to unveil and critique the effort to establish a "sovereign Subject" over and against a constitutive other (Mambrol)

The historical formation of race brings the idea of power and subordination over people of colour which causes isolation and othering in many markets such as labour, housing, education, media, and other forms of cultural representation. In this sense, racialization embodies racism in itself in the forms of social, economic, and political subordination. *Girl, Woman and Other* and *NW* questions the heritage of Britain's colonial history. Evaristo spoke about the fact that there are mostly black women characters from 19 to 93 in her novel in conversation with *NPR's* Scott Simon that she wanted "to show the heterogeneity of who we are in this society, and to explore us as fully realized, complex, driven, flawed individuals whose stories are as worthy of telling as anyone else's." (Simon). What Evaristo and Smith try to emphasize in these novels is that there is a great shift in the consciences, recognition, and perception of Black people right now in Britain. Compared to past where there used to be racist doctrines in British law such as the Race Relations Acts between 1965 and 1968s or new scandal that took place in Britain called Windrush where people of colour was forced to leave the country illegally by the government. As an individual, having a skin colour that is not white, one can be resulted, defined, or perceived as an outcast in that particular time in Britain. During the post-WWII period' as Britain was recruiting people from its colonies to address labour shortages, individuals of mixed racial heritage were often assigned an imposed identity, such as "half-caste". Racial taboos were not limited to Black individuals alone, as their interracial marriages with white British partners could result in them being pushed back to the bottom of society, where such unions were considered socially unacceptable.

Human physical difference, most significantly the blackness of African skin, caused extreme challenges throughout centuries. Olosuga addresses that there were always questions regarding African people's skin colour: why they were black? Is it because of the severe heat in the continent? Would it make any difference if they would have settled down in Europe? Contrarywise, if Europeans settle in Africa, would their skin colour be black? Was this

blackness temporary or genetic? What would happen to children whose parents inter-racial? Overall, what black skin signify? According to the legend, Africans were the sons of Ham which justifies the explanation of their blackness and the slavery. As a result of humiliation of his father, Ham got his punishment through Noah's curse on his son, Canaan. Even though this story takes place in Genesis, it does not specify any racialised story. Interpretation of George Best who is a British explorer and a member of the Elizabethan court, is black people as "should be so black and loathsome, that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the world" (69). Olusoga concludes that it is not clear how this interpretation spread that fast; however, Best was not the only one who interpreted black skin of African as a marker of curse. He believes considering biblical knowledge on scripture used to be the highest source of knowledge in that age, meaning 16th century, the explanation of blackness for Africans derived from this Biblical idea's interpretation of a white British man who used to responsible for the slavery. What one can see through these interpretations and attributions to the word "Black" in order to define mostly the people of colour and the whole African continent, illustrates the fact that these discourses are ideologically constructed.

Indian academician Homi Bhabha's "The Commitment Theory", exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other are European construction. The other or otherness is identified with the depoliticized Eurocentric view. In this sense, Bhabha claims that it legitimizes "the representation of the relations of exploitation and domination in discourse division between first and third world" (2164). What Bhabha and many other postcolonial theorists believe that there is a high growth in the language of nationalism coming from European imperialism which articulates nationalism, economical and philosophical power in political acts expresses neo-colonialism by disregarding autonomy of people and places in African continent. They mean that with the increase of nationalists' discourses by ignoring the sovereignty of colonized countries, European imperialism as an ideology establishes its dogma upon these countries. Since the Western elite produces discourse of the other that reinforms its own power knowledge, otherness contains the effects of difference. It becomes a fantasy of a certain cultural space through deconstruction of "the epistemological edge of the west" (2165). Although the sentence appears to be a bit abstract and could have various interpretations based on the context. However, in this specific context, it implies that a particular cultural space is idealized or romanticized by analysing the Western ways of thinking and knowledge production. According to this "epistemological edge of the West" that the West's knowledge and ways of thinking are dominant and privileged, and by deconstructing them, the other

cultural space can be valued and appreciated. By challenging the dominant Western narrative, an alternative cultural space can be created and celebrated.

Today, David Olosuga argues that millions of African speaks English, coming from different countries and independent nations because of the continuation effects of British Empire in this sense the economic, linguistics, cultural links between Britain, Africa and West Indies did not occur within one day, rather the existence of interconnections of these still present in Britain's black people who claimed to be British citizen. Black Britons are whether symbolically or visually, its connections and interconnections are the constant reminder of the lost empire. After denouncing the laws regarding racism and anti-discrimination laws, black Britons' presence become clear. Although, all those laws, rules, and regulations regarding people of colour in Britain removed symbolically, what happened at the end is that we still have been witnessing the brutality of otherness through this historical and cultural construction.

What Spivak argues in her famous article called "Can a Subaltern Speak?" that the organization of the world is based on the discourses of Western capitalism and colonialism, which either perpetuates or undermines the marginalization of people of colour. In this case, the power structures and systems are designed to reinforce the oppression which are deeply embedded in the imperialism. The abuse of British imperialism affects this current identity politics in Britain. These effects of imperialism, postcolonial and neo-colonial continues in economic, political, language, as well as education and religion. As in the case of Commonwealth countries, political independence does not imply economic or cultural sovereignty over the countries. What Bhabha calls this situation as personal identity becomes based-on imitation in colonized countries.

The cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter, famous for her work on the dehumanization of the Black subject, has written an article entitled "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" where she addresses the issue from historical and sociological perspective to prove why Black subjects are regarded as non-human. Wynter explains that imperial expansion led to perceive Black people as "the Other" (3). The description of the opposite of "Other" highlighted a white, Western, bourgeois ethnocrats of Man which became the referent for what is human (266–292). What she calls as overrepresentation of black people is the source of today's coloniality of power which is a form of discrimination caused by the colonial legacy. I do believe this colonial legacy is underlined in the idea of "Eurocentric universalism takes for granted the superiority of European whereas inferiority of what is not" (Barry, 186). The perception of others is always depicted as inferior to the superior one. In my thesis context, the black women characters are othered, considered inferior compared to white

British women. In order to illustrate detailly, the source of this discrimination in otherness which, they encounter, one should discuss theory from *Orientalism* (1978) by Palestinian, American literary theorist and professor Edward Said. His criticism is based on the idea of Western conception of the East. The major concern from a postcolonial perspective is the nature of representation. As Said argues in his book *Orientalism*:

> Said's basic thesis is that Orientalism, or the 'study' of the Orient, 'was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). Said shows that this opposition is crucial to European self-conception: if colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual, and lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic that of hard work; if the Orient is static, Europe can be seen as developing and marching ahead; the Orient has to be feminine so that Europe can be masculine. This dialectic between self and other, derived in part from deconstruction, has been hugely influential in subsequent studies of colonial discourses in other places—critics have traced it as informing colonial attitudes towards (Loomba 65)

West's construction of the third world as "other", results in damaging stereotypes and creating binary oppositions. He argues Orient/Orientalism is the western perception of the east. Said claims that this misrepresentation, othering "the imagined space" constructed by the West (Said 51). While all the masculine qualities and attributes of civilized, rational, balanced, educated, and authority apply to the West whereas East is considered to be non-civilized, irrational, ignorant, sensual, impulsive, and feminine. According to Edward Said, *Orientalism* is a political vision that created a binary opposition between Europe and the East. Said demonstrates that this opposition was fundamental to European self-conception, as it allowed Europeans to construct a sense of superiority over the Orient. As it is stated above this binary opposition portrayed the East as irrational, barbaric, and static, while Europe was rational, civilized, and constantly developing. What is significant about this opposition is that also was used to justify colonialism, as the West believed that it was its duty to bring civilization to the East. This dialectic between self and other, which derived in part from deconstruction, has had a significant impact on colonial discourses. Colonial discourse are the forms of Western knowledge's categories and assumptions about cultural difference and colonialism. According

to Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba, "critics have pointed out that this dialectic informed colonial attitudes towards other colonized people, and that it helped to maintain European hegemony over the rest of the world" (65). Edward Said claims that: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1785). What Said creates by this statement is that awareness of power relations between Western and Third world countries where the hierarchy lies. Considering the orient as other, as a replacement of the self, I claim the fact that it is the same binary oppositions take in place in white versus black. According to Shannon Sullivan's article on the "Unconscious and Economic Operations of Racism", American sociologist and Africanist civil rights activist, W.E.B. Du Bois believes that "the concept of whiteness identity is formed by the claimed benevolent actions of colonialism" (Sullivan 217). In this sense, black is there as a result of white, other is there as a result of self. My main point from Edward Said's theory is specifically about the concept of otherness which remains on his influence from Jacques Derrida's centre versus margin as self-versus other. According to Edward Said, "the margin of the East helps defines the colonial centre of the West, and the oriental Other is a projection of these Western view that constructs it." (1782). Therefore, by doing so, this criticism draws attention to questions of identity which highlights this perception as a cultural construct. His theory enables us to understand how the power of discourse operates through language, literature, culture, and the institutions that govern our everyday lives.

In this sense, my aim is to show the discourse of colonialism has operated historically, socially, and culturally to maintain excluding or marginalizing "subaltern" voices through postcolonialism in which criticism lies on the Eurocentric point of view that was shown in canonical texts so far. The promoted ideas in nineteenth century imperialism are a project to bring civilization to non-civilized territories which caused their ideas as universal. They would consider it a civilized proper way of life to impose on that culture those ideals that disregards something completely. The universal ideas are accepted by Europeans as values based on the humanitarian idea of Enlightenment. Since then, Europeans considered themselves the epitope of civilization they believe that their responsibility is to spread that culture civilization to the non-civilized world. There is something significant regarding this mentality that disregards the very important aspect of European imperialism that is completely overlooked by the Europeans themselves. Slavery and the slave trade were the results of one of the most violent oppressions in human history against that humanitarian civilized, ideal Eurocentric universal values. In this

sense, while race as an otherness play a significant role in the lives of many people of colour; moreover, there is a reason why racism still functions as a form of otherness.

According to British cultural theorist and professor Paul Gilroy, "the political practices of modern nation-states are rooted in the colonial era's acquisition of the idea of racial hierarchy" (Gilroy 44). He believes that this racist pattern of thinking is derived from cultural rather than biological factors. The reason for the perpetuation of contemporary racism in Britain is the historical legacy of British power embedded in notions of nation, culture, identity, and race. Paul Gilroy claims in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004) that British nationalism's attitude toward immigrant populations, particularly to people of colour, derives from a desire to recreate past glory, which is embedded in the concept of postcolonial melancholia, where race is used to ease anxieties about the loss of national identity. His analysis highlights the significant impact of colonialism on modern nation-states' political practices, demonstrating how racial hierarchies have been perpetuated through cultural practices rather than biological factors. He argues that Britain's historical legacy of power has created a framework that perpetuates contemporary racism through the use of race to relieve anxieties about the loss of national identity. Gilroy's analysis suggests that creating a more inclusive and equitable society requires addressing these historical legacies and cultural practices perpetuating inequalities.

> There is a fault line between our past, present, and differences over how we negotiate the future, but the inequalities born from slavery mean for some apology without material action is truth without reconciliation. (Brown 6:24)

The relationship between our past, present, and future is divided by a fundamental issue, and disagreement over how to proceed. However, due to the inequalities that arose from slavery, merely apologizing without taking concrete action is insufficient to achieve true reconciliation. This statement highlights the complex and ongoing issues surrounding historical injustices like slavery. The idea of a "fault line" suggests a deep divide between different perspectives on these issues, particularly regarding reconciliation and reparations. Therefore, inequalities born from slavery reminds this historical injustice's long-lasting and ongoing impact and suggests that more than just an apology is necessary to address these issues. In this sense we should work on the importance of acknowledging past wrongs and taking tangible steps to address them and function towards a more balanced and equitable society. For this reason, the way we organize our systems is crucial. The way politics is structured will always impact the policies that are created. If the UK had a constitution, it would be preferable to have all issues, including

austerity and cost of living, embedded in an actual democratic system rather than the current system with its bizarre and archaic roles. Today, people are proud to display the Union Jack flag in the UK. However, this symbol has a genuine association with centuries of colonialism and slavery, reflecting the horrific history of Britain. The monarchy in Britain operates a medieval feudal system representing the legacy of the British empire. In this sense, the importance of the structure of political systems and their impact on policymaking is crucial to understand current inequality and discrimination in the UK. The contemporary political system of the United Kingdom, with its archaic roles, is not ideal, and a democratic system with a constitution would be better suited to address contemporary issues. The symbol of Union Jack flag and the feudal system employed by the monarchy, both of which are seen as legacies of Britain's imperial past. Hence, acknowledging this history and considering how it is embedded in current systems is essential for understanding and addressing societal inequalities.

2.5 Deconstruction of gender concerning patriarchal discourses

The attribution of femininity to every tiny detail is always associated with being weak or having a weakness. In this context, gender is a concept of social constructions of the sexed subject which has a problem with its cultural representation. The subordination of women has always been understood to be a structural condition. Barker defines structural subordination as patriarchy which is associated with masculinity and superiority. The use of female and male as binary opposites seems to be a natural approach to categorizing humans. In this sense, "Catharine MacKinnon argues that women's subordination is a matter of social power foundation on men's dominance of institutionalized heterosexuality" (Jackson 197). This subordination comes through the way we use language which is a tool for the construction of concepts in terms of the way itself forces people into categories.

What is truly mirrored in Evaristo and Smith's novel is how the political differences affect conflicts of interest among women of colour, women from different classes, and women of different sexualities. Women who do not see themselves represented in mainstream media or social agendas bring attention to the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and identities. This highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing differences among women. Due to the absence of representation and recognition, women are excluded and marginalized. There is a need to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of women's experiences and identities. *Girl, Woman, Other* and *NW* are all about socially constructed

identity politics which emphasize a multiplicity of female identity undermining solidarity and the united front of feminists, disturbing the dominant order while supporting resisting reading becoming against all women into one homogenous category as women. Bernardine Evaristo and Zadie Smith argue in their novels about sexist discrimination, and inequality in male-dominant literature referring to the importance of gender and sexuality and questioning how it feels to be a woman of colour coming from different classes. As Simone De Beauvoir argues in her book *The Second Sex*, men are the norm, the one that defines humanity, women are other defined against the norm (25). Evaristo and Smith claim that the language of the norm proves the existence of patriarchy. In order to deconstruct the patriarchal position, they do draw attention to voiceless women in contemporary Britain.

An Introduction Literature, Criticism and Theory, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle claim that "the one that our culture has fixed upon to define us most profoundly, in some respects perhaps even beyond that of ethnic origin, race or skin colour, is that of sexual preference, the sex of the person whom we desire" (264). According to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, our culture defines us more deeply through our sexual preference than even our ethnicity, race, or skin colour. They suggest that the gender of the person we desire is the most profound aspect that shapes our identity. Bennett and Royle remind us of how power of identity politics can affect even the choice of sexual preference as a determining factor of our daily lives. Certainly, the irrationality of this causes so many issues and illustrate how severely rooted in the discourses of the construction gender and sexual preference. Judith Butler, American feminist, and philosopher argues in her book *Gender Trouble* that gender starts with the identity politics which deduces, fixes subjects in line with what is considered to be normal (148). Whereas French philosopher, Jacques Derrida says identity is something "never given, received or attained: only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmic process of identification remains" meaning that it is a complex and ambiguous which one cannot neither get nor achieve, rather it is something in a constant change, progress, or development (Baggini). While Butler and Derrida problematize identity from two different perspectives, I do agree with these two philosophers that identity has a power of fixation on human beings by categorizing them but also creating this complexity around their individuality that makes it changeable.

According to French, literary theorist Michel Foucault difference between being in a different gender in the sense that you are the one or the other, which brings the idea who you are defined by the divisions. For example, only recently the sexual associations and individual identity that has established within selected recognized and free practices before that if we take consideration of early 17th century, the conception of sexualities historically and culturally

constructed, distanced, practised in a different way. According to Butler, gender and sexuality are performative concept instead verified by biology in the sense that: "gender identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (25). Gender is a cultural idea which construct identities such as class, race, religion. In this sense, it needs to speak a long with race, class, culture, and ideology. The way culture is oriented constitute a statement on human difference and creates this complex of discourses of men and women, not natural rather cultural. Butler believes that gender is a belief that works disregarding the other, and she adds "the radical dependency of the masculine subject the female "other" suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory" meaning patriarchy refuses any representation of women's subjectivity therefore rejecting to identify their individual existence, considering as a threat to autonomy of patriarchal masculinity (Butler 28). What I mean by patriarchal masculinity is the norm that is imposed upon us by male domination through the construction of patriarchal discourses.

While French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir claims the idea of masculine versus feminine binary oppositions create this hierarchy where women are subordinate, Butler argues that the concept of woman is problematic in a way that it is reflected as made rather not born. In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler claims that:

> If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (10-11)

According to her, the distinction between sex and gender lies on the idea of naturally given versus culturally acquired. She underlines that sex is also a social construct based on a social and cultural discourses within the frame of its history, social, political, and economic underlying forces. What she means with a social construct is that concepts like sex and gender are the product of performances such as one's behaviours, everyday actions, the way one talks, wears, acts as well as certain expectations considered to be vital as being in a male or in a female identity -men have to behave in masculine ways whereas women have to behave in accordance with femininity-. Butler's assumption regarding what is normal results in non-normal, less full fulling lives. When one chooses to the other which is not the norm, it is considered to be abnormal which leads to suffering prejudices or actual violence against individuals. There is no fundamental natural basis to gender and one's sex instead the social conventions that stated

above implement these imposed natural bases. Certain expected acts construct these categories of gender by individuals themselves. Where do these classifications come from? Why do we need to label ourselves or others depending on the gender preferences? How they influence the prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance in a society and what are the impacts to society? According to Butler's assumption, what is normal results in non-normal, less fulfilling lives. While Butler concludes her main argument in *Gender Trouble* as "sex is not given bodily", whereas in *Bodies That Matter*, she points the fact that it is "a process of materialisation that stabilises over time" (9). She questions in what parameters norms of sex is materialized and how this materialization establishes normative conditions. Her claim approaches in a point where she criticizes feminist not embracing the variability and multiplicity of gender. Release from the patriarchy can be truly happened through supporting LGBT+ community. Butler believes gender is culturally formed consequently one needs to resist the violence that is imposed by the ideal gender norms, especially for those who are gender different or uncommon in their gender presentation in a society.

The foundation of binary opposition of male versus female begins with the preoccupation of women's body. Butler uses Michel Foucault's theory presented in his famous book titled *Discipline and Punish* where he argues challenges and the relations of the body. Foucault claims that subjugation enforced on prisoners is not something internalized rather it is marked on their bodies. This method of discipline forms, controls, and adjusts every action upon an individual's body (Foucault 49). Butler adopts Foucault's argument merged with the concept of gender by claiming that gender is a cultural mediator which functions as shaping, marking with the remnants of discourses on the body, therefore establishing socially construction concepts, gender roles in identities such as masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality. As Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin argue in their book titled *Critical Terms for Literary Study* that "…masculinity as a given expressed a traditional conviction that the differences between men and women arise from natural causes to organize the cultural order" (264). At one point, these discourses are ideologically formed and constructed in order to unify this notion of cultural order, meaning being in line with the norm of society.

The foundation of the modern image of gender principally has its roots in psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, and the founder of the theory of symbolic order consider socialization as an entrance to language into the symbolic order. Judith Butler uses Lacanian theory of symbolic order to illustrate that accepting the norms of the world, of the father, logos, already dominantly patriarchal male-oriented institution. Therefore,

Butler claims that "language structured by the paternal law and its mechanisms of differentiation." (56-7). Although the language is gendered, it belongs to the symbolic order because of the patriarchy's role in shaping and dominating. In his article, "Othering, identity formation, and agency", Sune Qyotrup Jensen claims that there are two important points that can be derived from Lacan:

> Firstly, language plays a central role in constituting identity. This understanding of identity later led Althusser to coin the notion of interpellation, a notion grasping how individuals are hailed by ideology to occupy specific subject positions, thereby achieving identity. Secondly, Lacan stresses that identity is fundamentally gained in the gaze of the powerful. (64)

Whereas American literary theorist Judith Butler believes in there is no essential biology laying under gender emphasizing the necessity to come up with an explanation that will obliterate that binary opposition on female or male inverting, opposition. Butler argues in her book Gender Trouble, in chapter 27 where "she makes a strong case for refusing to think of the body as the ground of identity (371). Butler claims that we become our gender through performing it. We come to understand and internalize gender through that performance, which is the reason we tend to believe this is natural and essential. The same theoretical approach can be applied to race, which has a direct connection to the class. Her theory proposes an alternative to that which would not necessarily prioritize one over another. She would consider all genders as performative; therefore, both male and female genders are constructed (Butler 11). Gender identity is a performative accomplishment which is a historical idea that is culturally constructed and historically oriented thought to us ensure the reproduction of mankind. She believes that it is a historical concept in which we are led to or tend to believe that there are only two sexes. The performance is an enactment of what Butler calls "the embodiment of different possibilities" (89). One becomes her or his gender through performing, understanding, and internalizing that performance. In this case, my aim is to demonstrate how gender identity is facilitated through language both as a way to control the individual and as a tool for freedom in *Girl, Woman, Other*, and *NW*. Traditionally gender has been discussed in a feminist context but with these novels, we realize that race, gender, and class are very interlinked that is why this thesis will use intersectionality as a background theoretical field in the thesis, rather than a main theory.

The concept of intersectionality comes from the article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" by Kimberl*é* Crenshaw who is an American lawyer and activist. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as:

 a metaphor for understanding the ways multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves which create obstacles that often are not understood within conventional ways of thinking about anti-racism, feminism, or whatever social justice advocacy structures we have. (Crenshaw, 00:00-00:30)

Intersectionality is a kind of feminist theory that shows things we consider equality for women is not only women's gender but also women's race and women's class. According to Patricia Hill and Sirma Bilge, "intersectionality is about the understanding complex architecture of social and economic inequalities bringing about social justice-oriented change" (1). They believe intersectionality speaks to the language of activism where the inequality lies. Hill and Bilge argue in their book Intersectionality that inequality is not only created by one axis but many other axes that work together and influence each other (7). In this sense, intersectionality illustrates how social divisions of race, gender, and class position people differently in the world. The vulnerability of people depends on their background structure. Zillah Eisenstein argues in a Feminist Wire article:

When civil rights activists speak about race, they are told they need to think about class as well. When anti-racist feminists focus on the problems of gendered racism, they are also told to include class. So (…) when formulating class inequality, one should have race and gender in view as well. Capital is intersectional. It always intersects with the bodies that produce the labour. Therefore, the accumulation of wealth is embedded in the racialized and engendered structures that enhance it. (Eisenstein)

Intersectional frameworks reveal how race, gender, class, and many other social inequalities relate in complex and intersecting ways to produce economic inequality. Interdepended system of discrimination by multiple sources of oppression like identity markers; race, gender, and class results in one single categorical disadvantage as a subordination. Kimberl*é* Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a framework for hypothesizing the juxtaposition of the multi-dimensionality of black women.

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The intersectionality of identity and its impact on oppression is a central theme in my analysis of the two novels, *NW* by Zadie Smith and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo, as the characters navigate the various forms of subjugation and inequality related to the race, gender, and class, which is unique to their identities. Although all the characters in the novels encounter challenges of subjugation and inequality under the roof of identity, they experience distinctive forms of these challenges that differ. Having intersectionality as a background theory in my thesis project gives me an understanding of this complex structure embedded in inequality. Usually, one tends to think that:

> The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. (Hill Collins and Bilge 2)

Nevertheless, when it comes to social inequality:

> people's lives and the organisation of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (Hill Collins and Bilge 2).

In this sense, the power structures in society are not merely determined by one social division, such as race, gender, or class, but by multiple influential factors that are interconnected, intersected, and interrelated. Therefore, the use of intersectionality as a background tool for my analysis enables me to understand better the complexity of identity politics, inequality, and otherness, which brings the world's current issues, such as globalisation, capitalism, Brexit, LGBTQ+ and the Black Lives Matter movement. Therefore, theory of intersectionality conceptualizes the interconnected nature of social categorization such as race, gender, and class.

2.6 Intersections and complexities of identity, otherness, race, gender, and class

As it is established in above, identity is a complex concept that can be approached from various perspectives. One way to think about identity is through identification with self-descriptions and the social identity expectations and opinions that others have of us. In this sense, identity takes a narrative form, constructed through the stories we tell about ourselves, and the stories others tell about us. As I will explore the topic of identity, my starting point will be "personhood is not a given, but rather a cultural production" (Barker and Jane 295). According to Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane's book *Cultural Studies Theory and Practise*: "subjectivity and identity are contingent, culturally specific productions that are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which we live" (295). The argument highlights the importance of the social and cultural contexts in determining subjectivity and identity. It suggests that subjectivity and identity are not inherent or fixed but constructed through social and cultural interactions. The notion of contingency suggests that subjectivity and identity are not predetermined but rather are shaped by the circumstances and environments in which individuals find themselves. According to this argument, identities are not universal but culturally specific productions. Therefore, the statement emphasizes the need to understand the socio-cultural contexts that shape subjectivity and identity and the significance of such contexts in shaping individual and collective identities. If we take into consideration Barker's and Jane's theory, many cultures do not have the concept of the pronoun "I" because they do not have a perception of self and personhood. Norbert Elias argues that the idea of the "I" as a self-aware object is a modern western conception that emerged from science and the "Age of Reason" (qtd. Barker and Jane 295). This indicates that identities are entirely social constructions and cannot exist outside cultural representations. In this sense, understanding identity highlights the importance of recognising and critically examining how identities are constructed and how they can impact individuals and groups in society, as in the case of the novels *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other*.

This thesis will examine the themes of racism and racial otherness experienced by black women in Britain, as portrayed in the novels *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Zadie Smith and Bernardine Evaristo. These authors highlight the various forms of daily racism and discrimination their co-protagonists face. Race is often characterized in relation to identities that are marginalised and perceived as other by members of dominant cultures. My research will focus on the impact of colonialism on how race is complex and multifaceted. I will

demonstrate how colonial discourse, subjectivity, and language have all significantly restructured ideologies of race, racism, and racial differences. The legacies of colonialism and the history of the British Empire have contributed to the complexities of colonial and postcolonial subjects and identities. It is crucial to understand the complex restricting of individual and collective identities within the context of the history and legacies of colonialism. According to Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba, the concept of race has been a significant but vulnerable aspect of human identity, as it is challenging to control and maintain but remains influential in causing devastating consequences. The idea of race is artificially constructed but has real impacts on society. "Race" came to represent a notion of an "imagined community", similar to Benedict Anderson's description of nations. Both races and nations are viewed as imagined communities that unite some people and distinguish them from others (Loomba 120).

The term "race" can be compared to the concepts of "gender" and "patriarchy" in feminist discourse. Both novels are examples of patriarchy as describing an unequal relationship that operates in conjunction with other social constructions, such as race and class. Similarly, the impact of gender is interrelated with other factors in society, depending on the context. Especially in Evaristo's novel, we can see that "patriarchal oppression and colonial domination have been conceptually and historically connected" (Loomba 13).

> The cultural hierarchy established by the combination of skin colour and female behaviour places white British at the top and black Africa at the bottom, indicating that not all margins are equally distant from the centre. (Loomba 146-7)

In this sense, a cultural hierarchy is determined by skin colour and female behaviour. It implies that this hierarchy is not accidental but rather an intentional construction that has been put in place. Furthermore, this hierarchy is not simply a matter of distance from the centre but a complex interplay between various factors. In this case, the hierarchy places white British men at the top, then white British women as second, indicating that they are seen as the most central and influential group. In contrast, black African descent is placed at the bottom, indicating they are seen as marginal and powerless. Overall, the novels highlight how race and gender intersect to create hierarchies of power and privilege within societies. When it comes to the distinction between male and female genders, it is a defining feature of society, with these binary oppositions continuing to operate to this day. This has resulted in a set of expectations damaging to women, produced by cultural attributions of what it means to be a woman. These cultural expectations are perpetuated through various means, including the media and

socialization processes. Through the lives of fictional characters, we can observe how the power of sexual preferences determines in shaping the daily lives that influence the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed. Therefore, it creates this impact on the actions and decisions people take. The interconnection between gender and sexuality is intricate and diverse, as social norms and expectations frequently limit individual freedom and self-expression.

The intersections of feminism and colonialism cannot be separated from capitalism, which influences colonized people and women dependent on labour. In this sense, an individual's gender and race are aligned or obscured by capitalism's ideology, which is based on exploitation. The established racial hierarchies and patriarchal agenda allow capitalism to reinforce a class system that enhances capitalist production. Therefore, capitalism neither excludes nor ends these ideologies; rather depends on them and builds up their outcomes. These outcomes are reflected in the novel as a neoliberalism influence. As in the case of *NW*, continuing racial hierarchies and patriarchal ideologies are crucial for reinforcing neoliberalism. The subjugation of Black women, the marginalization of gender, and the commodification of women's bodies by capitalist operations, which establish specific standards, are all explored in Zadie Smith's *NW*. "Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* argued that the new global order should still in fact be called Empire" (Loomba 18). Their definition of contemporary empire is based on the idea of inclusion of minorities specifically into the mainstream, rather expelling them. Therefore, their argument claims that:

> contemporary empire is "imperial and not imperialist" because it does not consist of powerful nations that aim to 'invade, destroy and subsume subject countries within its sovereignty' as the old powers did but rather to absorb them into new international network (Loomba 19)

They argue that the current form of empire can be classified as "imperial" rather than "imperialist" because it differs from the traditional approach of powerful nations invading and subjugating other countries within their sovereignty. Instead, the contemporary empire seeks to assimilate these countries into a new global network. This statement can be analysed in terms of globalization. It suggests that today's dominant mode of power is no longer based on direct control and colonization but on economic and cultural integration across national borders. The idea implies a globalization process involving the spread of a standard set of values, norms, and

practices and the diffusion of economic and political power beyond the boundaries of individual nation-states.

Considering the recent political climate, particularly within the last five years and across various Western countries, it is evident that nationalism has replaced other ideologies. In today's world, things are accumulating quickly, which requires action. However, people now have the tools to stand up against cruelty and are no longer oppressed. This collective change demolishes the old-world order where one group holds power over another. As described in William Butler Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming", "The falcon cannot hear the falconer", meaning that marginalized groups no longer listen to those in power. The once dominant Western man is no longer at the centre of the universe, resulting in cultural fragmentation and disintegration. The current state of anarchy in the world represents a lack of order, and culture has become decentralized with a lack of coherence and unity.

According to Mike Featherstone's argument, there is a sense of cultural fragmentation in contemporary times. People are increasingly deconstructing and questioning traditional cultural norms from what is considered centre as West. The process of globalization has been helping to undermine the alleged integrity and unity of nation-state societies. However, we should be aware of assuming that this is the whole story because the notion of "society" has long been as much a projected image of what social life should be like as a reality (Featherstone 2). There is a growing awareness that culture is not merely centred in the West and that there are other regions and populations outside of this centre, periphery, that are social agents in the globalized world. Featherstone argues that cultural fragmentation causes people to question the centre of modernity, which was previously the West. This shift is continuing to reshape the world. The central belief is that culture has lost its centre, resulting in a lack of coherence and unity which can no longer deliver a good illustration of a structure that can be used to manage lives. In this way, globalization adds another layer of complexity to our understanding of the relationship between race, gender, class, and identity.

Hence, globalization is an essential factor to be considered when examining these issues. While these theoretical thoughts are critical in legitimizing the constructed concepts of race, gender, and class, the principle of this thesis is to question the complex and ambiguous structure of the intervention and intersection of the narrative of language in *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other*. By challenging the norm, and deconstructing the default, one can put aside the biased constructed perceptions such as race, gender, and class that are imposed upon us.

Chapter 3: *NW* by Zadie Smith

As I will demonstrate by close reading, the subjugation carried through constructed discourses about class, race, and gender functions to imprison the human being, which Zadie Smith targets in her novel, and this is what I will unpack and discuss in this chapter.

3.1: The significance of location in *NW*

In an article by Sarah Hughes' in *The Guardian*, she quotes Ben Judah saying that Zadie Smith describes London as "a state of mind" presenting a working-class view of immigrants and ethnic identity (Hughes). Zadie Smith writes about a London, both faulty and vivacious as a person of colour. On the one hand, she illustrates London as lively, energetic, and dynamic, with a vibrant culture and diverse communities; on the other hand, Smith illustrates how London is imperfect and has problems such as inequality, discrimination, and social division. Together, these two representations suggest a complex and contradictory image of London as an exciting and challenging place with strengths and weaknesses.

As mentioned above, the abbreviation of the book title clearly states the specific place and the postal code. These characters in the novel share a common working-class origin, located in the imaginary Caldwell estate in Willesden. Therefore, Zadie Smith specifies the setting as a particular place and postal code by creating the struggle of British working-class origin of the characters and their residency in the Caldwell estate, emphasising the role of place and class in the narrative.

NW plays with the interconnection of past events and possible futures within the characters whose narrative structures take readers through their life by echoing. The novel is centred on four characters: Leah Hanwell, Natalie Blake (formerly known as Keisha), Felix Cooper, and Nathan Bogle; all get their chapters except Nathan, who comes and goes in some chapters. The novel introduces these characters as struggling with maturity, revealing several phases of their identity growth. The novel's first chapter, "Visitation", is described from Leah's point of view in a dense stream-of-consciousness mode. She finds herself in a crisis caused by class, forced motherhood, and race. Beatriz Pérez Zapata claims in her article "IN DRAG: Performativity and Authenticity in Zadie Smith's *NW*" Zadie Smith wanted to "reverse the Western centre/periphery dualism by marking Leah's whiteness" (88). Smith presents Leah as isolated

and signals her feeling of unbelonging because of her disadvantaged position in her class. As a white Irish woman married to a husband of Algerian origin, the couple represents a multicultural image commodified and colonised by the upper classes, limiting their agency. The second chapter of the novel, entitled "Guest", observes Felix Cooper, a young film producer, during his day in London. At the end of his part, random violence occurs, and he is left for dead.

"Host" is the novel's third and most introductory section and tells us the story of Natalie Blake from childhood to adulthood, centring on the development of Natalie's character. Her "cleverness and will-to-power" (Smith 160) allow her to rise above where she comes from gradually. The struggle as she grows up in a small and underprivileged council estate in the Willesden area of NW causes her to be ambitious enough to leave the estate and becomes a barrister. As part of this process, she also changes her name from Keisha to the less ethnically marked and posh Natalie. After her marriage with Frank, a successful lawyer, Nathalie starts questioning her life before and after marriage. She moves to a better area of Willesden where she has a better life than the Caldwell council estate. The part where things become more problematic for Nathalie is when Frank discovers her email address which she has been using to arrange sex with young men. This event brings the reader to the last chapter of the novel, "Crossing", which belongs to Natalie and her old classmate Nathan Bogle as they walk through parts of northwest London. Leah joins Nathalie towards the end of the novel, and they talk to each other about their marriages, questioning how far they are in life while Nathan and many others cannot do it. While these two women reconnect, they call the police to tell their suspicion about Nathan as Felix's murder.

3.1.1 The importance of place and its implication to social mobility and meritocracy

According to John Mullan's article in *The Guardian* entitled "John Mullan on *NW*", "events are subordinated to a sense of place in *NW*" *(*Mullan). Mullan underlines the importance of the setting in shaping the events and actions. Hence, the place is a constant reminder for the class in the novel. Smith writes about Northwest London, which depicts a sense of social marginalisation that is exclusive, occupied, and varied like London itself. She raises class and race themes; central to such themes is the place where you live. In this part of the chapter, this thesis will discuss the significance of the place in the novel, the consequences of choosing Northwest London as a setting, and themes such as social mobility and meritocracy in the

British class system. For example, the first-time meeting with Nathan Bogle occurs on the bus while Leah and her mom are there:

> A jolting form of time travel, moving in two directions, imposing the child on this man, this man on the child. One familiar, one unknown. The Afro of the man is uneven and has a tiny grey feather in it. The clothes are ragged. One big toe thrust through the crumby rubber of an ancient red-stripe Nike Air. The face is far older than it should be, even given the nasty way time has with human materials. He has an odd patch of white skin on his neck, yet the line of beauty has been entirely broken. – Nathan? – All right, Mrs. Hanwell. (Smith 45)

The quotation above is from the first chapter which the reader encounters events through Leah's stream of consciousness. While Leah is in limbo at this point, Nathan has lost his life's meaning. As it is mentioned in the introduction, Smith uses Nathan as a character who "comes and goes", mainly providing other characters to make didactic comparisons between them and him regarding the meritocratic idea of what if you do not work hard.

Zadie Smith uses the encounter of the main characters as not a coincidence since the effect of the location in *NW* produces coherence and unity within the setting itself, resulting in cohesion between a particular class of people, race, and gender. Not only is this concept of place always present in the lives of characters in the novel as part of their identity, but each character also has a clash of identities trying to find their roots.

When Stuart Hall discusses cultural identification in his article "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities", he emphasises the characterisation of "one's identification with one's roots" as establishing "stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (Van Ameelsvort 424). Jesse van Ameelsvort argues in her article "Between Forster and Gilroy: Race and (Re) connection in Zadie Smith's *NW*" that "these frames of reference are grounded in a community that arises from shared historical experiences and culture with all the common codes that come with such sharing". (424) Van Ameelsvort claims if one orients oneself towards "routes" then future becomes as important as the past. In this sense, as Hall asserts identity is a "matter of becoming as well as being" (Hall 225) in which Smith portrays the transformation of the characters on perpetual change, allowing them to be multi or bi-racial, trying to build identity process within a society where the roots matter. This ongoing reminder of roots is clearly exemplified by the place in *NW*, the local communities where the characters grew up, and the wider setting of postcolonial London. Since the routes are embedded in the concept of

roots, the intersection of class and race plays a vital role in the characters' identity change. Van Amelsvoort quotes from John McLeod, "postcolonial London emerges at the intersection . . . between the material conditions of metropolitan life and the imaginative representations made of it." (22). Smith reflects London's material conditions, such as memorials and buildings, and are remaining notices of Britain's imperial triumphs, therefore presenting an apparent disparity with its postimperial versus the multi-ethnic, multiracial, and multicultural body of residents as in the quotation below:

> Bearing no relation to the debates in the papers, in Parliament. Everybody loves sandals. Everybody. Birdsong! Low-down dirty shopping arcade to mansion flats to an Englishman's home is his castle. Open-top, soft-top, drive-by, hip-hop. Watch the money pile-up. Holla! Security lights, security gates, security walls, security trees, Tudor, Modernist, post-war, stone pineapples, stone lions, stone eagles. Face east and dream of Regent's Park, of St John's Wood. The Arabs, the Israelis, the Russians, the Americans; here united by the furnished penthouse, the private clinic. If we pay enough, if we squint, Kilburn need not exist. Free meals. English as a second language. Here is the school where they stabbed the headmaster. Here is the Islamic Centre of England opposite of the Queen's Arms. Walk down the middle of this, you referee, you! Everybody loves the Grand National. Everybody. Is it really only April? And they are off! (Smith 39-40)

In this sense, *NW* creates a strong relation between particular neighbourhoods with their ethnic or racial backgrounds in Northwest London, where the characters are not only associated with that specific place but also characterised within the category of bigotry and stereotype based on where they live and come from. Zadie Smith echoes the postcolonial literature side of London by showing various definitions related to people, city, and buildings concerning Northwest London, underlining place as both advantage and disadvantage in which characters, such as Nathalie, can convert her own identity and story throughout the novel, what Michael Keith and Malcolm Cross argue about the notion of "the racialisation of space, implying the construction of space in racialised terms, which in turn allows for people to be put in place" (qtd. Van Amelsvoort 424). It indicates the characters in the novel have already destined for a particular type of life, labelled in a specific class just because the place they live is categorised as a construction of racialised space. Hence, Smith proves this notion of the racialisation of

space by creating a specific class of people with different ethnicities and racial backgrounds by putting them in Northwest London, as in the paragraph below:

> From A to B redux: sweet stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab, exhaust fumes of a bus deadlock.
>
> […] Everybody loves fags. Everybody, Polish paper, Turkish paper, Arabic, Irish, French, Russian, Spanish, News of the World. Unlock your stolen phone, buy a battery pack, a lighter pack, a perfume pack, sunglasses, three for a fiver, a life size porcelain tiger, golden taps. Casino! Everybody believes in destiny. Everybody. It was meant to be. It was just not meant to be. Deal or no deal? TV screens in the TV shop. TV cable, computer cable, audio-visual cables, I give you good price, good price. Leaflets, call abroad 4 less, learn English, eyebrow wax, Falun Gong, have you accepted Jesus as your personal call plan? Everybody loves fried chicken. Everybody. Bank of Iraq, Bank of Egypt, Bank of Libya. Lone Italian, loafers, lost, looking for Mayfair. A hundred and one ways to take cover: the complete black tent, the facial grid, back of the head, Louis Vuitton- stamped, Gucci stamped, yellow lace, attached to sunglasses, hardly on at summer dresses, blouses, vests Gyspy skirts, flares. (Smith 39-40)

Zadie Smith makes the reader feel like NW-er through the stream of consciousness as a literary device in this passage. All the descriptions, such as buildings, shops, tower block, and bridge, the characters on busy Kilburn High Road where class and colour intersect, as well as posh Queen's parkers are familiar to the reader who grew up in the area, but also accessible to the reader who does not know the area. In this paragraph, Leah's thoughts and observations create a particular route for a reader to capture the experience of constant moving and definitions regarding the area because of her concerns regarding the concept of identity, like many other characters in the novel. Through Leah's perception, the representation of the intersection of class, immigration, and gentrification in the city is incredibly stressed. We also, moreover, get to understand Leah's despair, having poorly paid charity work, a fantasist husband, a flat with a rent beside her best friend Nathalie, who, in contrast, has a posh lifestyle (being a lawyer, a rich husband, and two beautiful children).

In her article "*NW*, By Zadie Smith" in the *Independent*, Suzi Feay mentions that Smith plays "a paranoiac storyline about a clash of cultures and classes. But her sense of class is more nuanced, or perhaps simply more modern" (Feay). Feay believes that Smith's writing includes a storyline that explores the tension between different cultures (meaning immigrant

backgrounds) and social classes but also underlines that Smith's understanding of class is more complex and contemporary than what is typically portrayed in literature. In this sense, identity and belonging to a specific place are one of the main themes of *NW* within the class frame.

> "Not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century." From the outset, when a crack-addled neighbour scams cash out of trusting Leah, we grasp that the ladder of mobility has been hauled up and stashed away. Yet Leah and Keisha, born (like their creator) in the mid-1970s, have both climbed it – though to very different heights. (Tonkin)

According to Boyd Tonkin, not everyone has equal access to opportunities and success in society. What Tonkin defines is the illustration of the lack of trust and mobility in the community. These two female characters, Leah and Keisha, are like the author, Zadie Smith, because they are all from the generation of mid-1970s when social mobility and inequality were on the rise in the UK.

3.1.2 The consequences of class and social mobility to "escape"

NW is concerned with the consequences of class and social mobility and investigates the validity of concepts like mobility, meritocracy, or individual improvement within the framework of class, race, gender and, as a result, identity. Consequently, social mobility and meritocracy bring the idea of escaping from your class rather than producing cohesion among people. The belief is that the core of inequality comes from the division of wealth and power. What Smith does in the novel solution for this kind of social illness is not to escape but to challenge this inequality in allocating wealth and power. The idea is that living in a meritocracy allows people to judge members of society, which results in the concept of escape. What is interesting regarding the characters in the novel and their relation to the writer is that, as stated above, they belong to the generation that came out of the 70s when Britain suffered a catastrophic economic shock and was plagued with massive strikes. Britain's Conservative prime minister struggled to answer for the cost-of-living crisis aiming to achieve high wages and a high-growth economy. It was being affected by high pressures and rising wage demands. The 70s was a time of mass production and mass consumption.

"Today's economy is dominated by niche production and niche consumption, where what you buy defines you much more than what you do to earn a crust." (Inman). The current economy is characterized by the production and consumption of recession products; the goods and services individuals purchase define their identity more than their occupation. The quotation highlights that economic shifts affect individuals' identities defined by the goods or, in other words, things they consume rather than their occupation or income. In this sense, the novel is very much connected to the austerity policies and cost of living crises of Britain's economic and political turmoil.

Smith's sense of place and her awareness of British social class show the concept of escape in the novel. Escape, in a way that to find a way, going into complete isolation, disappearing within a constant moving. Each character leads another path and recognizing each other is always a struggle both literally and figuratively, says Anna Leszkiewicz in her article "The BBC adaptation of *NW* is more relevant than ever after Brexit" in the *New Statesman*. She argues in her article that "they are all in various degrees of happiness – that don't necessarily correlate with their degree of social status" (Leszkiewicz). Although, characters in the story experience different levels of happiness, which may not necessarily solely correspond to their social status; however, Smith's interview on BBC Radio 4 where she claims "assumption that rising to a middle-class life is the aim of everybody, and the final example of human happiness. Of course, when you meet middle-class people, so many of them are intensely miserable." (Flanders 03:04). Natalie's move into a middle-class life has left her lonely, filled with a "need to slip into the lives of other people". The impact of social mobility has a massive effect on specific communities and districts. However, Leszkiewicz believes it is significant to understand what it does to people's emotions and interpersonal relationships. "I'm actually living in a tower block," Smith mentions in the same Radio 4 interview:

> A tower block that, physically, is not a million miles away from the tower block I
> lived in a council estate […] The actual, physical space of this block is not much
> different than a million high-rises in London. So, again, you wonder if it's the actual
> structure of the thing that is the curse, or the way people are thought of in that
> building, the way they think of themselves. (Flanders 35:30)

This brings us to the end of *NW*, where Leah struggles to comprehend why she has been lucky enough to lead a life compared to her school friends. "It's 'cause we worked harder, because we were smart, and we wanted to get out. People like [Nathan] Bogle, they just don't want it

enough. I'm sorry if that answer sounds ugly to you, Lee, but it's the truth." (Smith 332). Neither the readers nor Leah believes that Anna Leszkiewicz quotes from Smith in the *NYRB*, "Extreme inequality fractures communities, and after a while, the cracks gape so wide the whole edifice comes tumbling down" (Leszkiewicz). Anna Leszkiewicz claims if cracks start to occur once, it will become too late to create solutions in order to prevent discrimination within inequality in British society. Although *NW* cannot present any solutions to the problems of extreme inequality, it creates awareness and questions current complex issues in Britain.

In BBC's podcast *Start the Week*, Stephanie Flanders talks about social mobility's effect on our lives and how Zadie Smith's novel NW portrays modern urban life in which characters try, but mostly fail, to escape their past. In the same podcast, columnist Owen Jones and historian David Kynaston discuss what meritocracy and opportunity mean in today's society concerning the concept of social mobility. Smith finds things miserable because middle-class and upper-middle-class life is living in isolation, having their own house, and no need to speak with their neighbours. This idea is that the higher you go, the less contact you have with other people. Social mobility is underlined as undesirable when one becomes middle class and isolated from the community. Ultimately, it can be considered immoral to draw oneself away from poverty, not the rest of your community. As in the case of Nathalie, despite being isolated from the circle around her, she is critical towards broken and distinct metropolitan scenery, which she encounters as almost pleasant, which suggests a certain degree of connection with the city.

In the book, Zadie Smith believes that Natalie misses exactly the commonality of state life, the lack of a certain kind of community. In the BBC podcast entitled "Zadie Smith on social mobility", Oven Jones argues that:

it was, as the old phrase goes, rise with your class, not above it. And I suppose the problem with that kind of concept if you like social mobility, it is the acceptance of underlying inequalities. You accept kind of grotesque distributions of wealth and power (Flanders 04:25)

Jones claims when you admit the meritocratic ideal as a system, it means you tolerate and act according to its rules. Based on this, changing her name from Nathalie to Keisha is significant in terms of how one serves and goes in line with the written rules of social mobility. In this sense, the concept of social mobility is about escaping from your class rather than trying to create cohesion. Another thing that makes a class distinction between people is a meritocracy

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which allows people to judge. This judgement comes from people put in the higher power mechanism through their backgrounds.

The speakers in the BBC podcast referred to above that Britain is based on a meritocracy system in which one can see through passing exams and getting to university; just because one has some talent in one area gives one choice to do something. What is dangerous about the idea of meritocracy is that it justifies or rationalizes inequality which makes it something only the top of the hierarchy can deserve because they always work hard and are considered to be more intelligent than those bottoms of the hierarchy; they fail to get on, they do not have the same determination. This is exactly what happens throughout the book; people judge each other for how they live. Within this meritocratic system, Nathalie learns how to engage with the failures of others, which results in the capitalist meritocratic idea that "if you do not work enough, you can end up like others". In this sense, as historian David Kynaston argues that your background and education still affect your life changes, making you privileged and exceptional. For example, a sense of disconnectedness occurs when the grammar schoolboy arrives at Oxford College. In Britain, there is a tendency that people governing should be of higher merit. The majority of the prime ministers are Eton and Oxford graduated in Britain. Kynaston claims there is a difference between vocational and academic schools in Britain, where people are treated with inequal respect and looked down upon. The danger is always that one ends up in a "know your place" situation, academic education for the middle class whereas vocational for the working class, says Kynatson (Flanders 17:35). For example, in one of the scenes where Nathalie goes to shopping and sees a situation of a woman who has been in the same situation as her before she moves her posh lifestyle. That is when she realizes the language of poverty is forgotten through meritocratic ideals.

> The woman in front of her in the queue came into view. She was emptying her pockets on the counter, offering to relinquish this and that item. Her children, four of them, cringed around her legs. Nathalie Blake had forgotten entirely what it was like to be poor. It was a language she'd stopped being able to speak or even to understand. (Smith 276)

As in the quotation above, Nathalie clashes with herself about the class where she grew up and the standards that have led her to leave the house at the novel's end. It comes to a point in which she cannot realize she was one of them at a specific time. Previously, she tried to be part of that social class by changing her name, hiding it before she headed to her new lifestyle.

Towards the end of the novel, she comprehends that there are things in our lives which we cannot change or escape, while she tries to convince herself the other way around.

When Leah starts to question the reality of life differs from person to person, she says that: "I just don't understand why I have this life… You, me, all of us. Why that girl [Shar, the drug addict] and not us. Why that poor bastard [Felix] on Albert Road. It doesn't make sense to me" (292). At the same time, Natalie tries to come up with an answer: "We wanted to get out… I'm sorry if you find that answer ugly, Lee, but it's the truth" (293). However, her answer carries the neoliberal idea that because Leah and Natalie worked better, they could escape Shar's, Felix's and Nathan's fates. Reading Nathalie's story as improving her socioeconomic situation while failing, the reader might see how class and social mobility in postcolonial Europe are often racialized. Her positions remind many others who work equally but do not have a chance to achieve similar success. Rather than determining whether this is an individual success or a failure, it can result from a dysfunctional society or a community.

Smith creates a society marked by an ideology of meritocratic ideal within the issues of class, race and ethnicity. Jesse van Amelsvoort provides an example from Paul Gilroy who is a British cultural studies professor:

> If routes were determined only by hard work and not by roots, Gilroy's convivial society could be achieved more quickly. Conviviality, for Gilroy, rises from "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" and rejects the idea of a "closed, fixed, and reified identity" (430)

Gilroy and Van Ameelsvort argue that a society based on meritocracy rather than on one's background or identity would fail the establishment of a convivial society. What Gilroy defines conviviality as the result of harmony and collaboration that has made multiculturalism a regular aspect of social life in British and postcolonial urban areas. He rejects the notion of a "closed, fixed, and reified identity", moreover, promotes the idea of fluid and dynamic identities. Individuals' identities constantly change and evolve; therefore, it is essential to acknowledge this fluidity in social interactions. For this reason, *NW* examines class in terms of collaboration and cohabitation within the London postal code NW, where people get to know and encounter "others" daily. Even though there is the constant threat of violence, as demonstrated in Felix's murder, there is also the prospect of equal opportunity, mutual bond, and hospitality within the

same class of people. Although Smith raises many questions and awareness on the British class system within a meritocracy, in *NW*, these ideals are located in a specific place and a moment.

3.2 The concept of race in *NW*

While it is clear that the concept of class is essential in the novel, race and gender also correspondingly reveal the interconnectedness of subjugating ideologies in the formation of themes under the effect of neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism and patriarchal ideologies. In this part of the analysis, this thesis will focus on how the multiplicity of dominant discourses suppresses the category of "the other" in terms of race, how postcolonial agendas of neo-colonial discourse affect authenticity in the contemporary context and what are the consequences of these on the characters' identity split.

 NW is a non-linear, structurally compound novel and a great example of postcolonial history, its current multicultural representation in the twenty-first century of Britain by demonstrating through the characters with diverse and various identities. Zadie Smith does not follow a specific chronological order in her narrative but moves back and forth in current events. She creates this multi-layered and complex stories by creating this structurally compound novel based on various techniques to create a more complex and layered narrative. For example, Smith uses different techniques, such as stream of consciousness and multiple perspectives, to explore the lives of characters and the multicultural society they live in. David Marcus considers "the twenty-first century is already the century of postcolonial empowerment," which one can observe through the narrative of characters in *NW*, where British society is reflected through the lens of a British author of Jamaican descent (432). Jesse Van Amelsvoort argues in her article "Race and (Re) connection in Zadie Smith's *NW*", "As a literary artefact, the novel engages, takes issue with, and transforms a long tradition of cultural interactions." (431) Here, she provides a strong correlation between race and class. As it is stated above, Smith believes racial inequalities exist and problematises the notion of the failure of meritocracy. However, the novel also problematises Britain's postcolonial legacy, the characters' individualistic notions of failure under the category of authenticity, and the prevalence of racial inequalities. The racially diverse council state and interracial nature of Northwest London put characters

into postcolonial melancholia, a term introduced by English sociologist and cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy to make awareness of the denial of the ongoing effect of colonialism and imperialism in contemporary political life. Although the Freudian concept of melancholia influenced Gilroy, the method he applies is not "the individual grief but the social pathology of neo-imperialist politics". (Gilroy 2). He claims the legacy of British colonialism has significantly impacted multiculturalism, such as institutionalised racism which evolved organically in urban areas and created this contemporary hostility and violence directed at any minority, such as blacks and immigrants. (Gilroy 3). There are many passages where Zadie Smith emphasises race and how racism is part of British society's problem. For example, when Leah is confronted by her mom in the first chapter when she believes a gipsy girl:

> He says I am an idiot. – Well, that is no less what you are. You cannot con his people so easy.
> […]
> All of them are Nigerian, all of them, even if they are French or Algerian, they are Nigerian, the whole of Africa being, for Pauline, essentially Nigeria, and the Nigerians wily, owning those things in Kilburn that once were Irish, and five of the nurses on her own team being Nigerian where once they were Irish, or at least Pauline judges them to be Nigerian, and they are perfectly fine as long as you keep an eye on them every minute. – you were robbed on your own doorstep by a gypsy, weren't you? Everything translated into its own terms. – Nope, Subcontinental. – Indian, you mean by that. – somewhere in the region. Second generation. English, to listen to. (Smith 16- 17)

Smith defines Leah's mom as a well-feathered Irish owl who blames Leah for believing the sincerity of a gipsy. Not only does racism separate Irish and Jamaican immigrants, but Nathan and Felix are considered of Jamaican descent in the context of *NW*. In contrast, Leah is Irish, placing her coming from mainstream British society, but it sets places these two immigrants against each other. It stopped them from establishing a united power to oppose racism in Britain. Thus, they do not come together but try to locate their way through life. It takes an "occasion" to change this status quo momentarily. Smith illustrates that while the novel's characters reflect the diversity in London, it also creates a political statement by choosing black or mixed background people such as Nathalie or Felix, who is depicted as a product of a dysfunctional Caribbean family. While this disorder is shown through the second/third generation of Britain's immigrant community in the novel, it is also mirrored through Leah's husband, who does not

have any ties with specifically British colonialism. In a conversation where Michel talks to Leah about the working situation as a French-Algerian:

> In France, you are African, you are Algerian, who wants to know? There is no opportunity, you can't move. Here you can move. You still have to work! You have to work very hard to separate yourself from this drama below! … I know this country has opportunities if you want to grab them, you can do it.
> […] of course, your skin is white, it is different, it is easier, you have had opportunities I did not have. (Smith 29)

The quotation above illustrates the fact that race intersects with class. There will always be levels among people to make distinctions between themselves and others, even if it occurs in the most populated and less wealthy part of London. While Leah praises Michel's beauty, "He cannot deny that he is more beautiful. It is easier for him to be beautiful. his skin is very dark and ages more slowly. He has a good West African bone structure." (Smith 22) However, Michel reminds himself that he is an African-descended French: "exercising his little store of hard-won colloquialisms, treasure of any migrant: at the end of the day, know what I mean, and if that was not enough, and I says to him, and I was like, that is a good one, I will have to remember that one" (Smith 18). Feeling like a second-class citizen, there is a constant reminder that he must work more and more, as in the case of the quotation below where he maintains to talk about the conversation with Leah:

> This is why I'm on the laptop every night, I'm trying to do this because its pure market on their nothing about skin, about is your English perfect, do you have the right piece of university paper or some bullshit like this. I can trade like anyone. There is money to be got out there, you know? Market is so crazy right now. That is what nobody tells you. I keep thinking what frank said at the dinner: the smart guys get right back in the game. It is crazy not to try to get some of it. I'm not like these Jamaicans -this new girl, Gloria whatever is her name, up here she still has no curtains. Two babies, no husband, taking benefits. I am married, where is my benefit? When I have children, I knew, I said it to myself: I am going to stay by this woman that I love, that I really love so much, I am going to always be with her. Come here. The bottom line is like this: I was never just OK to sit on my Laurens and take charity, I never was interested in that. I am an African, I have a destiny. (Smith 30)

As we can see from this quote, Michel not only represents the possibilities the UK provides for foreigners but also emphasises the inequality among the citizens. Where you come from, how you look, and how you speak English matter; for this reason, someone with a foreign background must work more than a white British person. While he argues the fact that this inequality is embedded in society, at the same time, he tries to make a comparison and a distinction between a good immigrant versus a bad immigrant; how is one supposed to work in line with the rules not taking any charity money without seeing the reality of the system which the government imposes in Britain. Instead, he chooses to blame himself and immigrants, believing he is destined for this. This destiny lies in people's minds in daily life as a continuous fear of everything. As in the example of Nathalie's conversation with her husband, Frank:

> I am not sending my children to a boarding school. Completely alone in a class of thirty white kids. You'd have to be crazy. – Our children, Twenty white kids. Didn't do me any harm. – You are wearing loafers, Frank. (Smith 64)

Though it is not straightforward for a reader to see that people of colour are not strange or exotic in themselves, Zadie Smith claims that race as being obscured when it is white. (Smith "The secret history of Black England"). It is based on the mindset of the idea of neutrality that people of colour are exotic. There are many passages where she emphasises racial differences and how racism is part of British society's problem; at the same time, she tries to give a celebratory discourse on the integration of immigrants while she makes the reader question the authenticity of this issue. NW's society is considered a postcolonial melancholia in which the three characters of the novel, Natalie, Leah, and Felix, are "othered" because of their backgrounds. As a result of Natalie's Jamaican, Felix' Caribbean and Leah's Irish descent, they are the constant reminder of Britain's past colonial and imperial schemes and their current effects in the present day. Although they all try to escape from race and racism throughout the novel, they are repeatedly dragged back to NW by their pasts which they try to break.

Even though the characters of the novel project into other parts of the city, as David Marcus indicates that "like a released top, Smith's narrative spins out in ever-widening circles but never drifts too far from its geographic centre." (Van Ameelsvort 425) Moving too far from the centre of NW results in characters' identity split. While Felix Cooper goes to London, he only ends up with his downfall on the way back home, whereas Natalie's attempts to change her route from Caldwell happens in the chapter "Host," after she is done with her studies in

Bristol, returns to Willesden. In the final chapter of the novel, Nathalie's walk with Nathan to Hampstead Heath ends where she has started, highlighting a cyclical pattern. The repetition of this pattern pulls Nathalie away from the centre but eventually brings her back to it. In addition, the flashbacks of the character have a significant impact on Nathalie's past and present. Therefore, Nathalie's journey underlines the idea that even as Nathalie tries to escape her past and establish a new identity; however, she is still trapped within the same patterns and cycles that have defined her life so far. In this sense, her narrative plays an essential role in shaping her identity and understanding her place. "From these movements, Marcus concludes that "we may still be free to choose how we want to speak, but many of us are not able to choose how we want to live… [Smith's] characters' lives are ultimately determined by where they grew up" (van Amelsvoort 425). In this sense, characters, specifically Leah and Nathalie, are deeply embedded in their roots, which restrict and control their freedom of choice. Although it is possible to change how one talks, when it comes to living one's life, where you come from and how you grow up matters, especially creating effects on people's lives. As it stated above, according to Jessie van Amelsvoort's article on "Race and (Re) connection in Zadie Smith's *NW"*, the "roots" of the past conflict with the future "routes" that the characters in NW are looking to follow (425). For example, Nathalie is the character in the novel which situates in substantial determination to transform her origins into opportunities for advancement by distancing herself from past, mainly NW. This is evident her decision to move away from estate and adopting a name that does not signify any specific racial or ethnic identity. Even though Leah is deep-rooted in the Caldwell estate state where she was imprisoned, Natalie is constantly moving. While she works as a lawyer, she realises that it can still be diminished and humiliated by the colour of her skin. It seems that Natalie is a successful lawyer, married, had two children, and moved to one of the posher areas of NW; however, her achievement makes her detached and undeniably rootless. As a result, we find her character deprived in her identity split. When she was being told "Don't worry, you won't have to do any-thing, just look pretty" (Smith 205) as a Black woman with the Caribbean descends, "Natalie is being used to make the white men on the defence team look more believable and neutral, and it destroys Natalie's "innocence and pride" (Van Amelsvoort 426). While it enhances as a result of Nathalie's humiliation and pride, it led her to lose the meaningful and meaning-making connections to others in her community, says Van Amelsvoort. Hence, *NW* is closely connected with issues of British national identity, and all the portrayed characters cannot fit into this concept of Britishness. The disparity as being in limbo comes out during her walk before Nathan joins him in the last chapter, where she feels disconnected from anything, including herself:

walking was what she was… She had no name, no biography, no characteristics
[…]

Later, as she walks past Caldwell with Nathan, she tries to recall the past but cannot:
As she walked, she tried to place the people back there, in the house, into the present current of her thought. But her relation with each person was now unrecognisable to her and her imagination—due to a long process of neglect, almost as long as her life— did not have the generative power to muster an alternative future for itself. All she could envision was suburban shame. (Smith 264-266)

The struggle to be able to fit in this concept disengages Nathalie from her identity as a Black Caribbean descendant who grew up in Caldwell. Jesse van Amelsvoort argues in her article by quoting Fernández Carbajal's analysis that Natalie is displaced in terms of both ethnicity and class, with which she has an ambiguous or challenging relationship with herself within the environment she has (426). Her internal trouble comes out through the email address she creates to have sex with strangers. The email address of Nathalie is "KeishaNW@gmail.com." which connects to her former name and the place where she grows up. This creation of a second identity places it in contemporary simulated truth in which her husband, Frank finds out, and ask: "What the fuck is this? Fiction?... "Who are you?" … "You have two children downstairs. You're meant to be a fucking adult. Who are you? Is this real?" (259). Frank's questions detect her own concerns regarding the issue of authenticity. Not only Frank and Nathalie but also Leah realises the change on Nathalie, — "Who is she? Who is this person?"—stating an isolation from a childhood friend which she knows from NW (Smith 58).

Leah and Frank touch upon Natalie's conflicted feelings about her roots and routes, about where she fits in. After Frank catches her online life, one can see that Natalie seeks to locate a connection to London, which she describes as "home" (Smith 269). However, Smith repositions Natalie's location within the immigrant background complicates her connection with the area where she lives. Fernández Carbajal underlines that Natalie's "conflicted identity as a black British citizen whose claims to London's ownership paint a complex picture . . . of pains and pleasures, terrors and contentments" (qtd. Van Amelsvoort 426). The engagement with multiculturalism and identity construction in postcolonial societies like Britain lies in the indifference to the people's family background, class, race, and gender. "Contrary to this celebration of difference enhanced by multiculturalism and fragmentation, globalisation may increase the search for sameness and the need to assert an authentic identity". (Zapata 84) In

this sense, reading *NW* from the perspective of authenticity reveals the reconnection towards the end of two characters, Leah and Nathalie's pasts and the problems they have confronted to re-form their roots which is both their pasts in addition to the immigration of their families which led them to find their routes come to Britain.

3.2.1 The issue of authenticity and race

Assuming her efforts to fit this notion of Britishness detach her from the identity she did have, and she does want her children to experience the same isolation. *NW*'s representation of these four friends, who are formed by boundaries of class, race, gender, and ethnicity but who also challenge those limits, points to the difficulties faced by many contemporary European minorities. Smith depicts London as a multiculturalist in which varied communities experience occasional disappointments of intercultural communication rather than embracing the differences. Wendy Knepper argues that *NW* published within this British socio-political context "registers the anxious dynamics of a globalizing neighbourhood." (Van Ameelsvort 420). These dynamics within the novel are constituted and constructed by restrictions of class, race, gender, and ethnicity. The idea of race cooperates with those second-generation immigrants of their ethnicity and class to structure an intensely racialized logic inherited through increasing social mobility. By itself, the characters represent London society in which there are attempts to shift from a decolonial space to a postcolonial one. As Sandra Ponzanesi and Bolette B. Blaagaard describe in their book titled *Deconstructing Europe* (2013) that:

> To read Europe as a postcolonial place does not imply that Europe's imperial past is over, but on the contrary that Europe's idea of self, and of its polity, is still struggling with the continuing hold of colonialist and imperialist attitudes. (7)

European societies in this context Britain are filled with colonial remains, which makes still an influence without acknowledging. Through *NW*, one can see Britain's postcolonial remains become the invisible visible that postcolonialism regenerates and interconnects itself through colonial legacies and new forms of colonialism working under the classification of globalization (421). Progressively, Van Amelsvoort claims that postcolonial critics have lifted their devotion from the original idea of colonialism as "an activity on the periphery, economically driven" to

new forms of colonialism in European societies, which are sometimes referred to as neo-colonialism, internal colonialism, or reverse colonialism (421). She believes that Nathalie's struggle to connect with the city and the community she belonged to before is deepened by the racism of a postcolonial melancholic society. Amelsvoort gives an example from Huggan, who classifies:

> race relations as a key area in which old and new colonialisms manifest themselves and are resisted. Following a number of semantic shifts and redefinitions, Huggan follows Stephen Castles in arguing that racism can now be understood as racism without race. (427)

What he means by "racism without race" is that racism and any kind of racist forms of segregation and rule do not apply to the idea that race is biological or natural, rather than it entails exclusion within the social normalisation in globalised capitalist modernity. (428) Therefore, racism is not considered a genetic hierarchy where the white is in the centre, superior to the marginalized black in the periphery. Even though several ethnic and cultural groups live together in a society such as *NW*, discussing coexistence is impossible. In this sense, the fundamental basis of contemporary racism gets its foundation from the justification of European colonial and imperial extension. Rather than being based on supposed biological differences, "racism without race" adopts a culturalist logic. What Aimé Césaire classifies as Europe's "colonial problem", which Gilroy categorizes as "the migrant problem" in contemporary postcolonial. Gilroy believes "the immigrant's body has come to represent the ambivalence of empire; immigrants are physical manifestations of the colonial and imperial past" (Gilroy 110). Thus, he claims while immigrants represent the imperial past, also refer "consciousness to the unacknowledged pain of its loss and the unsettling shame of its bloody management" (Gilroy 110). This nostalgia makes it a challenge to be part of a society, a nation which is diverse and ethnic as Britain. As in the case of Nathalie and Michel, in which one can see through their search for a better career, results are the same, although they come from different social classes; however, white privilege always reminds them of their positions when Michel illustrates the difference between him and Leah about how easy for her to find a job rather than him because she does not inherit any skin colour, or for example when Nathalie starts to work as a trainee, she was othered and classified based on her skin colour.

According to Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein's book called *Race, Nation, Class*: *Ambiguous Identities*:

current evolving nationalist opinions regarding the idea of a specific Western European identity occurred through the interaction between them and colonies increased, it led to established certain alterations. As a result of separatist opinions "not only towards the exterior but towards the interior. (32)

In this sense, racism leads its way to "the other" by constructing a hierarchy in the nation based on the concept of race. Gilroy asserts that "the immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there," he believes postcolonial societies, as in the case of Smith's NW, require new structures of recognition and consciousness, which should provide a new system format from a colonial to a postcolonial to a decolonial society (Gilroy 110). In this sense, the characters in *NW* demonstrate the present is always intertwined with the past. While Paul Gilroy believes in the fact that it is possible to embrace multicultural and multiplicity within all the fragmentations; however, globalisation has increased the search for sameness and the need to assert an authentic identity (Gilroy 84). In the case of Nathalie, this fear of the unknown between integration and the preservation of origins leads to a split personality. While British multiculturalism is a multiverse where it underlines multiple identities on decentred subjects such as discourses on multiracial, Smith attempts to reveal the deconstruction of a new authentic identity which she illustrates by considering the characters' racial, ethnic, and national identities. Contemporary attitude in the West regarding migration, multiculturalism and integration has profoundly changed. As a result of global economic and political situations around the world, such as terror attacks in metropolitan cities in Europe and war in the Middle East, 2007-8 economic turmoil with high budget cuts -specifically in Great Britain where the austerity measures are on a high level- and continuously rising socioeconomic burdens, increased the conflicts among the people towards to both immigrants and people with immigrant backgrounds, due to the xenophobia related to their race, ethnicity, nationality and religion. In this context, the socio-cultural environment of Britain specifically resulted in "othering" or "casting" communities into categories, labelling them as marginals, and locating them into a lower hierarchy with an attitude of high superiority.

3.3 The effect of neoliberalism on female subjectivity

Beatriz Pérez Zapata argues in the article "In Drag: Performativity and Authenticity in Zadie Smith *NW*" the recent focus on the intersection of race, gender and class categorizes these discourses to form and oppress female subjectivity by feminist theories. In a way, gender develops into a classification which presents the interconnection of numerous structures of repression. Zapata states that "the subject is conceived as engendered in race, class and sexual relations" (85-6). What Elizabeth Spelman has defined as "ampersand thinking is "it handles race, class, sexual orientation and gender conceptually, as if these factors are separate atomic particles, metaphorically speaking, which bump into one another accidentally from time to time and occasionally stick together" (Zapata 86). This trinity of class, race, and gender others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, [and that] the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once" (4). Hence, the notion of intersectionality takes into account all these issues running at the same time.

Zadie Smith intersects the experiences of migrant women through both patriarchal and colonial discourses, which they utilize, termed "double colonization" The theory of double colonization includes the interconnected manifestation of the axes of differentiation. Therefore, the representation of double colonization is used to investigate, in this sense, the reality of the various repressive discourses that construct female subjectivities, as in the case of characters Leah and Nathalie. Smith brings women to centre stage in the novel; she presents the reader with the contemporary British feminine experience by demonstrating the connection between race and the prevalence of gender inequalities. Although it seems to be that the novel focuses on the problematizing individualistic notions of failure as self-responsibility, Smith proves the reasons behind this failure are interrelation, interconnection, and the intersection of exploration of women's life and neglect of the portrayal of women. She applies female identity as a tool for exploring the lives of contemporary women in Britain by analysing their freedom and the female realm of experience. In this part of the chapter analysis, this thesis will examine the development of two female protagonists, Leah and Nathalie, and how they present opposing attitudes towards "motherhood", which is a significant issue on the self-examination of characters and different views of social pressure of motherhood. Although Smith does not bring neoliberalism into a central focus, she does use neoliberalism as a tool to demonstrate through a feminist lens how the influence of neoliberalism is represented in the idea that women experience equality.

She discusses how characters reflect on the importance society places on the appearance of women who are influenced by the neoliberalist elements such as the focus on subjectivity and beauty. One can see that neoliberalism affects several phases of the lives of Smith's characters. In this sense, *NW* signifies a range of concerns an individual may encounter in contemporary, western, and modern society. In this part of the analysis, my aim is to demonstrate how Smith embodies the difficulties observed in the theoretical context of the impact of neoliberalism on gender performativity. Angela McRobbie, a British cultural theorist and feminist, argues in her book called *The Aftermath of Feminism* that because of the double-entanglement and double movement of post-feminism, there is a new sexual contract which has been profoundly affected by neo-liberalism (McRobbie 54). She believes there is a need to reshape the notion of womanhood in relation to the evolving neo-liberal social and economic arrangements. (57). For example, when McRobbie explains the neo-liberal policies in the UK from the 80s, she identifies the term "meritocracy", which has a significant effect on the development of the role of women in British society. She expresses how the new meritocracy influences the "fashion beauty complex", the space of sexuality, fertility and reproduction and the education and employment of women (59). Her emphasis on the danger, which she calls this new sexual contract, underlines the idea that there is no more inequality between the sexes. While it takes elements from the feminist movements to reshape these essentials to fit in neo-liberalist values, in other words, McRobbie connects the influence of neo-liberalism to the double-entanglement of post-feminism (Zapata 87).

This thesis explores how the double entanglement, and the new sexual contract are represented in *NW*. Regarding work and Education in *NW*, although Natalie and Leah both attended university and gained a degree, both characters differ in terms of Natalie's ambition to make a career for herself. In contrast, Leah is pleased with the job she has. The female characters confront distinct matters in their individual career lives. On the one hand, Leah's colleague is sceptical of Leah because of her degree, assuming her to struggle for jobs with more status.

On the other hand, Natalie does not struggle for a higher-status job; however, she is told to be wise and limit herself because of her gender. The novel appears to demonstrate that women are supposed to engage in a career. However, then again, they must remain less successful than their male colleagues within the structure of Neoliberal values on female subjectivity. This characterizes the double entanglement regarding the influence of neo-liberalism on feminist views of women's careers and education. As McRobbie discusses in her book about the value

of education and intelligence, she claims that due to neoliberalism's impact on feminism, education for women has become the norm underlined through the importance of education.

For this reason, women encounter immense force to perform within this so-called education system or, in other words, the meritocratic system. Importance of education and intelligence, as McRobbie argues in her book, one of the results of neo-liberal influence on feminism has been the emphasis on the importance of education. McRobbie argues that women being educated is now seen as the norm, and within the education system, women face enormous pressure to perform.

What is interesting regarding Leah's situation concerning this neo-liberal meritocracy is when her co-worker, Adina, considers a university degree as a high achievement: "[She] clawed her way up the system. […] Is wary of those, like Leah, whose degrees have thus installed them. To Adina a university degree was like a bungee cord, lowering in and pulling out with dangerous velocity." (Smith 32). Leah realizes this scepticism towards her occurs because of the idea that her university degree more superior to herself, which indicates the neo-liberal meritocracy could be realised as appreciating harsh labour and talents above everything else in the ideology or the agenda of neoliberalism, practising education and gaining a degree is valued even more. In the host section, where Nathalie meets with her friend Michel from the university, she distinguishes her friend with her weakness:

> It is perhaps the profound way in which capitalism enters women's minds and bodies that renders 'ruthless comparison' the basic mode of their relationship with others […] She did not have the luxury of mediocrity. Raised in the brutal high-rise towers of south Kilburn, which had nothing to recommend them, no genteel church culture, none of the pretty green areas of Caldwell or the intimate neighbours. (Smith 211)

When Nathalie considers herself and Leah's indifference not as a privilege but more like praising their intelligence, regarded as "working hard", it can be interpreted as a statement on the significance which is positioned on education in neoliberalism. McRobbie claims this stress put on educational accomplishment provides keeping gender imbalance together. From a post-feministic perspective, getting an education as a woman is seen as common sense and responsibility. In this sense, McRobbie believes educational accomplishment in the double-entanglement of post-feminism becomes the new indicator of female success (McRobbie 75). The novel illustrates balancing gender and works from the women's perspective. Smith's female characters do not only confront the suppression in their homes but also in their professional

working environments. When Nathalie works as a trainee, she is attacked by one of her superiors when she withdraws from the social aspect of her workplace; after this incident, female mentor figures question her. One of them ignores Natalie's attempt to explain and instead gives her unsolicited advice: "[his] passion, or mine, or yours, reads as "aggression". And let me tell you, as a woman it's worse: "aggressive hysteria" (Smith 177).

The mentor refers to their shared race, telling Natalie she will be perceived as aggressive for behaving the same way as her white colleagues. Then the mentor emphasises that this is even more true for a black woman. She advises Natalie to hold herself back, to make herself more palatable to judges and juries. Natalie is first assaulted and then told to be careful of being too much herself. This shows that women still hold challenging positions in the workplace, where they are vulnerable to abuse and not seen as equal to their male co-workers. Again, this seems to suggest the presence of the double-entanglement. Women are seen as equal to men because they are allowed to work, but they face inequality within their work environments.

According to the neo-liberal postfeminist ideology, a woman must stay economically self-sufficient, not depend on her husband. This economic independence implies when a woman becomes a mother; she must combine being a mother and maintaining a career. The ways in which neo-liberalism has affected feminist views of women's lives and how this influence expresses in *NW*. The importance of education and intelligence in the neoliberal view is that anything can be accomplished through hard work, which outcome results in a meritocracy. The dichotomy of the importance that the new sexual contract places on education are embodied in Natalie's doubts about her perceived intelligence. While the conclusion can be seen as neo-liberalism agenda helps women to be recognized as equal to men, women hold a more significant requirement of personal accountability than men.

For this reason, I do believe that neo-liberalism affects gender performances and the focus on beauty standards. In recent years, female success has been determined based on how a woman can be beautiful. At the same time, she still tries to achieve success in their educational accomplishments besides being an angel in the house. Zadie Smith demonstrates in the novel that enduring belief that women must have children, as in the case of insecurity of Natalie when she meets her cousin who is considered to be more beautiful than her: "Despite the toddler and the baby in her double buggy, Tonya retained the proportions of a super-heroine in a comic book. Natalie meanwhile was sadly [skinny.]" (Smith 243). In *NW*, this is manifested in the uncertainty Natalie feels when met with her cousin Tonya who brings the lack of confidence of women in McRobbie's evaluation of the new sexual contract and discusses the description of

increased focus on women's presence in order to keep them exposed to the patriarchy. Though in meritocratic terms, Natalie is more successful than the two, having gone to university and practising law, she feels insufficient when faced with her more desirable cousin. It indicates that Natalie feels that her presence matters more than her accomplishments. This idea would validate McRobbie's argument on the subordination of women over to men, so they are allowed to be economically, not dependent on men.

3.3.1 Gender roles: motherhood

As readers, we have confronted gender expectations from the very beginning of the first pages of *NW*. When Leah's mother dictates that Leah have children: "On what front? -On the Grandma front. The ticking time front." (Smith 18). Leah disappears from the conversation when it comes to her body. She cannot state that she does not want to have children. Instead, she blames herself for not realise this expectation from her husband: "A thirty-five-year-old woman married had most certainly been warned, should be paying attention, should be listening." (Smith 25). This means that the agenda of patriarchy has already decided the destiny of Leah, who thinks she should have thought of it earlier rather than blaming herself for not having the conversation about having children, which resulted in a secret abortion. She starts to take stolen anticonception pills. In addition to Leah, Natalie stresses having children: "they believed that people were willing them to reproduce." (Smith 268). The belief is that these female characters feel this communal tension between having kids coming from both family members and society. When Leah applies to use birth control, later on, the abortion process proposes the demands she gets from her environment where she cannot secure her own expressions and feelings regarding not being willing to have kids. This debated judgement or clash that she has, is getting more complicated when her husband strongly wants to have kids. The dilemma that Leah illustrates is that neoliberal society advocates the idea that "you are free to make your own choices". At the same time, it still does imply a dedicated hope for women to adapt to the norm of having children. At this point, the manifestation of McRobbie's double entanglement brings the idea of gender imbalance based on individual accountability over women's lives. Nonetheless,

continuing the burden put on women to have children implies the else. Therefore, the patriarchy creates more importance on women themselves than on their economic success.

NW symbolizes the neo-liberal impact on feminism in a critical way as a result of Angela McRobbie's interpretation of the neo-liberal influence on post-feminism, resulting in a new sexual contract where the perception of womanhood was redefined in order to fit with neo-liberal social and economic arrangements. *NW* reveals the representation of the elements of this new sexual contract which McRobbie explains. The analysis of elements of the novels linked to women's careers and education shows how the female characters distinguish themselves to be identical to the male characters. At the same time, they are labelled, unlike conditions that suggest there is still a gender imbalance. Although under this new sexual contract, women seem to have self-rule based on their choices, when it comes to their experiences, women are still forced to follow selected gender expectations, performances, and beauty standards. At that point, as a reader, we encounter how the neo-liberal influence on feminism has shaped women's lives differently.

NW gives a genuine and perceptive overview of the female internal understanding. The novel represents the characteristics of the new sexual contract convincingly. Thus, it influences public awareness effect of neo-liberalism on the female experience. The intersectionality of class, race, and gender brings us to the significance of race on the impact of neoliberalism on women's rights. McRobbie highlights that all women are affected by the experiences; however, depending on their backgrounds, such as having different races, they face different experiences other. For example, she states that beauty standards and educational standards affect Asian and black women more than white women. *NW* is an excellent example of how race affects the matters of female experiences.

Smith addresses a postfeminist ideology whose focal point is not based on female weakness but on women who have derived the gains from prior fights for equal opportunity and liberty. Smith reflects two female characters in a way that the same generation and age as herself, grew up in the nineties and notwithstanding their occupation as a working class, also with their immigrant upbringings as being Irish and Caribbean, Leah and Natalie have chance to increase their possibility in a society where neoliberalism plays its own rules. While the emphasis on self-education is promoted among middle-class women in order to take control of their lives in the neoliberal world, it is associated with the postfeminist archetype in the novel; besides the main characters in the novel, others who come from the immigrant origin, the novel echoes in the territory of Britain's postcolonial history and its multiculturalism. In *NW*, Leah and Nathalie are given a topic with the complete statement that their friendship has endured

periods, marital issues, and maternity. The consequences of their choices, paired with their own intimate catastrophes, merged to produce some natural conflict and gap within their bond. The division of these two female characters concerning compound affiliation to the feminine norm generates to constitute themselves. At this point, Zadie Smith depicts their personalities at a certain point in time when they are about to fall. For instance, Leah fails to come up with the potential beliefs of this type of feminine subject which seems to adopt Nathalie's middle-class lifestyle as the following passage:

> Nathalie laughs. Frank laughs. Michel laughs hardest. Slightly drunk. Not only on prosecco in his hand. On the grandeur of this Victorian house, the length of the garden […] Nathalie crosses one bare leg over the other. Sleek ebony statuary. Tilts her head directly to the sun. Frank, too. They look like a king and queen in profile on an ancient coin. (Smith 60)

NW signifies the female ideal of desire and accomplishment against which Leah cannot relieve but evaluate herself. Smith's investment in exploring postfeminist subjecthood within neo-feminist subjects works well with Nathalie. During her study time, she replaces her name from Keisha with Natalie, which excludes this so-called ethnic appearance and is more evocative of her process of self-invention, establishing a life guided by the principles of appropriateness and reasonableness. While she used to have an Afro-Caribbean boyfriend and law student Rodney Banks, with his stigmatizing ties to her former life in the estate, is changed by a more appropriate companion regarding wealth and modern Frank De Angelis, who has a Black Italian, to an investment banker. After marrying Frank, Natalie enters the corporate world of money and business. In contrast to Nathalie who separates her husband from the problematic ethics that caused the crisis, Frank's solid support of the finance industry demonstrates his involvement in the system that led to it. "If the city closed tomorrow,' states Frank, without looking at his wife, 'this country would collapse. End of story" (Smith 240). Frank states that if the city were to shut down, basically the country would collapse. Smith continually examines ideas of contemporary femininity in the "Host" section. Nathalie's social rise within the marital crisis that she has constructed indicates that her self-esteem comes from her set devotion to the philosophy of meritocracy and effectiveness. She is not aware of the fact that her subject position is a construction. Although Leah can see through the breaks of Natalie's marriage, Natalie assumes Leah is depressed caused of what she recognizes as Leah's dull life. Smith underlines one of the final scenes of the section, sarcastically labelled "Catching up", portraying

the friends' meeting in an Irish pub. While their meeting happens between Natalie's crisis and her sensual adventures, the conversation does not go further.

According to Beatriz Zapata, various feminist theories have examined discourses which attributed fundamental characteristics to the category of woman and refused woman's multiple subjectivities, thus offering a monolithic idea of womanhood. In contrast, recent theories have preferred considering female subjectivity as multiple (85). Moreover, Zapata argues that contemporary feminist theories focus on intersecting race, class, and gender as the classifications or discourses that form and oppress female subjectivity. She believes gender has created its category, which more clearly reveals the intersection of different forms of oppression (85). Leah's confrontation with motherhood is continuously stressed through her mother, Pauline, her husband, and her female colleagues, who remind Leah to perform as how "normal women do".

Nonetheless, Leah denies this vision of a "normal woman" in which woman is identified in the category of the "institution of motherhood as compulsory for women", says Judith Butler in her book called *Gender Trouble* (92). After realizing that she is pregnant, she does an abortion. She associates becoming a mother as being mature and explicit, relating motherhood to the appearance of time and death. Furthermore, her fears about reproduction do not finalise with the abortion. When she decides with her husband to have children, subsequently, she begins to take the birth control pills. The denial of motherhood can be examined as suppressed in "fears of losing oneself and one's identity" (Zapata 90).
Nevertheless, Zapata claims that the features of the identity she wants to maintain are unclear in the novel. The narrator yet conveys Leah's anxiety about attaining a permanent identity against her distinguished condition of constant "becoming" (Zapata 90). Her conflicting desire for serenity, transformation, and her refusal to accept societal expectations of motherhood leads to a rejection of dominant institutional norms and behaviours. In this sense, her conflicting attitude and rejection of traditional gender roles could lead to a challenge of dominant cultural norms and expectations. Therefore, her gender and her lack of desire for motherhood remove her disobedience; however, her story places importance on conforming to patriarchal expectations and suppressing her natural desires resulting in the limitation of her agency and autonomy.

When portraying the abortion episode, Smith remarks how Leah "is ashamed before an imagined nobody who isn't real and yet monitors our thoughts" and how "she reprimands herself" in an attempt to think "the sort of thing normal women think" (Smith 65-6). That "imagined nobody" could be detected as what Judith Butler states as "normative phantasms" in

her book called *Bodies that Matter* (4). The reason why Leah is feeling humiliated is that she does not go in line with the patterns which have been put by individuals' discourses or agendas. As a reader, we cannot put Leah into the "normal" category. In this chapter of the novel, there is a constant repetition highlighting the statement that everybody expresses and performs the same things in the same way.

> Globalization has brought sameness into our current multiverse, one which should have allegedly learnt to accept difference. Susan Hawthorne has explained that "systemic power tends toward the universal and toward the imposition of sameness, homogeneity, monopoly, monotony and monoculturalism. (Zapata 68)

Though Leah has surrendered to some of the influences of universal systematic power, nevertheless, the narration demonstrates her consciousness of those methods whose purpose of uniformity, in return, concentrates on cultural and political constructions. Zapata believes "the contractedness of these discourses will be further exposed in the case of Keisha and her metamorphosis into Natalie. Contrary to Leah, Natalie D'Angelis, née Keisha Blake does not seem to struggle with motherhood. Nevertheless, the narrator comments that she becomes a mother because she had no intention of being made ridiculous by failing to do whatever was expected of her (Smith 321). This is one of the great examples of her efforts towards integration into hegemonic discourses. Zapata claims that "the Lacanian moment of (mis)recognition causes harm to her internal division in which the image of wholeness and fragmentation" (91). Zapata argues that Keisha's desire for recognition and the Lacanian moment of (mis)recognition causes harm to her sense of internal division and leads to fragmentation. When Keisha enters university, she adopts the identity of Natalie as a way of self-creation. However, this process is influenced by her class background and her need for recognition within the university. Despite her efforts, Smith suggests that this process of self-creation ultimately fails. When Keisha/Natalie meets Leah, the pain and isolation she experiences lead to a sense of having "no self to be". This suggests that the search for recognition and the adoption of new identities can be a problematic and even destructive process.

3.3.2 Gender roles: performativity

In her book *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler argues that selfless subject occurs due to the impact of political, patriarchal, and neo-colonial discourses, which creates suppression over Natalie's origin as a Black, working-class woman who is enforced for assimilation what society sees as common and norm. As Zapata claims in her article, "Performativity and Authenticity in *NW*", though selfless subject seems to be a product of postmodern and poststructuralist conception of subjectivity, involvement of patriarchy and neo-colonial agendas imply the destruction of Natalie's roots and the construction of her identity which is the result of performativity. Judith Butler identifies performativity as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler 2).

Additionally, she states that performativity is "not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Butler 12). She relates performativity to gender in terms of how "one takes to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (Butler 14). While the concept of performativity is indicated in *NW* based on the idea of motherhood, it also refers to one of the significant concepts from Butler called "drag". She considers drag as "subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 174). By definition, the word "drag" reminds connotations concerning the gender. In contrast, in *NW,* in "Host" chapter, we see the list of Nathalie's drags:

> daughter drag. Sister drag. Mother drag. Wife drag. Court drag. Rich drag. Poor drag. British drag. Jamaican drag. Each required a different wardrobe. But when considering these various attitudes, she struggled to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least inauthentic (Smith 333)

The extension of categories rather than gender provides a metaphor for Nathalie's disguise regarding her class, nationality, race, and gender by revealing them as constructions. "Drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated

in the very regimes of power that one opposes" (Butler 125). Towards the end of the novel, Smith elaborates the possibility of capturing an original identity does not exist. In this sense, drag for Nathalie is inherited in her "self" which she has created her first identity as Keisha in order to survive besides her is a subconscious ego. Keeping her first identity with its location within the working-class environment of Northwest London in her internet identity as "Keisha NW" offers to make her subject liveable. When Butler talks about the issue of subject formation within the context of the feminine norm, she clarifies that "the self-delimits itself, and decides on the material for its self-making, but the delimitation that the self performs takes place through norms which are, indisputably, already in place" (225). Nathalie's case, even though it appears keeping this identity allows her to be both identities in which she is not only a lawyer and hairdresser but also belongs higher and lower class which results in a narrative of no self to be. When the realization of Nathalie comes out by her husband, Frank, her life as "Keisha NW", he questions whether it is fiction without being aware the that both identities are fictions, admitted by Nathalie: "no name, no biography, no characteristics", rather acknowledging that "there was some relief in becoming an object" (Zapata 93).

Consequently, she does not have a self nor any origin, which brings us "Irigaray's idea of miming should be considered here, since her idea of miming "has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace the origin as an origin" (Zapata 93; Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 45). Correspondingly, Judith Butler has maintained that "the normative force of performativity—its power to establish what qualifies as "being"—works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 188). Since Keisha tries to enforce numerous identities, she becomes a subject that does not praise differentiation within female subjectivity nor approach a new way of being. On the contrary, she implements particular identities based on determined discourses, which leaves no freedom for modification or subversiveness. In this sense, the drag metaphor for her is the outcome of a disguise rather than subversive agenda.

Judith Butler discusses that "social discourse wields the power to form and regulate a subject through the imposition of its terms. Those terms, however, are not simply accepted or internalized; they become psychic only through the movement by which they are dissimulated" (Butler 197). For this reason, hegemonic power must always be doubted and examined wherever it comes from. Smith problematizes in her narrative identity formations of the female characters by illustrating the intersection of differentiation, which makes female subjectivity and echoes the identification of the subject as multiple. The continual effect of depictions of patriarchy and colonisation approaches ends in split subjects instead of held as multiple in *NW*. The presence of a merged and authenticated female subjectivity is also questioned. Especially

the idea of having an authentic identity can be seen as a hegemonic discourse in which the explicit intention is to enforce consistency among the possibly threatening subjects on the margins who are regarded as "Other."

Zadie Smith depicts a multiverse where female protagonists are constrained into identicalness. She presents a perception of the contractedness of contemporary female identities and the performativity that they denote; therefore, applying Butler's use of the metaphor of drag supports clarifying different identities one can adopt depending on the context. While the concept of origin, originality, and original identity is mocked in the novel, *NW* also indicates that the possibility of being trapped in dichotomies of separately constructed biases does not survive. According to Zapata, the demonstration of "Drag" should demonstrate "its subversive potential because those who obtain subversion need to be able to raise their voices to become politicised in order to deliver a more substantial analysis of the hegemonic authority of a society which still favours assimilation and consequently is unable to identify the contractedness of its supposedly natural discourses." (94).

Two young women from the same council estate, half-Irish Leah, Caribbean Keisha, or later called Nathalie position their differences on the choices that they make after the university without knowing that it will affect their current situations in the novel. Once called Keisha, she went to the same school as Leah, married a rich man, living in a big Victorian house with her gorgeous children. Leah, a philosophy graduate, married a French African hairdresser, Michel.

Leah struggles to achieve the "next step" by having children, which she finds depressing: "I don't wanna move forward. I like it here". In the meantime, her husband insists, "I am always moving forward […] I'm going up the ladder – one step at least." (Smith 38) There are times that, as a reader, we see that Leah likes dealing with the things alone, without having any interference from her husband. "Leah is grateful to be without Michel. Then her face turns into his face, and his voice comes out of her throat, or this is a marital excuse…" (Smith 41). However, Michel is very much inherited in her soul, which she cannot escape; she feels trapped in this marriage. While Leah does not want to have a child, Nathalie struggles during her pregnancy:

> Pregnancy brought Nathalie only more broken images from the mass of cultural
> detritus she took in every day on several different devices, some hand-held, some not.
> To behave in accordance with these images bored her. To deviate from them filled her
> with old anxiety. She grew anxious that she was not anxious about the things you were

meant to be anxious about. Her very equanimity made her anxious. It did not seem to fit into the system of images (Smith 229)

To act in line with what is supposed to be done as a "woman", the expectations coming from society, the image portrayed by the system, force women to do things that they find 'anxious', unnecessary workload to live happily in their marriages. This enforcement leads her to experience "feelings of insecurity and inadequacy" when she comes across any woman in the street - despite her new status as a big lawyer lady. (Smith 243) As Annie argues with Felix in chapter three, she says: "Certainly, I cannot find anyone around here to talk to anymore. And for a woman, it is harder, you see. "They can feel trapped. Because of patriarchy." (Smith 113). This socially established, systematic construction of patriarchy affects women, womanhood, and all the qualities that a woman can have to be limited. This begins with an understanding of the concept of gender; what is gender? What is a woman? Why would men stop a fight when a woman appears, as in the case of Michel and Leah; "… the presence of a woman has released them from their obligation" (Smith 82). By drawing attention to her contemporary feminist experience, Smith concerns with a postfeminist paradigm in which she points "the disabling aspects of this ideology" (Lopez Ropero 123). In this sense, dominant discourses are attempts to suppress the Other -the woman, the black, and the working class-. The opposing attitudes toward motherhood from these female characters bring the concept of female subjectivity in which one can observe the intersection of different forms of oppression.

> Female individual seeks a male individual for a loving relationship. And vice versa. Low-status person with intellectual capital but no surplus wealth seeks a high-status person with substantial surplus wealth for the enjoyment of mutual advantages, including longer life expectancy, better nutrition, fewer working hours, and earlier retirement, among other benefits. (Smith 227)

While Zadie Smith convinces us that the concept of class is fundamental in the novel, in contrast, race, gender, and sexuality also reveal "the interconnection of oppressing discourses present in the formation of subjects currently living under the influence of neo-colonial and neo-imperialist discourses" (Zapata 86). Beatriz Perez Zapata claims in her article called "In Drag: Performativity and Authenticity in Zadie Smith's *NW*" that the interconnection of variation and the oppression used by the dominant discourses on class, gender, race, and sexuality are very much existing in the novel, which shows quite explicitly the constructed-ness

and performativity that they may entail. (87) Specifically, the female characters in the novel constitute their identities by the culturally normative behaviour which is considered to be acceptable in the communities. Smith implicates "performative identity", which constantly changes and adapts according to the specific situations or circumstances that characters are in.

The female alienation figured in the text is, consequently, compensated with a discourse of deficiency and social discrimination related to class, race, and gender, which brings a potential space for individual identity reconstruction through ethical dichotomies. Smith classifies the marginal narrative of peculiarity, which correlates to Britain's post-war migration history from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent. She builds an environment of similarity among these characters. In contrast, they differ from being privileged to the oppressed ones who all joined the same school and whose routes persist in intersecting within the urban landscape of Northwest London. Even though *NW* could be viewed as its title appears to imply, as a novel "about being local", it implies all the daily struggles of female characters within the intersection of many axes in contemporary British society.

Chapter 4: *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo

From the very beginning, it is clear that while Bernardine Evaristo has also written a novel that takes place in contemporary England and, for the most part, London, *Girl, Woman, Other* is a text that is very different from Zadie Smith's *NW*. *Girl, Woman, Other* is written in a "fusion fiction", showing unified characters who are mainly black British women but who differ in axes of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age. Evaristo claims that she endeavours to prove through these women characters that "We are all things and everything. You cannot dismiss us, nor can you easily define us." (León). The novel's structure is exceptional in that it can be called a hybrid style of prose and poetry. The lack of punctuation and poetical side of stories are carried through twelve characters. Since the novel is experimental, each woman has her chapter simultaneously as everything intersects, interconnects, and interrelates. Readers encounter each of the characters through their relationships with the others. Compared to Evaristo, Zadie Smith's novel, *NW* comes across as more conservative in using tools such as stream of consciousness. The novel's structure is also straightforward, whereas Evaristo plays with the structure in terms of combining prose and verse experimentally. The source of this experimental or fusion writing, in her words, can be explained as someone who studied in a catholic school;

she saw the poetic side of the Bible in a way that her career started as a poet, and then she started to catch the essence of the characters individually.

The form, style, and structure of the novel and its protagonists are diverse in *Girl, Woman, Other*, which is full of paradoxes concerning questions of identity and otherness. In *NW*, Smith classifies identity and otherness as fixed and permanent, whereas Evaristo describes the same concepts as a fluidity that helps create new potential for the characters. Through reading the novel, the reader realises that one character leads the other because they are all co-protagonists, and we see the equal weight of their narratives. Even though *NW* is depicted as London centric novel whereas Evaristo provides a real presentation of Black British women in society by creating awareness on exploring their agencies by locating them not only in London but also in North of England. *Girl, Woman, Other* illustrates how society shifts around and how the landscape in contemporary Britain today differs from the past regarding the identity of a Black British woman. Although both novels highlight issues of gender, race, and class, they do not do this on equal terms. In *NW,* class is highlighted more than in *Girl, Woman, Other.* For this reason, the analysis in this chapter will focus more on gender and race in order to show the visibility of Black British women in *Girl, Woman, Other*. Even more, than Smith, Bernardine Evaristo produces this intersection of identity politics underlining "otherness" concerning its collective black women's experience in contemporary England.

Evaristo plays with the form by forcing the periphery of how one identifies a novel and its limitations which brings the idea of the exceptionalism side of the novel. Nevertheless, Evaristo keeps under control of her characters in which all stories are composed of each other. As a result, readers encounter contrasted views unified in one cohesion: the experiences of living as a Black woman in Britain. Although the experiences differ, the characters are merged in the category of challenges and the meaning of being a Black British woman. By enriching the struggles of minority groups, Evaristo questions what it implies for black British women, non-binary, and LGBTQI+ people in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, she underlines domestic abuse and gender identity among Black British women in Britain. All these differences between Smith and Evaristo are essential, but perhaps, the most significant difference between them has signalled in the title of the latter's novel: *Girl, Woman, Other.* Otherness is a much more important theme for Evaristo than it is for Smith. This is problematised on several levels, as will be investigated in this chapter, which focuses on race and gender.

4.1. The perception of otherness in Evaristo's writing

This definition of otherness highlights a construction through a process of discourse in which a dominant group creates one or more subordinate groups through the stigmatisation of a perceived difference.

> Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us', the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them', Other) by stigmatising a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. To state it naively, difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. (Staszak 1)

Whether real or imagined, this difference is presented as a denial of identity and functions as a justification for possible bigotry against the "other". This difference can be seen as an actual attribute of an individual or a group; however, otherness is a construct of language and social norms. In Bernardine Evaristo's *novel Girl, Woman, Other*, the theme of otherness is an outstanding pattern that stresses the experiences of black British women marginalised and excluded from the mainstream narrative. Evaristo explores the theme of otherness, central to the experiences of the twelve interconnected black British women depicted in the novel. She characterises the challenges these women encounter due to their marginalised status in contemporary British society, including discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class. Through the experiences of her characters, Evaristo underlines the need for representation and recognition of those historically excluded from mainstream narratives. Evaristo challenges societal norms and emphasises the importance of diversity, multiplicity, and inclusivity by strengthening the voices of those who have been silenced. Being a voice to the new generation of the Black British LGBT community, Anglo-Nigerian Booker prize winner Bernardine Evaristo presents her dedication to marginalised minority groups from the opening of *Girl, Woman, Other:*

> For the sisters & the sistas & the sistahs & the sistren & the women & the womxn & the wimmin & the womyn & our brethren & our bredrin & our brothers & our bruvs & our men & our mandem & the LGBTQI+ members of the human family.

As mentioned above, Evaristo depicts twelve characters from different generations, positioning them in their chapters. For example, in the interview titled "Booker Prize Winner "*Girl, Woman, Other*" is Coming to America" in *New York Times* with Concepcion de Leon, Evaristo says:

> I would put as many women as I could into a single book and somehow connect it all through x degrees of separation and see what happened with that. In a sense, you could almost call it an activist novel. I don't feel, as a black British woman writer, that I would want to write a book just because I want to explore something about the human race. My mission is to write about the African diaspora. That's what I've done with all my books. And so, focusing on 12 black British women was my way of addressing our invisibility and also exploring our heterogeneity. There are probably about 800,000 black British women, and we're all different. (Leon)

In principle, Bernardine Evaristo wanted to create a novel that would unite numerous women and connect them in various ways. This approach could be considered political action through literature. As a black British female writer, she felt responsible for writing about the African diaspora rather than just exploring general themes about humanity. Her goal is to highlight black British women's invisibility in society and celebrate their diversity. Her focus on twelve black British women is a way to address these issues and show that despite their differences, they all share a common experience of otherness. Evaristo states that she was raised in England in a white British environment. She struggled to comprehend her identity as a child born to a white English mother and a black Nigerian father. Following WWII, her father came to Britain with the immigration wave from the former colonies. In order to integrate her, her father did not teach his native language Yoruba and his culture. Evaristo claims:

> I wanted to develop an identity that was so much more than being one of the few black people in a white society […] Perhaps one of the reasons I write the books that I do is because of this awakening I had in my late teens and early 20s that my background had been completely whitewashed, that my sense of self was not rooted in anything black or African. (Charles)

She strived to formulate an identity beyond being a minority in a predominantly white community. This desire occurred from a realisation in her late teens and early 20s that her identity had been washed off any black or African roots. Writing books that explore her

background and culture may be a way for Evaristo to reclaim her idea of "self" and tackle this lack of representation. The intensity of the lives of 12 black British women in *Girl, Woman, Other* reflects the Caribbean and the African continent, illuminating the heritage of British colonialism. What Evaristo achieves by questioning the life of a black woman in British society generates this recognition of the invisibility of their presence in British literature. Safiya Charles says in her article *Girl, Woman, Other* for the *Nation and the New Republic* that:

> From my point of view, this is something that is urgent and topical because we don't talk about it, Evaristo says. Our invisibility, the ways in which we are marginalised, the ways in which our stories haven't been told.… This goes to the heart, in a sense, of what we want from the society that we're a part of. And that's to be fully participating citizens and for our work to be fully accepted and expressed in the arts and beyond. (Charles)

Evaristo believes that the issue of the invisibility and marginalisation of black British women is both urgent and relevant today because it is not a topic that is often discussed. She emphasises that the lack of representation of black British women's stories and experiences is an important matter affecting their ability to participate fully in society. I believe this invisibility that she describes in this paragraph brings the history of Britain, precisely its relation to the colonised countries in the Caribbean and Africa. Their stories were not told because they were not seen as part of the society that their families were forced to arrive. The first wave of immigrants was there to provide the labour force, fill the shortages in Britain's labour market, and not be entirely active citizens. Bernardine Evaristo has a point in a sense with her father's migration from Nigeria in 1949 until today; the waves of migration from different countries continue. The majority of the UK's migrants come from the Caribbean, where they have their individual histories, cultures, and preferences on certain things such as gender, but not when it comes to Britain; their existence consists of only as a black person. In this sense, Evaristo's characters investigate the otherness caused by their skin colour and origins and the sphere of their sexualities and gender representations. She describes female characters who are repeatedly regulated by society because of their race and gender, facing things that the reader is not familiar see that is detailed in contemporary conventional fiction. What Evaristo wants to investigate is by exploring different sexualities, breaking the obsession with the concept of race and gender, which is something you are born into one, cannot change anymore.

Choosing different ages among the characters provides a reader wider perspective on how generational differences between these twelve black women are exhibited in contemporary Britain, where the recent debates on the intersectionality of gender, race, and Brexit have happened. According to Evaristo, she chooses varied characters from each other such as Hattie, who lives in a rural area of England in the North, because black identities are not welcomed in the countryside but mainly in urban areas. By creating a character and locating this place, she feels like doing something radical in a way to break the stereotypes (Tepper). Furthermore, it establishes the diversity of interculturality and intergenerational differences from different ages, perspectives, clashes, and beliefs. So, it is an opportunity for a reader to how these generational gaps discover how all these female characters attribute to gender and racialised identities. Though the characters' lives are affected by gendered, racialised, and financial problems, the narratives of these characters are not depicted in the same way, which is why each of the characters has a chapter with their names. At this point, Evaristo shows the interrelationships, interconnectedness, and intersectionality of gender and race; as a result, ongoing otherness takes place in current issues in Britain, such as the Windrush scandal, the Brexit vote, the rise of the neoliberal and neo-imperial side of Britain.

Notably, the rise of neo-imperialist ideals goes hand in hand with the ideals of nationalism. Current British nationalism is based on the epitomes of white British privilege, which serves as the principles of xenophobia. The prejudices and attitudes of the ideas of xenophobia reject any ties with black people. However, Britain has a horrific past when it comes to colonisation based on the perception of outsiders. In fact, the novel also refers to the amnesia which is going on in English nationalism. As a result of this amnesia, we encounter a British society where postcolonial melancholia occurs. Postcolonial melancholia is a concept produced by cultural theorist and British professor Paul Gilroy which this thesis will explore in the chapter below with British historian David Olusoga's observation on British history. The agenda of this ideology of nationalism, which promotes amnesia in British society, believes that foreigners or outsiders meaning black people, build a threat to British society and its national identity.

For this reason, the ideology of nationalism tries to erase the history of migration, African diaspora, rights of people of different origins and their ancestries, and forgetting that Britain has more mixed families than ever. In this sense, while critics define the novel as an anti-Brexit, anti-parochial, and anti-patriarchal novel, forgotten sides of black British history are embedded in interpreting perceptions such as race and gender. For this reason, in this thesis

chapter, this thesis will analyse how Evaristo deconstructs race and gender in contemporary Britain within the context of identity, otherness, and Britain's past.

Each character shares some commonality and contrasts in terms of their identities, which the reader can detect through the intersectionality of issues of gender and race. Throughout this intersectionality, Bernardine Evaristo illustrates the African diaspora within 12 interconnected characters. The novel chapters are divided into five, except the fifth chapter, which is about the afterparty and epilogue, where all the characters come together; each chapter has three characters parts where their stories are told. The first chapter consists of three characters, Amma, Yazz and Dominique. The first chapter of the novel opens with Amma, who, an artistic director, dramatist and lesbian, is the first co-protagonist of the novel. She has a queer partner, Roland, the parent of Yazz, who represents the new generation of young black women whose beliefs are brave, unknown, and connected to her mother's activist youth. Dominique is Amma's best friend and a lesbian who is abused by her partner Nzinga. Dominique meets with Nzinga, whom she considers a stunning Afro-American woman in Victoria station. The moment when Dominique leaves the UK for America, she loses all ties to Britain. After, we see Nzinga applies emotional abuse to Dominique. In the end, Nzinga accuses Dominique of flirting with other women; in the meantime, Dominique ends up not interacting with anyone staying inside the wall of their home with Nzinga. The novel's second chapter continues with the characters: Carole, Bummi and LaTisha.

Born to Nigerian immigrant parents from a working-class background, Carole grew up, attended a high-level university, Oxford in Britain, and became a banker, later marrying a white male named Freddy, whose job was investment banking. Bummi, a Nigerian housecleaner, has fought to provide for her daughter, whose only fear of Carole's success will bring a loss of her culture. So Bummi names her with a British name, assuming it would make a difference. La Tisha is a school friend of Carole and works as a supervisor in a supermarket. The third chapter of the novel includes Shirley, Winsome and Penelope. Shirley is a strongly conservative teacher. Winsome is a working-class Black British, a retired bus driver who arrives in England 1950s from Barbados. Penelope is Shirley's colleague, an activist, an adopted child and the only white character in the novel, displacing her sense of otherness on Shirley. The novel's fourth chapter includes the last three characters: Megan/Morgan, Hattie, and Grace. Megan/Morgan, a humanitarian, non-binary, gender-free, and oppressed by her parents, is othered until she finds her own identity. Later, she finds her love with Bibi and becomes a social influencer. Hattie is 93 years old, a farmer who is the daughter of Grace and Joseph, Megan/Morgan's grandmother and Penelope's biological mother. She lives in the rural northern English countryside. Grace is

Abyssinian, a bi-racial woman, and Hattie's mother. Her story is about the sorrows of her dead children, which sets in the 1920s.

In the following part of the analysis, I will investigate the historical, cultural, and theoretical sides of race and racism and their implications on the experienced otherness and inequality as represented through the lives of Black women characters in *Girl, Woman, Other.*

4.2 Race as otherness in *Girl, Woman, Other*

David Olusoga who is a British- Nigerian author and professor at the University of Manchester, argues in his book called *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) that:

> Many non-white people felt that while it was possible to be in Britain, it was much harder to be in Britain. They felt marked out and unwanted whenever they left the confines of family or community. It was a place and a time in which 'black' meant 'other', and 'black' was unquestionably the opposite of 'British'. The phrase 'Black British', with which we are so familiar today, was little heard in those years. [..] What drove us deeper into that citadel of self-reliance and watchful mistrust was not just racial prejudice but a wave of racial violence. (11-12)

David Olusoga highlights the difficulties that people of colour faced in Britain during a specific period. The feeling of being marked out and unwanted outside white people's close circles was pervasive. During this time, the term "black" represented otherness and was regarded as the opposite of "British". Olusoga argues that the phrase "Black British", commonly used today, was not frequently used then. In addition to racial prejudice, a surge of racial violence also contributed to the further isolation and mistrust of people of colour. He claims that a sense of otherness and violence towards marginalised groups denoted this period of history. As we see here, being "Black" and "British" were two separate things, and you cannot be both. This is exactly what Evaristo presents through racial and ethnic differences. She sees race as a way of establishing otherness. As in the case of Penelope, the only white character who sees towards the end that "England is made up of many Englands" (450). This statement is reminiscent of Jamaican-born British intellectual Stuart Hall's statement that: "the immigrants are here because you were there", which emphasises this ambiguous construction between Britain and the

Empire; in this sense, it is not possible to understand Englishness without comprehending its imperial and colonial ideals.

The construction of race and racial categories plays a significant role in the lives of many women of colour. Yohann Koshy's article in the Guardian, *"The Last Humanist: how Paul Gilroy Became The Most Vital Guide To Our Age Of Crisis"*, this modern invention of racial categories dates back to European imperialism, which people can see as the source of current Britain's racial inequalities and the legacy of empire derive from inside of this multicultural society. Koshy directs us to the artificiality of these made-and-remade categories. For example, the 1857 rebellion against the British from India caused them to be called "niggers" by officials. Gilroy's mother was categorised as black; only she came to Britain. As British cultural theorist Paul Gilroy once said, "It's white supremacy that made us black.". Although current politics is mainly based on the refusal of racism in Britain; however, Koshy argues in his article that "this rejection of race does not entail the denial of racism". Race is a fabrication, and its construction nature of it means a person's racial identity underlines "virtual reality has given meaning only by the fact that racism endures", as he has written (Koshy). *Girl, Woman, Other* is placed at the intersection of the discourses of race, racism, and racial otherness in which one can see the full scale of racism that black women encounter in the present. Evaristo gives an example of if you are a black woman living in Britain and what kind of daily racism and discrimination you can face, a characteristic that all the co-protagonists share in the novel. One example is Amma, when prepared for an audition, is told by the director that:

> Amma was shorter, with African hips and thighs.
> perfect slave girl material one director told her when she walked into an audition for a play about Emancipation
> whereupon she walked right back out again
> in turn a casting director told Dominique she was wasting his time when she turned up for a Victorian drama when there were not any black people in Britain then (Evaristo 6-7)

In this specific quotation, Amma is described as having a shorter height and a body type common to African women. However, during an audition for a play about Emancipation, a director made an insulting comment suggesting that she would be suitable for the role of a perfect slave girl. This provoked her to immediately leave the audition. Similarly, Dominique encountered discrimination during a casting for a Victorian drama where a casting director

rejected her, saying there were no black people in Britain during that time. This quotation stresses the pervasive issue of racial discrimination in the entertainment industry, where individuals are judged based on their physical appearance rather than their talent or qualifications. Evaristo reflects this casual discrimination that a black person encounters in contemporary Britain, where it is the habitual norm. At the novel's beginning, we see how Amma and Dominique continue with their lives without questioning this bizarre situation inherited in British society. Another example would be Bummi, whose story starts with the migration from Nigeria to Britain, where she is treated as a second-class citizen because of her origins:

> Bummi complained that people viewed her through what she did (a cleaner)
> and not what she was (an educated woman)
> they did not know that curled up inside her was a parchment certificate
> proclaiming her a graduate of the Department of Mathematics, University of
> Ibadan
> just as she did not know that when she strode on to the graduation podium in
> front of hundreds of people to receive her ribboned scroll, and shake hands with
> the Chancellor of the University, that her first-class degree from a Third World
> country would mean nothing in her new country especially with her name and
> nationality attached to it. (Evaristo 167)

Evaristo presents Bummi as a very conservative and traditional Nigerian Black woman character whose ultimate aim is not to lose her Nigerian identity while trying to adapt to a society where her daughter Carole attends one of the top universities in Britain. Bummi expresses her frustration about being judged based on her profession as a cleaner rather than her education. Despite holding a degree in Mathematics from the University of Ibadan, Bummi felt that people failed to recognise her true self. She achieved academic excellence and proudly received her first-class degree at her graduation ceremony. However, she was unaware that her degree from a university in a developing country held little value in Britain, particularly when combined with her foreign-sounding name and nationality. This situation highlights the discrimination faced by individuals judged based on their nationality and education rather than their abilities and accomplishments. In this sense, what Evaristo illustrates with the effects of neoliberalism which is an ideology based on the idea that George Monbiot defines in his article in *The Guardian* titled "Neoliberalism- the ideology at the root of all our problems" that:

"Inequality is recast as virtuous. The market ensures that everyone gets what they deserve" or in his other words:

> Never mind structural unemployment: if you don't have a job, it's because you are unenterprising. Never mind the impossible costs of housing: if your credit card is maxed out, you're feckless and improvident. Never mind that your children no longer have a school playing field: if they get fat, it's your fault. In a world governed by competition, those who fall behind become defined and self-defined as losers. (Monbiot)

Although the etymological meaning of "liberalism" or "liberal" entails "free" or "freedom", the exact denotation according to Oxford Dictionary is that: "willing to understand and respect other people's behaviour, opinions, etc., especially when they are different from your own; believing people should be able to choose how they behave" ("Liberal"). While the dictionary definition shows the meaning as one embrace all the contrasting opinions, identities, and behaviour, according to this ideology, the idea that there is an inequality in the market is a piece of a lie. The agenda of neoliberalism displays its core rule, as stated above, that if one cannot find what they are looking for, it means that they deserve what they have or have not. In this sense, it rejects the idea that one can be alienated in a job interview based on their identity, like race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender preference. I claim the fact that this cooperation of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism, which we encounter through this inequality and discrimination among the characters, still influences in a sense that is maintaining this fixed structure and attitude on the characters' lives by creating this anxiety and trauma among them through ongoing effects of Neo-imperialism.

In this sense, some of the characters in the novel signal their anxiety and awareness of this discrimination earlier than others. For example, when Amma goes to her black women's group in Brixton where they discuss specific issues:

> she listened as they debated what it meant to be a black woman
> what it meant to be a feminist when white feminist organisations made them feel unwelcome
> how it felt when people called them nigger, or racist thugs beat them up
> what it was like when white men opened doors or gave up their seats on public transport for white

women (which was sexist), but not for them (which was racist) (Evaristo 18-19)

Amma begins to recognise the impact of her skin colour on her life and experiences of oppression. Through her involvement with a group of black women in Brixton, she realises she is not alone in facing this subjugation. Amma also understands that concealing her racial identity is not a solution to oppose racism, as it only protects and maintains structural inequalities. By acknowledging her racial identity and joining this group with other black women, Amma is taking a step towards challenging these discriminations. The quotation stresses the importance of recognising and acknowledging systemic racism and oppression based on skin colour. Moreover, it emphasises the need to unite as a community to fight against these injustices rather than attempting to hide or ignore them.

Furthermore, the quotation indicates that individuals can become more aware of their own oppression by listening to the experiences of others who share their identities and by actively engaging in discussions about these issues. While race is perceived as something in or on the body; however, by principle, it is associated with the body or predominantly with the skin (Fanon, 1952). According to French philosopher Frantz Fanon, race is commonly seen as a physical attribute that is either a part of the body or displayed.

Nevertheless, primarily, race is linked to the body, particularly the skin. Fanon underlines race's complex and often contested nature as a social construct. He indicates that race is not purely a physical characteristic but rather a comprehensive social and cultural concept that is associated with physical appearance. By emphasising the link between race and skin, the statement draws attention to how skin colour has historically been used to define and categorise individuals and groups based on assumed biological differences. Additionally, Fanon implies that race is not a fixed or inherent attribute but a socially constructed identity subject to interpretation and arbitration. In other words, race is a visible part of one's identity which cannot be hidden, like gender preferences. For instance, Yazz, the daughter of Amma, is entirely aware of the fact that her mother encounters hidden discrimination because of her identity as a Black lesbian woman. Yazz describes Amma in the following quotation:

Yazz knows full well that Amma will always be anything but normal, and as she's in her fifties, she's not old yet, although try telling that to a nineteen-year-old; in any case, ageing is nothing to be ashamed of especially when the entire human race is in it together (Evaristo 3-4)

Yazz touches on identity and societal expectations and how often women are influenced by race and gender. Yazz understands that Amma is not ordinary but unique in her way and will always be different. Although this quotation does not explicitly mention race, racism, or gender; however, it can be seen Her race and gender are underlined as a form of discrimination targeting her state of being "normal". Moreover, it can be interpreted as a reminder that societal expectations of what is considered "normal" can be limiting and that embracing one's uniqueness can be empowering.

As in the case of the quotation above, marginalisation is one of the cruellest forms of oppression because it forces human beings to the end edges of society, where they feel invisibility. The oppression comes from exploitation associated with social and power politics, in which identity politics lies. These divisions structured through inequalities destroy possibilities based on cultural imperialism and violence. Therefore, we can say that identity is established by the differentiation among people through oppression. Racial differences and sexual orientations are one of the factors that create this exclusion. When Carole visits her university for the first time, she experiences discrimination based on her skin colour. Carole realises that there is a difference between her and the others. She describes posh students as the loudest in a way that they have the highest confidence and make others feel worthless without noticing their existence. This invisibility feeling, or in other words, social isolation, is one of the oppressions that characters in the novel face. It brings us to the question of social constructions in a society where one can see visible a person's identity, like race, ethnicity, or gender, as well as one's invisible identity, such as sexual orientation or social class.

According to the definition of *Cambridge Dictionary*, identity is considered to have two meanings; the first is about "a person's name and other facts about who they are", and the second definition is about "the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organisation, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organisation, etc. different from others" ("Identity") which has an implication of difference, discrimination and otherness embedded in the meaning itself. In this sense, we can easily say that identity and all its connotations are a social construct that classifies people in a social category by labelling and distinguishing according to unchangeable characteristics, features, or attributes. Identity is some sort of enforcement to label people to mark their difference. Through this marking process, one can observe the forms of social exclusion in the symbolic representation system.

Therefore, identity is based not only the binary oppositions but also it feeds through differences. Doing so classifies and divides into two opposing groups, self-versus other or us

versus them. Race is one of the factors that play a significant role on identity creating this racial identity. Racial identity creates this particular group of people defined only by their race. The concept of race constructs this hierarchy of superior versus inferior, resulting in a purification of one race, which is the "white". According to the Anti-Racism Educator Jane Elliott, "There is only one race, and that is the human race" ("NBC News" 3:14). She believes the nature of racial categories and their identification is socially constructed, and there is no justifiable evidence that there are different types of races in our world.

As stated above, identity is a historical construct started by excluding the marginalised and the oppression of racial others. In this sense, racial other is a construction of repressive identity politics by the hegemonic white discourse. Human beings are divided into this categorisation called races which share fundamental biological, moral, and intellectual characteristics. Racialists believe the essence of race lies in these visible characteristics of one's skin colour or hair. These differences among people play a dominant role in who we are in society. Determining identities and structuring values leads to double otherness, as in the case of Black British women who are silenced both as Black and a woman. What Evaristo does in the novel is that there is a way or solution to enable this oppression towards Black British women. Racializing women of colour as black brings a connection among the characters in the novel in a way that different classes, heritages, or generations come together to celebrate and embrace the diversity in Britain. Evaristo creates this awareness by asking in *Girl, Woman, Other* why "white people are only required to represent themselves, not an entire race" (Evaristo 415) while Black people are expected to "carry the burden of representation" (Evaristo 415). According to Evaristo, white people are only expected to speak for themselves, whereas black people are expected to represent their entire race. This implies that people of colour must work harder to break stereotypes and expectations imposed on them solely based on their skin colour. She underlines the racial imbalance in societal expectations and how it lays excessive force on marginalised communities. This idea aligns with constructing the West's discourse on systemic racism and the unequal treatment of people of colour in various aspects of life.

Knowledge (Foucauldian idea) is profoundly connected with the operations of power (Loomba 62). Orientalism is based on this idea and argues that the way that Europeans produced and spread information about the East was closely tied to their colonialist endeavours. In other words, knowledge production was not a neutral act but a tool for those in power to maintain and expand their influence. Edward Said claims that the way Europeans represented the "Orient" in their works contributed to a binary division or a dichotomy between Europe and its

"others". This division was essential to creating and maintaining European culture and hegemony over other lands. "The function of stereotypes is to perpetuate an artificial sense of the difference between self and other" (Loomba 74-75). The distinction between one's own identity and that of others, stereotypes are created and maintained, often in an artificial way. Bernardine Evaristo demonstrates the function of stereotyping in a society in *Girl, Woman, Other* when Yazz and her friend Waris are in a deep conversation about many things:

> [..] at times like these Waris braces herself to get even more shoved, spat at and
> called names such as dirty Arab when I'm not even Arab, Yazz
> Waris said it's crazy that people are so stupid to think over one and a half
> billion Muslims all think and act the same way, a Muslim man carries out a mass
> shooting or blows people up and he's called a terrorist, a white man does the
> exact same thing and he's called a madman. (Evaristo 58)

Often subjected to discrimination, Waris spoke about being called names like "dirty Arab" despite not being Arab. She finds it absurd that some people believe that over one and a half billion Muslims think and behave similarly. Furthermore, Waris points out the double standard in labelling perpetrators of mass shootings, where a Muslim man is called a terrorist while a white man who commits the same act is labelled a madman. The quotation emphasises the problem of prejudice and stereotyping based on race, religion, or ethnicity. Her experience of discrimination emphasises the negative impact of such behaviour on marginalised individuals. Therefore, stereotypes are done to establish a clear sense of the difference between the two identities, which can lead to the creation and maintenance of unequal power dynamics between groups. This statement suggests that stereotypes serve a specific purpose in constructing and maintaining identities and power dynamics. They are used to create a sense of difference between groups, which can lead to unequal power dynamics. Stereotypes are imitations, implying that it is a constructed and not a natural process.

Said demonstrates how knowledge about "the others" was used to exercise power over them. By doing so, he seeks to reveal the status of "knowledge" and expose the ambiguous relationship between the ideological and the objective. Principally, he argues that knowledge inherited in the discourse of the West is intertwined with power and that it is used as a tool to maintain and reinforce cultural and political domination. He argues that knowledge about the East, or the Orient, could never be considered neutral or unbiased because it was created by individuals deeply influenced by colonialism's history and power dynamics. Producing

knowledge was not a neutral exercise; instead, it was filled with the politics and ideology of the time. By acknowledging this, he aims to show how the supposed objectivity of knowledge is a myth and that it is shaped by the social and historical context in which it is produced.

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other (Said 1784)

What is colonialism presenting a paradox in that it desires to civilise those it considers "other" while maintaining its perpetual "otherness". The concept of biological and intellectual mixing is feared and encouraged within colonial empires. Said highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of colonialism. On the one hand, colonial powers justify their actions by portraying themselves as bringing civilisation to supposedly primitive or inferior peoples. However, at the same time, they also perpetuate and even intensify the differences between themselves and those they colonise. This is often done by imposing strict racial and cultural categories that emphasise differences rather than similarities.

Additionally, the fear and encouragement of interacting demonstrate how colonialism pursued utilising control over not just physical bodies but also intellectual and cultural ones. While Europe's source of goods comes from the Orient, the image of the Orient is always positioned as other. This construction of the Orient was established to create the contiguous dichotomy of self-versus other. While "other" can be beneficial to the self, instead, it considers being threatening, which builds the basis of otherness. For example, Yazz, the youngest character in the novel, is born and raised in London, where the multiplicity of Britain's racial, cultural, various nationality offering city. Yazz observes from the beginning of the novel the otherness inherited in the discrimination of Black women mainly occurs through her friends' environment but mostly family, her mother, Amma. When Amma talks about her father after he passes, she says:

> my father was devastated at having to flee Ghana so abruptly, she eulogised at
> his memorial, attended by his elderly socialist comrades
> it must have been so traumatic, to lose his home, his family, his friends, his
> culture, his first language, and to come to a country that didn't want him
> once he had children, he wanted us educated in England and that was it (Evaristo 35)

During her father's memorial service, Amma defines how devastated her father was when he had to leave Ghana immediately. It was traumatic for him to leave behind his home, family, friends, culture, and first language and come to a country where he was not welcome. As a result, when he had children, he was determined to have them educated in England. Amma emphasises her father's displacement, cultural loss, and the desire for his kids to make advanced progress through education. Her father experienced significant trauma from having to leave behind his life in Ghana and start over again in an unwelcoming country. His desire to have his children educated in England echoes a common belief among immigrants that education is vital to achieving success and preventing systematic racism or discrimination.

Moreover, the quotation underlines the experiences of racism and xenophobia that her father likely encountered as an immigrant in a new country. What Evaristo offers through her novel is the alternation of identities by presenting a new image of the black woman's subject while illustrating all the intersections of points of oppression. Commonwealth countries' migration experience in some way still influences the second and third generations. Marginalised, specifically minority groups, do not have the same equal opportunities as white ones in Britain. When Amma mentions her squad in the old days, we can see how marginalisation is inherited around her environment. Some of her friends are married, some are making their careers but struggle to survive because of the discrimination they face, while some of them, as in the case of Olivine, try to achieve their dreams. However, in the end, she has to leave the country because she cannot be part of that society where there is constant rejection because of the colour of her skin:

> Olivine went from being un-castable in Britain because she was so dark
> to landing a major crime series in Hollywood and living the life of a star with
> ocean views and glossy magazine spreads (Evaristo 28)

Olivine went from being unable to find acting work in Britain due to her dark skin to starring in a popular crime series in Hollywood and enjoying the glamorous lifestyle of a celebrity, complete with stunning views and magazine features. The quotation above highlights the widespread issue of systematic racism in the entertainment industry. Her struggle to find work in Britain due to her dark skin suggests a bias towards people of colour in the job industry. The reason why Olivine was rejected from the cast is because she is considered "too dark" to play a role. In this sense, it does not matter how talented Olivine is in acting; however, what matters in this racialised society is that her skin colour is not appropriate with the standard of a white

British person. This is one of the reasons why Evaristo writes about black British women in order to provide more visibility and possibility, a voice within British Literature and British history. Their stories are told by different generations and different bodies in which they are limited to follow certain roles as women decided by patriarchy that banishes them, but most importantly, in this case, imperialistic ideals that discard them based on their race and skin colour, depending on how dark it is.

According to Gilroy's analysis, "the political practices of the modern nation-state have been forged out of the investments in the idea of racial hierarchy that characterised the colonial era" (Gilroy 44). He believes this racist thinking pattern comes from the ideas surrounded by the concept of culture, not biology. Therefore, the reason why contemporary racism in Britain is in a continual sequence is because of this historical legacy of Britain's power that is embedded in nation, culture, identity, and race. Focusing on contemporary Britain, Gilroy suggests in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* that British nationalism's attitude towards its immigrant population, specifically people of colour, derives from this desire to create the glory of the past, which is inherited in the idea of postcolonial melancholia in which race is used to cure all the anxieties about the loss of national identity. For example, *Girl, Woman, Other* depicts this issue when Yazz asks her friend Courtney, why she does not visit that often London Courtney answers back:

> it's because my parents don't like London, Courtney replied, they think it's a hellhole full of coloureds, suicide bombers, left-wingers, luvvies, gays and Polish immigrants, who deprive the hardworking men and women of this country of the chance to earn a good living (Evaristo 67)

Courtney explains that her parents dislike London, believing it to be a terrible place inhabited by a diverse range of people, such as people of colour, suicide bombers, leftists, homosexuals, and Polish immigrants, taking away job opportunities from hardworking British citizens. This quotation focuses on what Paul Gilroy argues about the issue of prejudice and racism towards certain groups of people living in Britain. Bernardine Evaristo reflects this typical attitude among some people who view immigrants and minorities as a threat to their economic and social status. Hence, power politics create a new set of issues to trigger the nation's relationship with its past to feed the hopes of the White British class, solidly creating conflicts across the boundaries of race, culture, identity, and ethnicity. Race is a powerful idea that supplies a natural hierarchy in which the other is racialised in terms of social and political. Ultimately, the

natural difference becomes a social division in terms of political, economic, and socially mediated. Not recognising race and racial conflicts ends up sustaining the power of racism. Addressing these dynamics becomes a significant problem in the lives of many people of colour living in Europe. In the case of Britain, denying the role of racism constructs postimperial, neo-colonial ideals associated with this fixed white national cultural identity.

Gilroy believes that "race is the ultimate cause of racism rather than, for him, it is a complex, unstable product; he claims, "neither race nor racism is the exclusive historical property of the minorities who are their primary victims" (Gilroy 14). When it comes to contemporary discussions of migration and nationalism where race is strongly underpinned, not only to indicate the history of decolonisation but also the importance of the concepts of political power that caused race-driven imperialism by legitimising European colonial expropriation. One of the reasons why racism can be spread that fast is because Gilroy claims that "racial difference obstructs empathy and makes ethnocentrism inescapable". (Gilroy 63) As a result, Gilroy argues what is more disturbing regarding race is that many people in Britain need race because this melancholic pattern that Gilroy named is to sustain this unstable empty national identity. Penelope's example will help understand Gilroy's theory in this case. When Penelope's mother, Margaret, was born "in the newly created Union of South Africa after her English parents sold up their farm in Yorkshire to take advance of the Native Land Act of 1913, which allowed over 80 per cent of the ownership of the land, Margarets adds only for the people who have the capacity to look after it, the white race, us" (Evaristo 277).

Further, she justifies the dispossession of native land by arguing that it was necessary for economic progress and the betterment of society. As the native population needed employment, they were willing to work for cheap wages. After Penelope's grandfather bought a farm in the region, it was unsuccessful in making it profitable due to the "idle, resentful and thieving workers" (Evaristo 277). Lastly, Margaret tells her unsatisfaction with the native people in the following:

> your grandfather's mind never recover, Penelope, he sold the farm for a
> song, brought the family back to England, we moved in with relatives and he
> never worked again
> I was relieved to relocate to England away from the hatefulness of the natives
> who'd done such a terrible thing to my father
> nor was it a place for a white girl to grow into womanhood
> I didn't like the way native men looked at me (Evaristo 278)

Evaristo highlights the racial inequality and discriminatory practices that existed during the time of the Native Land Act. The novel shows how white people were given favoured treatment and access to resources while people of colour were excluded and marginalised. It also reveals how racism and prejudice were deeply inherited during that time, as evidenced by Margaret's belief in the superiority of the white race. Margaret expresses relief at leaving the place where the natives harmed their father and suggests that it was not a suitable place for a white girl to grow up because of the way native men looked at them. In this sense, the feeling of the loss of empire and the loss of certainty about national and racial identity sustain people's emotions as a pleasure and distraction. He believes a solution exists to embrace the history of political nationalism surrendered on the ideas of race, culture, and identity within the context of how Europe's imperial and colonial supremacy still brings racism and nationalism, disturbing the current political environment. Gilroy suggests that the racism of Europe's colonial and imperial phase comes first before the migrants come. In this sense, it was racism, not diversity, that made them a problem.

Yohann Koshy quotes Paul Gilroy's famous book, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, as a result of mourning the loss of empirical greatness of Britain's postcolonial melancholia, which encourages British nationalism. In this situation, the question is, what defines English nationalism? Is it embedded in the sameness? In this case, Englishness, or whiteness? The answer would lie in the racial, linguistic, and cultural "other". Cultural, racial, and postcolonial discourses provoke the subjects (in this case Black British Women) with a deconstruction of the constant, permanent, and comprehensible self.

4.3 The notion of gender in *Girl, Woman, Other*

The British author Diana Evans claims that *Girl, Woman, Other* "captures the multifariousness of identity in Black British womanhood" (Russell). What makes inclusive of the characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* is that they represent types of marginalised groups such as black, gay and gender-free womxn. The word "womxn" is used by Bernardine Evaristo to prove that women can be understood as plural and multiple. The subjects of motherhood, sexual preferences, gender roles, and the effect of race result in inequality, like many other things in the everyday life of the characters. Therefore, it is challenging to provide a new sense of narrative and perspective to every individual who is othered based on the idea of what it means

to be a woman in British society. Rejecting the traditional rule of storytelling, Evaristo applies a new phase to novel writing by doing experiments. She represents the oppressed individuals in a traditional family and single mothers who differ from generation. Bernardine Evaristo creates these differentiations through these twelve characters by making them all novel protagonists. By doing, as I mentioned above, she brings all these characters to be similar to each other in some senses, like identity, but also, they have their own differences where in the last chapter of the novel, all the stories combine in an afterparty of Amma's theatre play. The presentation of complex and ambiguous narratives through the language of characters is my main goal in this chapter's analysis.

Bernardine Evaristo presents several important issues regarding sexual differences. First, it produces conventional assumptions about contrasts between men and women by underlining the subordination of women. What Evaristo does allows the reader to recognise not only certain kinds of gender that are stereotyped in real life, illustrating through the hierarchy of binary contrast between man and woman, and how man is a product of domination whereas a woman is a production of subordination but also other types of genders that are considered to be abnormal such as LGBTQ+ community. Throughout the centuries, women have underlined the opposites qualities of men, which has created this absence of women caused great repression by the violence of patriarchy that constantly oppresses. The problem with the patriarchy is that it directs line only with the behaviour of women, not men; for this reason, it represents gender differences by reinforcing specific gender roles. In *Girl, Woman, Other,* Evaristo questions gender and the power of its stereotypes, examining this one form of sexual difference, man and female. By applying feminist theory, I will look at the novel by deconstructing made conceptions such as female identity and gender roles dictated to women. In the following chapter, I will explore how the influence of gender roles plays a significant role in the oppression and judgment of the characters, how the language narrative of the protagonists is used to challenge the norms such as patriarchy and demand for equality in society as an agent or subject of their existence.

4.3.1 Persecution and discrimination in gender roles

Suzanne Moore argues in her article in the Guardian titled *I wish everyone strength however they identify:*

> The feminist philosopher Judith Butler writes: Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. For her, gender is a simulation of a simulation. (Moore)

In this sense, gender is some sort of an ideology that traps human beings, which we can see in the case of the characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* where Bernardine Evaristo presents this trap by depicting certain notions such as patriarchy, domestic abuse, taboo subjects within the frame of gender identity. The idea that one can love only the opposite sex of hers/his is challenged by Evaristo within the parameters of binary structures in contemporary Britain. Emerging from different racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds, the old generation, whose heritage is washed by white cultural connections, allows the reader to understand the intersectionality of current issues in Britain. Evaristo complicates the experiences of womanhood into multiple identities on a multidimensional level, creating race, ethnicity, age, class, and sexuality of trans to embrace all women. Each chapter has its own protagonist and one female identity where the intersectionality experience occurs.

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, the characters are aware of whether they have this white privilege regarding discrimination. The definition of privilege already emphasises the distribution of inequality among individuals. Evaristo reflects through Yazz when she confronts her white friend, Courtney:

> people won't see you as just another woman any more, but as a white woman who hangs with brownies, and you'll lose a bit of your privilege, you should still check it, though, have you heard the expression, check your privilege, babe? (Evaristo 65)

According to Yazz, people will see Courtney differently when she hangs out with brown-skinned people. For this reason, she won't be viewed as a regular woman but rather as a white woman who associates with non-white people. As a result of this choice, she will lose her

privileges. Yazz touches upon race and privilege, specifically the privilege of being a white woman. She suggests associating with people of colour may challenge this privilege, as others view white women differently. The phrase that Yazz uses, "check your privilege", is mentioned as a standard call to self-awareness and reflection on one's societal advantages based on race, gender, or other factors. This quotation stresses the complexity of navigating privilege and identity, particularly regarding race and social dynamics. Evaristo does this by exploring some common issues, presenting characters in a way that they can find their way to create their beliefs. For example, generational differences present a new way of modifying thoughts among the characters while also illustrating otherness caused by stigmatisation and persecution. The book's title addresses otherness by questioning, "Who is the other?" and "Why is othered?". The process of stigmatisation and oppression is reflected through the language of characters which the social construction of stigma affects social inequalities. Evaristo emphasises women of colour, putting them in a multidimensional category in a diverse context with their differences. These characters are othered based on gender and do not belong to this traditional conservative definition of femininity, appearance, skin colour or sexual orientation. However, they all share one common thing: stigmatisation and social exclusion. Through narration, readers encounter the female characters' stories of how persecution manifested through gender, race, social class and sexual orientation.

The concept of otherness also shifts from one character to another. The first protagonist, lesbian playwriter Amma, grew up in a very traditional family where the dominance of patriarchy was clear. She is an activist character portrayed fighting for her own goals and questioning why the male parts in Shakespeare could not be played by women, a norm of a binary understanding of gender (Evaristo 8). In the meantime, she comes across constant restrictions in her social environment. She has a daughter called Yazz who is growing up with the standards that Amma sets for herself as being brave in a world where women of colour are treated as second class like her mum when she went to Soho clubs:

> she says she felt ugly until African men told her she was not
>
> you should see what she looked like back then
>
> a cross between Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge
>
> so yeah, really ugly (Evaristo 10)

Amma confesses that she used to feel unattractive until African men complimented her, claiming she looked like a mix between Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge. Then she

sarcastically adds that she must have looked unattractive before receiving those compliments. Amma reflects on the intersections of race and beauty standards, how society often values external beauty standards and how the opinions of others can influence individuals' self-esteem. In this case, her confidence depends on external validation from African men. Additionally, Amma demonstrates the harmful impact of societal beauty standards and how women may feel inadequate without meeting them. Since the beauty ideals are considered white skin and blonde with blue eyes, the African woman is positioned in a hierarchy of binary opposition where it is labelled ugly. Categorisation of women is not limited only to this but also when Amma's traditional patriarchal father creates gender roles for her:

> my three older brothers became lawyers and doctors, their obedience to the
>
> expectation of our father meant I was not pressurised to follow suit
>
> his only concern for me marriage and children (Evaristo 10)

Amma maintains that her brothers all pursued prestigious careers in law and medicine, which satisfied her father's expectations. As a result, she was not pressured to do the same. Instead, her father was only concerned about her marrying and having children. In this sense, her father had a traditional and patriarchal mindset that prioritised marriage and children for his daughter over career success. The fact that the father was satisfied with her sons' professional choices but did not pressure the daughter to pursue their path stresses gender-based expectations and biases.

Furthermore, the quotation above entails that her acting career is a hobby which has an end when she decides to marry and establish a family. The idea that whatever Amma decides to do before she marries is simply a hobby can be associated with the gender roles and expectations that Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, where she underlines the concept of performance, which we all do in line with the obligatory expectation of the norm. In this situation, the norm comes from her father as the head of the house; Amma cannot go over the lines of patriarchy and what is expected from her as a woman. The patriarchy's agenda does not serve as an opportunity for a woman to study and discover herself; instead, it traps women, imposes certain expectations, and forces them to perform their duties. For example, the compulsory performance expected from a married woman is genuinely reflected in this paragraph where Evaristo defines Amma's mother through her narrative:

> Mum worked eight hours a day in paid employment, raised four children, maintained
> the home, made sure the patriarch's dinner was on the table every night and his shirts
> were ironed every morning
> meanwhile, he was off saving the world
> his one domestic duty was to bring home the meat for Sunday lunch from the butcher's
> a suburban kind of hunter-gatherer thing (Evaristo 11)

Amma's mother had responsibilities, including working full-time, taking care of the children, managing the household, and ensuring that the father was well cared for. Meanwhile, her father's only responsibility was to bring home the meat for Sunday lunch, which made him feel like a suburban hunter-gatherer. Amma illustrates the gendered division of labour within a family, where the mother has to manage multiple responsibilities. In contrast, the father's responsibilities are limited to the traditionally masculine role of providing meat. Her father's lack of involvement in domestic duties and childcare contrasts with her mother's massive workload, which can be seen as an example of the inadequate distribution of domestic labour often observed in patriarchal ideology. Her mother is imprisoned in this cycle of domestic sphere duties which she has to do every day while she also has to maintain the patriarch's dinner. Amma's father is from Ghana and came to Britain, where he never felt at home. Evaristo describes his migrant experience by justifying her mother's thoughts:

> it must have been so traumatic, to lose his home, his family, his friends, his culture, his
> first language, and to come to a country that didn't want him
> once he had children, he wanted us educated in England and that was it (Evaristo 35)

When Amma faces her mother about the fact that she is married to a patriarch, her mother justifies how her father acts because he is a man born in 1920s Ghana (Evaristo 11), meaning that he cannot comprehend what is going on in the 1960s in metropolitan London. After her father dies, she realises that her mother's oppression is something "as symptomatic and symbolic" and that she already accepted her "subservient position in the marriage and rotted from the inside" (Evaristo 11). Amma does not only react to the fact that her mother is a victim of patriarchy, where she is already trapped inside this hierarchy, but also rebels against this established system where she cannot share her sexual preference with her father. Although Amma's character is loud and proud, she is forced to obey the rules of male dominance. While she cannot achieve thoroughly rebellious, her daughter, whom she describes her to be as "free,

feminist and powerful", accomplishes Amma's dreams (Evaristo 38). The endeavour that Amma has for Yazz, who should be raised as an independent young woman without being afraid of speaking her mind. Amma puts her beliefs to Yazz by restructuring a world where she is not forced to follow the expectations of a patriarch.

After her father passes, Carole is raised alone by her traditional Nigerian mother, Bummi. She encounters prejudice against being a Black woman continuously. She describes her feeling regarding her Nigerian mother and herself in the following paragraph:

> her mother couldn't get the day off work and anyway, it was just as well
> because she'd wear her most outlandish Nigerian outfit consisting of thousands
> of yards of bright material, and a headscarf ten storeys high, and she'd start
> bawling when she had to leave her only child for the first time
> Carole would forever be known as the student with the mad African mother
> that first week she counted on one hand the number of brown-skinned people in her
> college, and none as dark as her (Evaristo 131)

Carole's mother could not take a day off work to accompany her daughter to college, but it was probably better that way because Carole's mother would have worn her most flamboyant Nigerian outfit, including a headscarf that was extremely high. As a result, Carole became known as the student with the crazy African mother. During her first week at college, she noticed very few people with brown skin and none who were as dark as she was. In this quotation, Bernardine Evaristo reflects on the experience of a first-generation immigrant child and her mother. Her mother's traditional Nigerian outfit indicates the cultural gap between her and the predominantly white community in which they live. During the first week of her college, her existence difference is emphasised by her observation that there were very few people of colour at her college, which made her feel even more like an outcast. Evaristo illustrates immigrant families' challenges in integrating into a new culture while still holding onto their cultural traditions. There is apparent anxiety about her underlining, both embarrassed of her mother's existence and herself as a black woman who is not white enough like the others in the university. How she defines her mother reminds the reader to question the expectations imposed by society regarding appearances and preferences on what one is supposed to wear.

After we see her parents decided to give her a British name because they believe she will not encounter any discrimination they had when they first came to Britain. We understand that this anxiety is embedded in immigrant women's experience as a fear of not adapting enough

to society. Although she has a British name not expect to face any prejudice, she faces discrimination based on her skin colour and nationality. After graduating from Oxford University as a successful banker, even though she starts to wear like a white British woman, she still gets discrimination from her clients because of her skin. She is still perceived as a black woman whose parents migrated from Nigeria. No matter how fancy she would wear as someone who graduated from Oxford University, no matter how she talks British English with an accent, her identity is trapped in this established system of the patriarch when one cannot get higher than her/his hierarchy. Carole is a character that Evaristo defines as just conforming to the system in order to illustrate everything related to her in the category of the norm. Before she achieves a chance to prove herself as a black British woman is limited by her skin colour and being a woman. Evaristo defines this prejudice in the case of Carole's situation embedded in British society, described as "the collision between reality and expectations" (Evaristo 117). Her expectation comes from the success she has achieved through studying and becoming a banker, collapsing in the ideals of clients we can consider the norm. On the one hand, a Black British woman cannot be in a position like this because they inherit a skin colour and a particular type of gender unsuitable with the standards portrayed to them. On the other hand, her mother, Bummi, portrays her body by putting her gender role as an immigrant, which she should not forget her roots.

“Bummi gave her the benefit of the doubt, and you must stay that way, remember you are Nigerian and not one of these tarty English girls” (Evaristo 152). When Bummi compares her daughter with English girls marking them as lower than Nigerians because it is the best way to survive in this migrant experience as a Black woman, individuals create these biased divisions through labelling. These thoughts create an invasion of Carole's body which challenges the way she controls. Bummi reminds Carole to stay true to her Nigerian roots and not become like the immoral English girls. This quotation suggests that there may be a perceived cultural difference between Nigerian and English women in terms of their behaviour and morals. Bummi seems to want to protect her from the negative influences of English culture, which may be seen as a threat to her Nigerian identity. This highlights the importance of cultural identity and the desire to maintain it in the face of cultural differences.

Non-binary Megan/Morgan, a teenager and social media influencer, uses the internet to discover her gender identity and lives under the oppressive of her parents. She identifies herself as gender-free. The reason why she has two names is the reflection of her change in her gender identity from Megan to Morgan. Through these characters, Evaristo points out how the norms and expectations affect marginalised minority groups and their narratives. Megan/Morgan

comes across this problem of expressing her gender in a society where the norm is considered to be either male or female. The denial of new genders results in isolation from society, for gender-free individuals becomes outcast. This rejection of her gender starts with Megan/Morgan the treatment of her mother, Julie, when she says:

> […] repeating patterns of oppression based on gender, one example was that Megan preferred wearing trousers as a child, which she found more comfortable than dresses, she liked the look of them, liked having pockets to put her hands and other things into, liked looking like her brother Mark who was three years older wearing trousers really shouldn't have been an issue for a girl born in her time, but her mother wanted her to look cuter than she already was like the cutest of the cutest cutie-pies she was determined to dress Megan up for the approval of society at large, usually other females who commented on her looks from as early as she can remember (Evaristo 307)

Gender norms frame girls and boys like the binary oppositions of pink and blue. This repeated pattern of gender-based oppression in which societal expectations force girls and women to conform to specific gender roles and appearance standards. Her mother created this gender identity for her from the beginning of childhood for "the approval of society", where she does not need to do or say anything except be cute (Evaristo 308). Although the trousers are more practical and comfortable for Megan, her mother wanted her to conform to traditional gender norms and look cute for society's approval. When Megan grows up, she observes that her mother approves of the idea of her gender assignation at birth, making her wear skirts and dresses associated only with femininity. After a while, she realises the fact that "except it felt wrong, even at a young age, something in her realised that her prettiness was supposed to make her compliant […] invested in her being adorable." (Evaristo 308). This pressure from society to conform and fit into gender roles is a form of oppression. The quotation stresses how gender expectations can limit individual freedom and enforce harmful stereotypes. These gender roles that have been imposed on her since childhood led her to question her identity in a way to reach "the core of herself she wondered if she should really have been born a man because she sure as hell didn't feel like a woman perhaps that was the root of her problems" (Evaristo 317).

Evaristo creates this complexity of the definition of gender by society's standards by demonstrating how the language of the expectations constructs how a girl should dress and present normality. What we see from Megan is that she does want to carry this appearance of

what is expected of a girl. While she thinks that "manhood and womanhood set in stone" (Evaristo 319), she finds a woman called Bibi on the internet and asks for Bibi to redefine gender; Bibi replies as "gender's a social construction, most of us are born male or female, but the concepts of masculinity and femininity are society's inventions, none of it is innate" (Evaristo 319). Bibi's answer highlights Judith Butler's theory that being born with a particular type of gender defines who you are, which does not provide any choice or decision related to one's gender. Bibi also presents Megan with the gender roles:

> women are designed to have babies, not to play with dolls, and why shouldn't women sit with their legs wide open (if they're wearing trousers, obv) and what does mannish or manly mean anyway? walking with long strides? being assertive? taking charge? wearing 'male' clothes? not wearing make-up? unshaved legs? shaved head (lol), drinking pints instead of wine? preferring football to online make-up tutorials (yawn), and traditionally men wear make-up and skirts in parts of the world so why not in ours without being accused of being 'effeminate'? What does effeminate actually mean when you break it down? the thing is, Megan, much as I reject conformist gender bullshit as above, I still feel female, I've known it since like forever, for me it's not about wanting to play with dolls, it goes much deeper than that (Evaristo 320)

As in the case of this quotation, Bibi questions the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on women. She believes that women should not be confined to only having babies or dressing a certain way and that there is nothing inherently wrong with women. Bibi expresses her rejection of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. She claims society's expectations of women, such as playing with dolls and sitting with their legs closed, are subjective and restrictive. Moreover, she opposes the notion of being "manly" or "effeminate", asserting that these are societal constructs that do not necessarily correspond with biological sex. Bibi's emphasis on preference and individual agency is evident when it comes to questioning why men can wear makeup and skirts in other parts of the world without being seen as effeminate. At the same time, women are projected to obey a more restrictive gender code. Furthermore, she reveals her gender identity, acknowledging that society rejects these traditional gender norms but still identifies as female. This indicates that gender identity is a multiplex issue that challenges the binary nature of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Emphasises the importance of individualistic autonomy and choice in determining one's gender identity and representation of sexual orientation.

Evaristo depicts gender functions in the novel as an opportunity to express the characters' narrative, emphasising the importance of individualistic autonomy and choice in determining one's gender identity and representation of sexual orientation. Each character clashes with an individual fight resisting the same thing: a constructed world where things need to be in order in line with the ideology of patriarchy. Through the character of Bibi, readers see the characters are no longer trapped in a domestic sphere. The language of narrative depicts the characters' identity issues, such as who they are, whom they love and how they want to voice themselves. Nonetheless, preferences can result in isolation from society. Although British society has progressed on the expectations of marginalised groups, there is still a biased perspective on the belief that there are only two genders where a woman is subordinated as a Victorian ideal of an Angel in the house. Any kind of gender preference apart from the norm is still perceived as sceptical and lower rank in the hierarchy. As Bibi states, she is not just a feminist but an intersectional feminist because "it's not just about gender but race, sexuality, class and other intersections which we mostly unthinkingly live anyway" (Evaristo 323). For this reason, the concept of woman cannot be identified as one complete form of a definition; women entail multiple identities such as race, ethnicity, class, and social identity.

Megan's connections with the trans world results in her identification of herself as non-binary Morgan, which changes her pronouns from she/her to their/them. This change leads to her complete isolation from society, where the belief is based on there are only two genders. This social construction does not give an individual a choice because how you are born identifies who you are. Morgan is a significant character in *Girl, Woman, Other*, giving the reader a representation of new gender forms by being African American, part Malawian and part English. These categorisations demonstrate that an individual can be labelled through all these categories to find a room in society. By definition, these discourses are mainly exclusive forces that one can inherit living in Britain. Although she knows her gender preference will trigger the norms of society, Megan tells Bibi:

> after considering the options in depth, what makes most sense to me is the concept of gender-free, being born female isn't the problem, society's expectations are, I get this now and I'm so glad I didn't go down the sex change route gender confirmation (Evaristo 325)

This quote is substantial because the standardisation of narratives in gender forms changes through Megan's understanding of her individuality to discover her narrative. Megan/Morgan

reflects on her experience and thought process regarding gender identity. She has considered different options and concluded that being gender-free makes the most sense to her. She believes that societal expectations around gender are the issue, not the fact that they were born female. Ultimately, Megan/Morgan expresses relief and gratitude for not pursuing gender confirmation surgery. Her statement suggests a rejection of traditional gender norms and an embrace of the idea that gender is a social construct rather than a biological given. By rejecting the idea of gender confirmation, she challenges the notion that one's physical body must conform to societal expectations around gender identity. It also highlights the importance of individual agency in determining one's gender identity rather than relying solely on societal norms and expectations. Instead of fulfilling norms, Megan stops all the beliefs and ideals arising from society's persecution. In the end, she is pushed to leave society and considered to be an outsider. The idea of being gender-free or gender-neutral is a concept that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. It suggests that gender is not inherent in biology but is instead a social construct that is imposed on individuals from a young age. The goal of gender neutrality is to create a society where traditional gender roles and expectations do not limit individuals and where people are free to express themselves in any way they choose. Gender norms that function on behalf of individuals by the ideology of patriarch and the discourses on a sexual category without their preferences can severely affect the lives of marginalised groups.

In *Girl, Woman, Other* protagonists are confronted, provoked, and detained by this standardisation of the norm in their socio-cultural spheres. These twelve black women protagonists all explore a way to recognise a specific identification for themselves. In a way, the primary source of all these issues today is the norm that is expected and transferred from generation to generation. The challenging thing is to be able to remove these perceptions of women. Expectations of society result in imprisoning women to the belief of the norm and patriarchy. Bernardine Evaristo stages a new narrative to the voices abandoned in the novel's leading patriarchal structures. She illustrates the struggle of living in a patriarchal society and how it presents challenges and unites women at the same time.

Evaristo presents the characters by addressing numerous forms of brutality in contemporary Britain, where they shrink the opportunities in a patriarchal society. The stigmatisation of the characters occurs because of their differences which result in otherness. In the end, Evaristo offers a reader that there is a possibility in a world where there is no dichotomy of binary divisions based on a patriarchal system. Evaristo proves a new perception of diversity without excluding othered women in a collective black female experience. Although current topics related to gender, specifically from the traditional conservative perspective, lies on the

idea that it is a damaging influence on penetrating body politics and threatening traditional family values, Bernardine Evaristo breaks this belief of stereotypical assumptions by embracing queer community.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis analyses the deconstruction of race, gender, and class in the two novels, *NW* (2012) by Zadie Smith and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo. These two novels are set in contemporary Britain, emphasizing how the characters are confronted, persuaded, and imprisoned by their constructed identities, such as race, gender, and class, in their socio-cultural spheres. The main objective of the conclusion is to illustrate how this thesis unpacked the complex and ambiguous representation of these concepts within the language of the characters that attempt to identify themselves. At the same time, they are othered based on their identities. In addition, this thesis will demonstrate how these concepts are influential in understanding the current political, economic, and social turmoil, specifically in the United Kingdom.

As we have seen, in Zadie Smith's novel *NW*, the postal code NW is a crucial element that defines the identity of its characters. Smith portrays how the location of the novel plays a significant role in shaping the characters' past, present, and future. The characters share a common working-class origin, and their changes in identity are heavily influenced by their environment, which is colonised by the upper class. The limiting agencies of race, gender, and class subject the characters to subjugation, which is carried through their struggles for social mobility. Furthermore, the novel problematizes the notion of meritocracy, as racial inequalities are highlighted within this system. Overall, *NW* depicts the complexity and interconnectedness of issues of location, identity, and social stratification within the meritocracy, emphasising the importance of understanding these factors in the characters' lives.

The second novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), is about a profound exploration of black British women and their experiences. This thesis could also have discussed the concept of class in *Girl, Woman, Other* but I wanted to focus on more pressing subjects concerning otherness: race and gender. Bernardine Evaristo focuses on the intersectionality of gender and race, highlighting the extraordinary challenges black British women face. The novel examines the complexities of gender preferences or sexual orientations and how they are impacted by race and otherness. Evaristo's characters represent a diverse group of women who are othered, and

their stories are composed together to create a collective black British women's experience. The author masterfully highlights the societal and cultural limitations imposed upon black women, revealing how they are forced to navigate a world that is often hostile to their existence. Through her characters, she effectively portrays the struggles and accomplishments of black British women.

Although the novels *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other* share some similarities, there are notable contrasts in style and form. However, they converge towards a common theme, which is the exploration of identity. By the end of the analysis, it becomes clear that despite their differences in style and approach, both novels ultimately investigate the complexities of how individuals identify themselves concerning their race, gender, and class and how society perceives and constructs these identities. The interaction between the issues of race, gender, class, and identity is not a simple one, and the relationship between these concepts is subject to constant evolution and change with the current political, economic, and social instability in Britain.

Though *NW* was written before Brexit, whereas *Girl, Woman, Other* was written after Brexit, and the relevance of both novels to current issues is more applicable than ever. The slogan "Taking back control" of immigration and the economy and by, claiming the benefits of Brexit, the referendum was held in 2016 by David Cameron, which resulted in Britain's exit from the European Union, or in abbreviation, Brexit. There are many potential consequences of and reasons for Brexit, but in this thesis context it is mainly xenophobia and identity crises, such as the fear and anxiety for what would e.g., happen if Turkey would join the EU. The issues of sovereignty from the European Union and the potential benefits of Brexit resulted in victory for the Leave campaign. The xenophobia that the Leave vote resulted in society has later been revealed by Zadie Smith's essay on Brexit for the *New York Review of Books,* entitled "Fences: A Brexit Diary", where she states that:

I kept reading pieces by Londoners speaking proudly of their multicultural, outward-looking city, different from these narrow, xenophobic places up north. It sounded right, and I wanted it to be true, but the evidence of my own eyes offered a counter-narrative.

[…]

Then my first thoughts would have been essentially hermeneutic. What does this vote mean? What was it really about? Immigration? Inequality? Historic xenophobia? Sovereignty? EU bureaucracy? Anti-neoliberal revolution? Class war? (Smith)

While Smith describes her experience with Londoners' pride in their multicultural and outward-looking city and the contrast with the perceived xenophobia in northern regions, her personal observations led her to question this narrative. She raises a series of questions regarding the meaning of the vote, whether it was about issues such as immigration, inequality, xenophobia, sovereignty, EU bureaucracy, anti-neoliberalism, or class struggle. Nevertheless, what was the emergence of Brexit that led to this societal disaster? She believes the source of this disaster begins with the agenda of politics, which she considers as:

Conservative" is not the proper term for either of them anymore: that word has at least an implication of care and the preservation of legacy. "Arsonist" feels like the more accurate term. Meanwhile, Michael Gove and Nigel Farage are true right-wing ideologues with clear agendas toward which they have been working for many years. The first had his sights on the Trojan horse of "sovereignty," from inside of which empty symbol an unfettered deregulated financial sector was supposed to leap. The second, who resigned on July 4, seemed to be in the grip of a genuine racial obsession, combined with a determination to fence off Britain from the European mainstream not only on the question of freedom of movement but on a range of issues from climate change to gun control to repatriation of immigrants. (Smith)

Smith believes the term "Conservative" is not appropriate to describe certain politicians such as Michael Gove and Nigel Farage anymore, as it implies a sense of care and preservation of legacy. Instead, she suggests the term "Arsonist" fits more in labelling them as right-wing ideologues with their agendas. In contrast, some focused on the empty symbol of "sovereignty" to promote a liberalised financial sector. Others portrayed Brexit as having a legitimate racial obsession and a desire to isolate Britain from the rest of Europe. The motivations of political individuals are destructive by creating racial politics and xenophobia in Britain rather than promoting a more inclusive and diverse society. Though many remaining voters on the left was this was only about immigration, says Smith, the class and age made clear that working-class populists made an effect on it. The data of voters who voted for Brexit proves that Brexiters

have higher poverty, low skills, and lack of opportunities across the country led to Brexit. Economic reasons, low education, and national identity were the dominant factors motivating people to vote for it. In the article "Understanding the social and cultural bases of Brexit", it was stated that "people who see themselves as British rather than English are arguably choosing a broader and more inclusive identity" (Chan). In this sense, prioritising English nationalism, or the English national identity, played a significant role in shaping the referendum result.

According to Zadie Smith, neoliberalism is characterised by resistance to change, leading to a disruptive break in a system leftists interpret as continuing Britain's austerity and economic meltdown (Smith). Smith believes that in London, people's multicultural and cross-class experiences are often reflected in their staff, such as nannies and cleaners. However, the post-Brexit economic situation has highlighted the deep divides in British society. Smith argues that there are gaps between the North and South, social classes, Londoners and non-Londoners, rich and poor Londoners, and between white, brown, and black people (Smith). These divides are real and not limited to those who voted to Leave. Individual experiences of multiculturalism and class diversity are often mediated by employing staff from different backgrounds. However, the economic impacts of Brexit have further deepened the existing social and economic divides within British society. Smith argues that these divisions exist beyond voting for Leave and that they are a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed. In some parts of the UK, people live close to immigrants and face direct job competition, leading to resentment towards migrants. In this sense, Smith believes that "the casual racism lies alongside both by the campaign and by the vote itself". (Smith). What she means by casual racism is that indirect forms of discrimination that are expressed unintentionally create a significant impact on the outcome of the vote. Moreover, with a government that blames migrants for economic difficulties and promotes austerity policies, it becomes easy to point fingers at immigrants for issues like lack of hospital beds or insufficient funding for public services. The author questions whether, in such a dishonest and hypocritical environment, the working class should be expected to maintain a high moral standard, especially when everyone else is seemingly building walls and embracing nationalism by asking is it foolish to live without barriers when others are building them?

Zadie Smith highlights the challenges faced by working-class people in the UK who live near migrants and experience direct competition for resources. The government's rhetoric blaming immigrants for economic problems has contributed to anger towards migrants, which Smith questions in her article whether it is fair to expect working-class people to maintain high moral standards in such a dishonest and hypocritical environment (Smith). The rise of

nationalism and isolationism in the UK indicates that the British government enforces a system of double standards by consistently blaming immigrants for the economic crisis, austerity measures, and lack of funding for the National Health Service, which contends that building a fence will not address the corruption in N10 and is not a solution for Great Britain.

The Black Lives Matter social movement focuses on racism, discrimination, and racial equality experienced by Black people, which started on social media after the death of African American teen Trayvon Martin. However, the movement gained significant attention and popularity following the death of George Floyd in 2020. The structure of the movement is different from civil rights movements in the past, as it relies on creating collective protest with the help of social media and direct action. The movement addresses not only the issue of excessive power and brutality of the police but also the racial discrimination experienced by Black people. It emphasises the importance of addressing systemic racism and creating meaningful change towards racial equality. While the BLM movement originated in the United States, its effects continue to be felt today in many European countries in the fight against racial injustice.

Today it is possible to see these parallels and echoes in the lives of Black people coming from different countries coming together to demonstrate. For example, when Edward Colston, who is a British slave trader and a Tory member of parliament, whose statue was thrown in Bristol Harbour, David Olusoga claimed this was not an act of vandalism; instead, he justified it as an act of a generation demanding change (Hodges). In this sense, having memorials that honour individuals who have committed terrible acts is inappropriate. In addition, a recent examination conducted by Historic England has revealed the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on the built environment, demonstrating how the legacy of slavery continues to shape contemporary society (144 Wills and Dresser). There is an urgent need to acknowledge these ongoing discussions and actions to address the continuing impact of historical injustices.

The fundamental issue concerning racism, gender, and class lies in the failure to acknowledge and recognise their presence. These problems are deeply embedded in cultural traditions, language, and social interactions. Discriminatory language and patriarchal systems perpetuate the sense of exclusion, isolation, and "otherness" experienced by marginalised individuals. In the contemporary world, there is worldwide unease regarding the LGBTQ+ community, viewed by some as challenging societal norms. We witnessed a change in recent years in social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community with an increased understanding and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Regardless, the LGBTQ+ still encounters significant challenges, such as violence and harassment. Additionally, casual

discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation can negatively affect the careers and personal lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. This can manifest as discriminative practices in the workplace exclusively due to their identity. These kinds of discrimination can have extreme effects on feelings of isolation.

The issues of race, gender and class remain deeply rooted in the culture and language, affecting how we interact with each other. Casual discrimination and prejudice can significantly impact people's careers and personal lives. Acknowledging the past brings building a more inclusive and accepting society that embraces individuals regardless of race, sexual orientation, or gender identity. On the one hand, the Guardian acknowledges its past association with slavery by launching a research project called "The Cotton Capital", which investigates the newspaper's ties with its former British colonies and their cotton labour. On the other hand, the Conservative/Tory government in Britain has implemented the Rwanda refugee plan, which forcibly relocates refugees from the UK to Rwanda. The current climate in Britain features two contrasting approaches to acknowledging historical injustices and addressing present-day issues related to race, immigration, and human rights. The Guardian's initiative can be seen as a step towards acknowledging its past and actively working to uncover the truth about the newspaper's connection to slavery. In contrast, the Rwanda refugee plan reflects a lack of compassion towards refugees and a willingness to prioritise political practicality over human rights.

Eventually, the common themes addressed in these two novels, *NW* and *Girl, Woman, Other*, are particularly fascinating as they highlight the persistence of social issues across different eras. The recurring problems in contemporary British society demonstrate the challenge of standardising descriptions embedded in our collective consciousness across generations. In this thesis, the analysed novels prove that language can be utilised to oppose these imposed discourses. Despite progress being made, the narrative of black women who are othered based on the intersectionality of their race, gender, and class continues today. It is crucial to persist in fighting for the right to express individual choices and preferences that are not imprisoned by societal expectations.

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