

**“First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then  
raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits [...] Anyway, whatever the fuck we are, Ravi  
an others are better at being it than I am”**

Desire for Otherness in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*

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<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b>			
<p>This thesis examines Gautam Malkani’s novel <i>Londonstani</i>. The novel was based on Malkani’s own dissertation surplus material. He was studying the Brit-Asian rude boy scene and their rejection of their parents effort to integrate with mainstream Britain. The novel follows the life of Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden (Jas), a white teenager, who is throughout the novel portrayed as a British Asian. Jas is trying his best to mimic a group of British Asian teenagers from London’s multicultural suburbs Southall and Hounslow. This study attempts to find reasons for this desire for otherness, i.e. the need to perform a different cultural identity than one is born into and the need to adapt the role of the “other”.</p> <p>The theoretical discussion consists of many of the theoretical aspects that are central to understanding this idea behind the desire for otherness and racial crossover. Firstly, the theoretical section examines the legacy of colonialism and the current multicultural and postethnic state of London as well as introducing the myth of white superiority and how throughout history men have used stereotypes in order to maintain preferable power structures. Secondly, it discusses the various ways of belonging, the perpetual juxtaposition of the self and the “other” and the concept of home, displacement, the in-between state and hybridity. Thirdly, the theoretical discussion explores the desire for otherness and tries to find reasons for this desire by introducing such concepts as postcolonial exotic, otherness as a commodity and postcolonial melancholia. The last section of the theoretical section discusses the theoretical background of the different ways of becoming the other, i.e. performing identities.</p> <p>In the critical discussion of the novel it is explained and exemplified how Malkani’s London portrays the postethnic state of London and how his protagonists - unlike their parents who are first generation immigrants and have had to adapt to British society - are free to choose their cultural identities and rather celebrating and sometimes violently manifesting their own cultural identities and not questioning their place in British society. Furthermore, it is showed in the discussion how the British Asian population in <i>Londonstani</i> are transforming from displaced strangers to a new breed of Englishmen. In addition, it is discussed how the desire for otherness could be partly explained by the appealing masculinity and how the postethnic state of London has enabled the possibility of having interracial role models and idols and thus led Jas to idolise the British Asian teenagers who themselves are idolising black rap artists. The critical discussion also explains by giving examples how this British Asianness is representing otherness as a commodity and how in a modern consumer-oriented world it is possible to buy one’s way into another cultural identity. Furthermore, by analysing passages from the novel, the discussion explores the main reason for Jas’s role play or performance, white postcolonial melancholia. In the last section of the critical discussion it is exemplified how Jas has chosen to abandon the cultural identity as well as chosen to mimic the other. In addition, the debatable nature of the successfulness of the performance is questioned as well as the measurability of this success, i.e. the authenticity of the performance. The last part of this section discusses why Jas’s performance is believed to be a failure.</p> <p>In the last section of this thesis, as conclusion for the above discussion, this thesis tries to pinpoint that the postethnic state of Malkani’s London has served as a platform for the possibility for racial crossover and that Jas’s refusal of his whiteness might stem from postcolonial melancholia. Furthermore, it claims that postethnicity has aided in marketing and commodifying otherness and thus reinforced the desirability of British Asianness in British society and made it easier for Jas to idolise British Asianness and to buy his way into it. To conclude, I would like to mention that what I found was that even in an ideal situation like Jas’s, mimicry or racial crossover will ultimately fail because it is not considered as authentic and because it is impossible to alter one’s cultural signifiers.</p>			
<b>Avainsanat – Keywords</b>			
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<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b>				
<p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee lontoolaisen Gautam Malkanin romaania <i>Londonstani</i>. Malkanin teos perustuu hänen oman tutkielmansa ylijäämämateriaaliin. Malkanin tutkielma käsitteli brittiläis-aasialaista rudeboy-kulttuuria ja sitä miten nämä nuoret tietoisesti hylkäsivät vanhempiansa yritykset integroitua brittiläiseen kulttuuriin ja osaksi yhteiskuntaa. Tarina seuraa Jason Bartholomew-Clivedeniä (Jas), joka on valkoinen brittiläinen nuori, mutta Malkanin kerronta saa lukijan luulemaan, että Jas on brittiläis-aasialainen. Jas yrittää parhaansa mukaan imitoida ryhmää brittiläis-aasialaisia nuoria, jotka ovat kotoisin Lontoon monikulttuurisista lähiöistä Southallista ja Hounslowsta. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on etsiä syitä tälle toiseuden kaipuulle eli tarpeelle omaksua eri kulttuurinen identiteetti kuin se johon henkilö on syntynyt. Tämä voidaan nähdä myös tarpeena omaksua toisen tai enemmänkin ”toiseuden” rooli.</p> <p>Teoreettinen perusta tälle tutkimukselle koostuu monista aihepiirille tärkeistä teoreettisista käsitteistä, jotka auttavat paremmin ymmärtämään toiseuden kaipuun ja ”rodullisen” muutoksen tai etnisen muodonmuutoksen. Ensinnäkin, teoriaosuus käsittelee kolonialismin ajan perintöä Britanniassa ja varsinkin Lontoon nykyistä monikulttuurista ja postetnistä tilaa. Tarkastelussa on myös valkoisuuden paremmuuden myytti ja kuinka ihmiset ovat kautta historian onnistuneesti käyttäneet stereotyyppioita luomaan ennakkoluuloja toisista ja näin ollen ylläpitäneet haluttuja voimasuhteita. Toiseksi tässä teoriaosuudessa pyritään esittelemään niin jonkin osana olemisen ja kuulumisen tavat kuin myös minuuden ja toiseuden välisen aineisen vastakkainasettelun ja rinnastuksen. Teoreettisessa osuudessa pyritään käymään läpi myös seuraavat osittain vaikeasti käännettävissä olevat käsitteet kuten kodin käsite, <i>displacement</i>, <i>in-between state</i> ja hybriditeetti. Teoriaosuuden kolmannessa osuudessa pyritään selittämään toiseuden kaipua ja selvittämään mahdollisia syitä tälle ilmiölle esittelemällä sellaisia käsitteitä kuten jälkikolonialistinen eksotiikka, toiseus kaupankäynnin välineenä ja kulutushyödykkeenä ja jälkikolonialistinen melankolia. Teoriaosuuden viimeinen osio käsittelee toiseksi tulemisen ja identiteetin esittämisen teoreettista perustaa.</p> <p><i>Londonstanin</i> kriittisen tarkastelun tarkoituksena on näyttää esimerkein kuinka Malkanin Lontoo kuvastaa Lontoon postetnistä tilaa ja kuinka hänen keskushahmonsä - toisin kuin heidän vanhempansa, jotka ovat ensimmäisen sukupolven maahanmuuttajia ja ovat joutuneet sopeutumaan ja mukautumaan brittiläiseen yhteiskuntaan - ovat vapaita valitsemaan kulttuurisen identiteettinsä ja enemmänkin juhlistavat ja välillä myös vahvasti ilmaisevat omia kulttuurisia identiteettejään eivätkä kyseenalaista paikkaansa brittiläisessä yhteiskunnassa. Tämän lisäksi analyysiosuudessa pyritään näyttämään kuinka <i>Londonstanin</i> brittiläis-aasialainen väestö on muuntautunut pakolaisista ja muukalaisista uudeksi ja tasa-arvoiseksi ”englantilaislajiksi”. Analyysissä keskustellaan myös kuinka toiseuden kaipuu voidaan ainakin osittain selittää miehisyyden ja maskuliinisuuden viehätysvoimalla ja kuinka Lontoon postetninen tila mahdollistaa sen, että valkoisilla nuorilla kuten Jas voi olla roolimalleja roolimallin etnisyydestä riippumatta ja kuinka tämä on johtanut Jasin päätökseen ihannoida brittiläis-aasialaisia nuoria, jotka puolestaan ihannoivat mustia rap-artistejä. Analyysiosuus pyrkii myös selvittämään kuinka brittiläis-aasialaisuus edustaa toiseutta kauppatavarana ja kuinka modernissa kuluttajaorientoituneessa maailmassa on mahdollista ostaa tiensä toiseen kulttuuriseen identiteettiin. Tämän lisäksi analyysissä tutkitaan myös Jasin roolipelin tai esityksen tärkeintä syytä eli jälkikolonialistista melankoliaa. Analyysiosuuden viimeisessä osuudessa käydään läpi kirjan esimerkkien perusteella kuinka Jas on päättänyt hylätä synnynnäisen valkoisen kulttuurisen identiteettinsä ja valinnut toiseuden imitoimisen tai jäljittelyn. Tässä viimeisessä osuudessa kyseenalaistetaan myös esityksen onnistuminen niin kuin myös se seikka, että miten menestystä eli esityksen autenttisuutta mitataan. Analyysiosuuden viimeinen osio käsittelee syitä sille miksi Jasin esityksen uskotaan olevan epäonnistunut.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman viimeisessä osuudessa esitellään johtopäätökset yllä olevalle keskustelulle eli kuinka mielestäni Malkanin Lontoon postetnisyys antaa mahdollisuuden tai ikään kuin alustan ”rodullisen” tai etnisen muodonmuutoksen mahdollisuudelle ja että Jasin valkoisuuden torjuminen saattaa juontaa juurensa jälkikolonialistiseen melankoliaan. Tämän lisäksi johtopäätöksenä voidaan esittää kuinka postetnisyys on avustanut toiseuden markkinoinnissa ja hyödykkeellistämässä ja samalla vahvistanut brittiläis-aasialaisuuden viehätysvoimaa Britanniassa ja tehnyt Jasille helpommaksi idolisoida brittiläis-aasialaisuutta ja ostaa tiensä sen pariin. Loppukaneettina haluaisin mainita, että yksi tutkimukseni havainnoista oli myös, että edes ideaalisissa tilanteissa, jota Jasin tilanne edustaa, toiseuden imitoiminen ja jäljittely tai paremminkin etninen muodonmuutos on tuomittu epäonnistumaan, koska sitä ei katsota autenttiseksi ja koska kulttuuristen tunnuspiirteiden luonnollinen muuttaminen on mahdotonta.</p>				
<b>Avainsanat – Keywords</b>				
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## 1. Introduction

This thesis examines Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani*. The title itself uncovers the multicultural and hybrid nature of the novel. The novel is set in Southall, London, and it follows the life of a group of adolescent British Asian boys or "desis" as they call themselves. What makes this novel stand out from other contemporary British Asian fiction is, first of all, its language. The novel is for the most part written in youth slang and it also uses words from Punjabi and Urdu. Another interesting aspect of the novel is its main character Jas. Malkani's narration makes the reader consider Jas as another "desi" particularly because he spends his time with a group of British Asians, who seem to be very proud of their Asian heritage and loathe the dominant white society. In fact, Jas's real name, Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, is revealed only in the last pages of the novel as well as is the fact that, as the name implies, he is a white English boy. The reasoning behind Jas's desire for British Asianness or a certain kind of otherness is one of the issues that I am interested in. Why would someone want to "pass" as "an other" in his own society and adapt a British Asian cultural identity? Is it even possible? Still, the focus needs to be equally on both the (im)migrants and their descendants, who are affected by the surrounding British society, as well as on the white British who are affected by the (im)migration. However, in modern multicultural societies such as Britain, it is hard to categorise people as either "native" or "non-native" and who can really say if white Britons are more English than, for example, their Asian-originated fellow countrymen. These questions have been addressed by one of the most influential theorists in the postcolonial field, Paul Gilroy, who in *After Empire: Melancholia Or Convivial Culture* describes the situation among the youth in modern multicultural cities: "[r]acial difference is not feared. Exposure to it is not ethnic jeopardy but rather an unremarkable principle of metropolitan life. Race is essentially insignificant, at least when compared either to the hazards involved

in urban survival or to the desperate pleasures of the postcolonial city: “sex and drugs and on the dole”” (105).

In the first section of this thesis I will introduce the topic of my study and narrow it down to present a clear study question. In addition, I am going to provide information about the author, the novel and research concerning it, in addition to introducing some contextual information that I consider vital in understanding the topic. First, I will present the wide concept of Black British literature as a part of other British literature. Second, I will introduce the genre of British Asian fiction and its progress throughout its history and how its thematic has changed along with British society. Thirdly, I am going to discuss the novel, its reception, and earlier studies in more detail.

In the second part of this thesis I am going to introduce some of the theoretical concepts that serve as the basis of my study since they are essential in understanding the question behind the desire for otherness. First, I am going to represent how colonialism and the preceding *re-colonisation* shaped the British society and particularly London. Secondly, I am going to introduce the concept of whiteness as a predominant force in western societies and discuss how this position of dominance has been maintained by excluding others. Thirdly, I am going to discuss how these others and strangers are constructed with the help of Sara Ahmed’s ideas in particular. Then, I will move on to depict the problems in defining issues such as home and being “in place” from the point of view of the (im)migrant in western societies before presenting more complex concepts such as in-between space and hybridity. After this, I will discuss some other relevant concepts such as white postcolonial melancholia and aspects of the modern, multicultural and postethnic world that help to understand this desire for otherness. Lastly, I will introduce the various ways of mimicking others and its most extreme expression: passing or racial crossover.

In the last part of this thesis I will discuss how the aforementioned theoretical concepts are present in *Londonstani*. Firstly, I will exemplify how Malkani's description of Southall portrays a postcolonial and postethnic society that is changed by the reverse colonization. Secondly, I am going to discuss Mr. Ashwood as the representative of whiteness in the novel and how Malkani is playing with stereotypes when describing Jas's parents. Thirdly, I will move on to show the ways of belonging in the novel and how Jas and the gang are violently excluding everyone else from their group and choose to not belong rather than suffer from rootedness that has been a common issue in postcolonial literature. Then, I will describe how the desire for otherness is related to *Londonstani* by showing how the appealing masculinity of the gang might affect his longing to be someone or something else. In addition, I will show how Harjit acts as a role model and how Jas desires to be like him. After this, I will move on to discuss how desiness comes to represent commodifying otherness and how British Asian identity is something that can be sold to white adolescents like Jas and how he can buy his way into it. Furthermore, I will discuss the concept of postcolonial white melancholia and how Jas is a living example of it. In addition, I will discuss the different ways of mimicking and performing identity in *Londonstani* and how it differs between Jas and other members of the gang. Furthermore, I will exemplify why Jas's role-play will ultimately fail. Lastly, I will try to give a summary or rather a conclusion of what I have discussed.

### **1.1 The Topic**

As mentioned in the introduction, I am interested in Jas's desire for otherness. I am trying to find out what is the reasoning behind this performed cultural identity and why would someone want to adapt the role of "the other". Particularly, in a western society where Jas's innate cultural identity, in this case white British identity, is considered to be the



norm it seems strange that someone would want to give it away and choose to mimic “the other”. Naturally, the issue is not as straightforward as it may seem to be and in no means do I suggest that in today’s Britain the juxtaposition between various ethnicities is based on the superiority of the white British. Rather, since the myth of whiteness is the predominant norm that is kept alive by stereotyping others, it continues to affect the western way of thinking also unconsciously. It is also worth pondering upon whether it is even possible for a white British boy to pass for a British Asian. Is it possible to transform or pass into an authentic British Asian even in the eyes of other British Asians and how do we define this authenticity? I am also curious whether such racial crossover is a success or will it fail and by what standards can we measure this success or failure? To conclude, in my study I will try to investigate why someone who is a “native” British would want to be “the other” or non-British and is this even possible. In order to do so, I will also have to delve deeper into the concepts of Englishness and whiteness and their meaning in today’s multicultural Britain.

In addition, I would like to state that in this thesis I will use the term British Asian to refer to (im)migrants from South Asia, i.e., India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and their British offspring. As I have now briefly introduced the main topic of my study, I will proceed to discuss the unique writing that the many generations of (im)migrants have produced in Britain.

## **1.2 Black British Literature and British Asian Contemporary Fiction**

Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*, the novel that is at the centre of my study, could, generally speaking, be categorized under the somewhat loose caption of Black British literature or postcolonial literature. Both of these terms are somewhat problematic to define and could thus be understood in multiple ways. In a way, these terms make a clear

distinction between “proper” English literature written by “native” and usually white Britons and black or postcolonial literature that is, according to Mark Stein in *Black British Literature: Novels of transformation*, written by “male and female writers with African, South Asian, Indo-Caribbean, and African Caribbean backgrounds (backgrounds that could be further subdivided); writers who belong to different generations and social classes; and who are (or were) located in different geographical regions of Britain” (xiv).

It could be argued that these kinds of definitions outline the boundaries that restrict black or postcolonial literature from receiving the appreciation it deserves as a part of the English literary canon. Also, as Stein claims, “[t]he desire to keep separate the former colonizers from the formerly colonized (in terms of cultural production) becomes highly problematic in the case of Britain, where an overlapping space is inhabited by writers who are deemed postcolonial and writers who are not” (174). Altogether, these definitions also help to put a recognizable label on a wide and multicultural group of writers. In addition, it could be argued that all British writing is in one way or another postcolonial since the colonial past did not affect just the people in the colonies but also those living in Britain and continues to do so to this day.

Although the writers of black British literature, including the more prominent authors such as Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Caryl Phillips, usually had backgrounds in the former colonies, “Black British literature (which is as multifarious as the cast of *White Teeth*) not only deals with the situation of those who came from former colonies and their descendants, but also with the society which they discovered and continue to shape – and with those societies left behind” (Stein xii). It is important to realize that for Stein, who links Black British literature closely to the *Bildungsroman*, Black British literature and its thematic usually present “the *formation* of its protagonists” and equally importantly “the *transformation* of British society and

cultural institutions” (xiii; emphasis original). As can be seen, Stein sees black British literature as portraying the modern condition of Britain, which could be argued to be one of multiculturalism. In his own words, “[c]apitalizing on its ambivalent cultural attachment, what I term *the novel of transformation* portrays and purveys the transformation, the reformation, the repeated ‘coming of age’ of British cultures under the influence of ‘outsiders within’” (xiii; emphasis original).

As Black British literature might best be considered as the more general definition of the field of literature that my study focuses on, it might be useful to narrow it down and focus on a more specific term, namely British Asian contemporary fiction. At first, it is best to explain what this seemingly complicated term actually means. The focus is on the “British-born or British-raised Asian authors [...] who have emerged only in notable numbers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (Upstone 1) as a result of the mass migration of the 1950s. It must be stated that there were Asian authors in Britain prior to the 1950s but with the mass migration after the Second World War Britain found itself inhabited by a growing number of Asian communities and a demand or, more appropriately, an opportunity for someone to describe this migrant condition in literary form.

In both Black British literature and British Asian fiction the effects of the colonial period are still evident. As Sara Upstone argues in *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-first Century Voices*,

[t]here is, undoubtedly, a common context of racism in Britain that means black and Asian cultures share important perspectives on living in Britain. This is supplemented by a complex history of colonial settlement and migration, for example the use of Indian indentured labour in the Caribbean and East Africa

which has complicated the notions of belonging and led to dynamic fusions of black and Asian influence. (2)

However, although British Asian fiction could be seen as a subcategory of Black British literature, it is problematic to put them simply in the same category. Therefore, it is important to realize the obvious differences between them. As Upstone argues, "analyses of black culture often centre on the experience of slavery which, while essential to understanding British African and Afro-Caribbean identities, is often – though as the Caribbean context illustrates not always – less relevant to the British Asian experience" (2). In addition, as she continues to suggest:

[t]hat a large amount of the theory surrounding both black British literature and identity more generally comes from an African or Afro-Caribbean perspective, exacerbated perhaps by the dominance of American critical perspectives (where 'black' has a very different meaning), has perhaps led to the differing experiences of British Asians – especially from India, Pakistani, and Bangladesh – being underestimated. (2)

It has been argued that Asian communities in Britain have been, up to a certain point, "invisible communities" particularly in an academic environment and that there has been less interest in studying British Asian rather than, for example, Black British literature (Huq qtd. in Upstone 2). This claim is somewhat controversial when taking into consideration the recent and particularly early and mid-2000s interest in British Asian culture. The term "Asian cool" refers to this period when it seemed that almost everything related to Asian culture was trendy. The early fame and success of authors such as Salman

Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi has paved way to the success of more recent highly popular novels like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and even films such as Ghurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*, which in turn have made it possible for a younger generation of authors like Gautam Malkani, Niven Govinden and Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal to rely on an existing market for British Asian cultural products.

The early British Asian classics such as Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Kureishi's earlier works often deal with the notion of the migrant's otherness and the migrant's in-between state between two different cultures. These authors usually depicted this migrant condition in a problematic way by bringing attention to the discrimination and racism that the immigrants had to deal with in Britain at a personal as well as at an institutional level. Another important aspect was to depict the migrant's quest for a certain kind of perceived Britishness that did not necessarily even exist, at least in the form imagined. In addition, Kureishi's work such as the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, celebrates the idea of hybridity that is highly influential and crucial to early postcolonial theory, as it points out the possibilities that the mixing of different cultures possesses. The early ideas of otherness, the state of in-betweenness and hybridity that are vital in understanding the postcolonial theory are, sadly, no longer as easily applicable to the current situation. As Upstone argues, "[w]hile postcolonial terminology therefore continues to be useful when considering points of continuity between migrant and British-born perspectives, nevertheless, the uniqueness of British-born/raised writing demands revisions to key critical concepts" (9).

The aforementioned leads us towards the conversation of the new generation of British Asian writers. Today, British Asian fiction reflects the modern, multicultural nature of British society. It no longer deals with the problems of assimilation and the discriminating institutions but rather it acknowledges the equal role of Asian as well as

other immigrant-based communities in Britain. The protagonists of modern British Asian fiction do not question their Britishness or see themselves as others opposed to white Britons but rather think of themselves as exemplifying a certain kind of new Britishness. The new generation of British Asian authors no longer see any reason in defending the black and white perception of British society as somehow segregated and discriminating. Instead, they highlight the multicultural state of Britain as an unabating condition. Upstone continues from this notion by stating that, "[m]ost critically notable amongst these writers, Niven Govinden, Gautam Malkani and Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal all in 2006 published novels which reinforce the existence of a strident British-born generation, confident in its identity, and refusing to be 'othered' by archaic ancestral notions of Britishness" (210). The migrant condition that was evident in earlier British Asian fiction is less influential in modern society and "Dhaliwal, Malkani, and Govinden no longer even speculate on their location as either traumatic or a reason for alienation" (Upstone 210).

Terms such as new Britishness and the modern multicultural Britain come across as representing that the discrimination and hostility towards immigrants have somehow vanished and that modern British society is free of prejudice and inequality. This is hardly the case and prejudice and even open expressions of racism are still common in Britain. The stereotyping and even the ancient myth of white man's superiority are still deeply embedded in, particularly, the western way of thinking and continue to affect the relationship between those that consider themselves as true Britons and the rest. In addition, the 9/11 incident in 2001 and the tube and bus bombings in London in 2005 have led to more discrimination towards Asian communities. (Sardar qtd. in Upstone 3) The common mistake of categorizing all Asians as Muslims is also sometimes seen as an excuse for inequity. It is ignorant to consider all Asians as Muslims when, in fact, even the term Asian is problematic and culture specific. In North America, it usually means

Filippino or Chinese, in Britain it is commonly used to describe Indians, Pakistanis and/ or Bangladeshi. (Sardar qtd. in Upstone 3) Furthermore, Asia is a continent, not a specific ethnic group. To use the term Asian is as accurate as saying that someone is European rather than a member of a certain nationality. (Sardar qtd. in Upstone 3)

Although prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity are still part of British society, the change in British Asian fiction from exemplifying the migrant condition and depicting the discriminating society to celebrating new, confident forms of Britishness is a result of the cultural revolution that has taken place in Britain. As Stein argues, “[h]istorically speaking, Britain has long been subject to such processes of cultural transformation, induced not only by immigration but also by being annexed as well as having annexed foreign territory. Britain, therefore, cannot be considered an autochthonous society of *True-Born Englishmen*” (xiii). Contemporary British Asian fiction depicts a post-ethnic society where the historical notion of “race” should no longer make any difference and where multiculturalism is rather the preferred condition or status quo (Upstone 212). And as Upstone continues to argue, “[t]his reflects a world in which issues of ethnic tolerance are less concerns to be fought for, and rather elements of urban British life taken for granted” (8). While this view could be argued to be true at least partially in many texts such as *Londonstani*, I do not claim that there is no discrimination in British society and that its citizens are all equal. Rather, I am simply stating that Britain is moving towards becoming a more broadminded and cultivated society and that the literature its writers produce is a reflection of the changes in this society.

#### **1.4 Londonstani: The Novel, Its Reception and Earlier Studies**

As I have now given a detailed introduction to British Asian fiction in general, it is time to discuss Gautam Malkani and his novel *Londonstani*. Malkani was born in London in 1976

and thus represents the younger generation of British Asian writers. His mother was of Ugandan descent and came to London to work as a radiographer. Malkani grew up in Hounslow which is, as Sophie Harrison puts it in her review of the novel in *The New York Times*, a part of “the westernmost” London (n.p.). Hounslow is known for its large immigrant population and is situated right next to Heathrow airport. Malkani was a bright student and studied Social and Political Sciences in Christ’s College, University of Cambridge. There he, as Malkani himself states, “spent way too much time working on the student newspaper - but hey, I’d wanted to be a journalist even before my bollocks dropped and I didn’t have a Plan B” (Malkani, “About the Author”, n.p.). Malkani ended up working for *The Financial Times*, where he covered the media and telecoms industries, which are closely related to some of the topics of *Londonstani*.

The novel *Londonstani* started to form from the basis of the study material that Malkani had gathered for his dissertation “about the Brit-Asian rudeboy scene and the rejection of our parents’ efforts to integrate with mainstream Britain - leading to the development of our own brand of Britishness” (Malkani, “About Londonstani”, n.p.). Malkani had interviewed his friends back home in Hounslow and gotten extremely interested in the study and eventually even exceeded the limit of his dissertation work and “over-researched” the topic. The surplus material served as a basis for the novel, which started as non-fiction but later developed into a novel.

The name *Londonstani* by itself gives the reader a somewhat clear idea of what it is about. It is a mixture of London and Pakistani/ Hindustani, which aptly describes the situation of contemporary London where different cultures, religions, traditions and beliefs are forced to coexist simultaneously and merge into one another to form such hybrid forms as *Londonstani*. As was widely alleged, the term *Londonstani* does not, in fact, refer to



Islamist fundamentalism, although it has been used in that context by the media, particularly, after the terrorist attacks of 2005. As Malkani himself states:

In that original context, “Londonstani” was a self-referential term that basically meant I’m proud to be a Londoner because it’s a place where I can be both British and Asian and still feel 100 per cent like I belong - like I’m a native. [...] That’s why I call it a celebratory term. [...] If you defined yourself as a Londonstani, it meant you felt you belonged here and so it was an identity that transcended ethnicity. (Malkani, “About Londonstani”, n.p.)

The actual novel follows its protagonist, Jas, in his attempt to fit in in a group of *desi rudeboys* in Hounslow, London. Jas is a small and insecure, yet a very bright boy who longs for appreciation and recognition that he feels he has been missing throughout his life. The gang offers Jas an opportunity to belong to something and an escape from the (white middle-class) past that he now considers embarrassing. The novel offers a precise but somewhat caricaturic description of the life of British Asian group of boys, that is filled with latest designer wardrobes, shiny sneakers, newest gadgets, gangsta rap and BMW’s. A proper *desi rudeboy* is masculine, homophobic, misogynous and nonchalant, particularly in relation to studies or “coconuts” (i.e. brown on the outside, white on the inside, a term that describes British Asians who try to fit in and mimic the British). The word *desi* itself comes from Sanskrit and means “one from our country” and is usually used when referring to people from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh (Malkani, “Mixing & Matching: What’s Right with Asian boys?”, n.p.). The novel describes London’s *desi* culture and how western music, nightlife and commodities are mixed with Asian flavor to form new hybrid forms, which can be enjoyed by both British Asian and white British youth. One important

idea is just this exoticizing of “Asian-ness” where it is used almost as a spice to refresh the dull white formula. A great example of this is MTV Desi where a basic TV format is tweaked to serve the British Asian youth.

The novel starts with a scene that witnesses a brutal beating of a “gora”, i.e., a white boy because he had allegedly called Jas and his gang “Pakis”. Straight from the beginning, the reader gets a clear idea of what is coming. A major part of the novel is written in urban youth slang and in SMS-style with formal aspects such as spelling and grammar set aside to create an authentic “rudeboy” feel. The story follows Jas, Hardjit (real name Harjit), Ravi, Amit and Arun as they cruise around in Ravi’s BMW listening to artists like DMX and N.E.R.D, searching for fights and pretending to be like the “gangsta rappers” that they idolise. Usually, the hard exterior crumbles when someone’s mother calls and asks them to pick up groceries or sanitary napkins. The novel is capable of parodying 21<sup>st</sup> century western capitalist commodity culture and its saturated youth to whom what meets the eye is much more important than what is left unseen.

Furthermore, the gang is involved in a mobile phone scam where they unlock stolen phones and sell them forward. The plot thickens when they try to steal their former teacher’s, Mr. Ashwood’s, phone and get caught. Mr. Ashwood makes a deal with the boys that he is not going to report them to the police if they agree to meet up with Sanjay, a former student of Mr. Ashwood, who is a successful businessman and, as Mr. Ashwood believes, a great example of a successful, law-abiding British Asian man and a role model for the boys. However, Sanjay has made his wealth in large-scale tax scams and is in fact a calculative criminal whose only intention is to get the boys to do his dirty job and provide him with stolen phones. As one might guess, the boys end up in trouble. When all the aforementioned is combined with Jas’s relationship with a Muslim girl that leads to him being kicked out of the gang and with the fact that Jas is actually Jason Bartholomew-

Cliveden, a white British boy rather than a *desi*, what we have is multi-layered and ambiguous novel that deals with current issues such as cultural identity, ethnicity, religion, tradition and how these issues are dealt with in a multicultural society such as Britain. *Londonstani* is a great example of the new generation of British Asian fiction where the migrant condition is seemingly no longer the main theme and as Sara Upstone states: “*Londonstani* is dominated by hypermasculine bravado, centred on characters who feel no need to reclaim Britain because they already own at least some part of it: there is, here, ‘no kind of confused roots issue’” (210).

*Londonstani* created a “buzz” in London’s literary circles even before it was published in 2006 and many publishers were reportedly fighting over the manuscript. As Anitha Sethi writes in her article “The curse of being labelled the ‘new Zadie’” in *The Guardian* in 2005, “[b]ack in London, Malkani's rude boys incited a fierce bidding war with at least five publishers scrapping over them in a number of heated rounds in the ring with top agent Peter Straus” (n.p.). It has been claimed that the winner of the bidding, Fourth Estate, offered a six-figure advance to secure the deal. The competition in the publishing industry is fierce and “[t]he million copies apiece sold by *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* have been enough to open blinkered eyes, however, and spurred another energetic hunt for the latest hot ethnic minority writer” (Sethi, n.p.). However, as in many cases before, the hype and the publicity were premature and the actual novel received a contradictory reception combined with the fact that it did not sell as much as was expected. However, *Londonstani* was praised by some of the critics for its originality, and as Suhayl Saadi writes in his review in *The Independent*, “*Londonstani* marks a competent debut by a talented writer” (n.p.).

In addition, Kamila Shamsie writes in her review of the novel in *The Guardian* that “[e]thnicity gives this narrative a particular context, but it is not a story about migrant

communities, no matter what the hype might suggest. It is clear early on that gender rather than ethnicity is at the heart of this novel” (Shamsie, n.p.). Furthermore, she concludes her review by stating that “[t]he first chapter aside, almost all the book’s shortcomings come from its tendency to skim along the surface of things and avoid what is most richly interesting and complicated” (n.p.). Sophie Harrison continues from this notion of superficiality but also gives credit to Malkani for his vast knowledge of the topic and the warm attitude towards the culture that transforms into likeable characters by stating that “‘Londonstani’ has many such teenage flaws. [...] In summary, it’s annoying, chaotic, overstated – and funny. The author’s tenderness for his characters redeems them into likability; his care for detail makes his depiction of the Hounslow rude-boy scene both hilarious and convincing” (Harrison, n.p.).

Furthermore, Niall Griffiths starts his review in *The Telegraph* in an overly negative tone but towards the end gives praise to Malkani by claiming that “[m]any of what initially seem to be faults are revealed to be strengths; yes, even the off-putting beginning. It’s far from a cheery piece of work, but an exhilarating one” (Griffiths, n.p.). Also, Griffiths brings up the inescapable dichotomies that are at the center of the novel: “Sikh/Muslim, desi/gora, young/old, male/female” (n.p.).

One of the most critical reviews, however, comes from the Scottish author of *Psychoraag*, Suhayl Saadi. Saadi writes in *The Independent* that “Londonstani is best described as a competent early effort. The author’s fear of being off message dilutes the novel’s power, reaffirms liberal bourgeois boundaries and marks the book down as teen blaxploitation” (n.p.). Saadi seems to be highly critical, particularly, of the way Malkani portrays Asians:

[t]he white people in the novel, whose worst sin seems to be naïveté, seem balanced, human, and sensitive, whereas most of the Asians seem vain, devious, hysterical, and violent. One of the prime functions of a writer is to bear witness to truth. The aftertaste of *Londonstani* is that the state of “Asian-ness” is irredeemably primitive, destructive and existentially separate from the redemptive state of “White-ness”. This is a shabby, 21st-century, Orientalism and is not dissimilar from the mentality via which the Middle East is being re-colonised. (n.p.)

Although many of the reviews are critical, all of them conclude with a statement that credits Malkani’s talent as a writer and they also acknowledge the fact that a debut novel might not be the writer’s most complete and refined work, especially, in this case where the hype and expectations were enormous.

Furthermore, *Londonstani* has been the subject of a few academic studies such as Michael Mitchell’s article “Escaping the Matrix: Illusions and Disillusions in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*” (2006) included in the essay collection *Multiethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts* edited by Lars Eckstein et al. Mitchell’s study deals with identities insofar as it shows how the novel plays with the idea of choosing and performing one’s identity rather than being born into one. As Mitchell argues, “[t]he children of immigrants, the ‘second generation’, did not assimilate into a broader British identity or remain within the identity parameters of their parents, but instead have chosen to pick and mix elements of identity like fashion accessories to fashion their own subjective and performative identities” (330). In addition, Mitchell discusses the importance of this performance of Jas and his group by stating that “[h]e and his friends realise that the consequences of failure to achieve one’s own performative identity is to be

forced into an objective role created by the more powerful” (332). In Mitchell’s analysis, performing identity is seen as a vehicle of resistance against the “more powerful”, who in this case are “goras”, i.e., white society. He also studies in detail the novel’s intertextual references to the 1999 film *Matrix*, and even implies that Malkani is to the reader as Morpheus is to Neo in the film. He is supposed to stimulate imagination and to be the one to reveal the true nature of things to the masses. Mitchell acknowledges Londonstani’s identities as performances but he does not seek to find an answer to the question why would someone want to identify with the “other”. However, he gives the following explanation for the phenomenon: “[L]ondonstani’s portrayal of a performative identity outside the norms of social groupings suggest the chance of a crosscultural act of identification with the Other, a bridge of imagination such as has long been advocated by Wilson Harris as a liberation from self-perpetuating oppressions [...]” (333). This statement is something that offers a partial explanation for the desire for otherness and identification with the “other” but this and other aspects are introduced in more detail in the theory section.

Furthermore, Malkani himself provides a thorough analysis of some of the novel’s topics on his homepage and in the article “What’s Right with Asian boys?” in *Financial Times*. Malkani writes about the *desi* culture and states that “[t]he desi beats scene has all the characteristics of other youth subcultures, but one feature is particularly important: for many young British Asians, it offers us something to wear on top of our ethnicity - giving us an alternative collective identity” (n.p.). The article discusses in detail Malkani’s dissertation (which is the basis of the novel) and how he sees the *desi* culture, the culture he grew up in. The main question in Malkani’s study seems to be

why brown-skinned kids back home in the west London borough of Hounslow were suddenly choosing not to integrate with white-skinned kids. Why they were discarding the British Asian youth stereotype of disciplined, academically and grammatically conscientious citizens and instead asserting their ethnicity with an aggression usually associated with black-skinned kids. This was ironic given the prejudices Asian families have typically had against black communities and so, finally, I wanted to know why Asian kids were becoming alien to their own parents and adopting cultural identities that had as much to do with US hip-hop as they did with Bollywood. (n.p.)

In his study, Malkani found out that “the assertion of ethnic identities is sometimes better viewed as a proxy for the reassertion of masculinity” (n.p.). And by reasserting masculinity one is better able to protect oneself from discrimination based on ethnicity. In Malkani’s words:

[a]ll this cultural stuff was being used by brown-skinned boys as a way of helping them stand taller, speak up louder and strut their stuff with greater gusto. Add a bit of the hip-hop paraphernalia that had for long fulfilled similar functions for black kids, and you had a new model of British Asianness that was much less vulnerable to emasculation by any racism in the dominant culture. (n.p.)

Both Mitchell and Malkani talk about mixing and matching, picking the best parts of both – in this case western and *desi* – cultures. Similarly, they both see this performed identity as a reaction to or a defence mechanism against the “more powerful” or any kind

of discrimination. This is why I find it really fascinating that Jas would mimic the other as if we are to believe Malkani and Mitchell and think that by performing an identity one is resisting the more powerful, then why would Jas a white British boy need to do so if he already belongs to the “more powerful”? Could it be that in certain parts of London the tables have turned and that being white does not automatically mean that one is in a position of dominance. Could it be that in places like Malkani’s Hounslow and Southall it is commonly accepted and even preferred to be something other than white British?

As I have now discussed the topic, introduced the author, his novel and its reception and some of the earlier studies, I will continue by presenting the theoretical aspects that are critical to my study.



## **2. Theoretical Approach: Theorizing Racial Crossover**

In the following sections I am going to introduce many of the theoretical aspects that are central to understanding the idea behind the desire of otherness and racial crossover emphasized in the novel. This part of the text is divided into four sections and their subsections. Firstly, I will discuss the legacy of colonialism and the persisting myth of white superiority. Secondly, I will examine the different ways of belonging and the perpetual juxtaposition of the self and “the other”. Thirdly, I will explore in detail the desire of otherness that is at the forefront of the whole study and the reasons for this desire. Lastly, I will study the different ways of becoming the other, i. e. performing identities.

### **2.1 The Legacy of Colonialism**

#### **2.1.1 *Re-colonisation* & the change from Postcolonial to Postethnic London**

For better understanding of this thesis, it is vital to notice the effect that the movement from the former colonies to the heart of the empire, i.e., *re-colonisation* had in the former colonial superpowers, such as Britain. According to John McLeod’s *Beginning Postcolonialism*, “[f]or example, the existence of African peoples in Britain, can be traced back to Elizabethan times” (205; emphasis original). In addition, as McLeod continues to argue, “[t]hrough the work of colonialism, countless people voyaged *out* from Britain, often settling around the world in a variety of different places. But less well known today, perhaps, were the voyages *in* by colonised peoples from around the world who travelled to Britain were they remained for the rest of their lives” (205).

Although migration to Britain had started much earlier, it grew rapidly after the Second World War for many reasons. Some came to work because of the labour shortage after the war, while others came to study and some were exiles, escaping the political and economic difficulties in their homelands (206). As a result, “Britain can boast a wide

variety of diaspora communities” originating from all around the world (206). These diaspora communities are described by Robin Cohen in *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* as “communities of people living together in one country who acknowledge that “the old country” – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (ix). Collectivity and community are important for these communities but sometimes this unity alone may exclude them from feeling that they belong to the “new country” and thus it will “ghettoise” such communities (McLeod 207-8). Cohen continues by suggesting that “a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by the acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of similar background” (ix).

It would be easy to suggest that diasporic peoples are migrant peoples and of course many of them are, but it is not that simple and “generational differences” are particularly important in this case (McLeod 207). Children who are born in Britain to migrant parents instantly qualify for a British passport, but their sense of identity will be influenced by the “past migration history” of their parents and grandparents (McLeod 207). It is more precise to discuss “diaspora identities” rather than “migrant identities” since “not all of those who live in diaspora, or share an emotional connection to the “old country,” have experienced migration” (McLeod 207).

Furthermore, the multicultural and multiethnic London of today is not the (predominantly white) “heart of the Empire” that it was often referred to during Britain’s imperial history. Migration to Britain and, more specifically, to London from once colonised areas have shaped the city and, today, it is a melting pot of various ethnicities, cultures and beliefs. The city has been transformed by this act of reverse colonisation or *re-colonisation* and its effects are everywhere to be seen. McLeod discusses the idea of *re-colonisation* and the changes the city has gone through since the 1950s by studying the

work of (im)migrant writers in his book *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*. According to McLeod, who refers to an extract from a novel *Mr. Stone and The King's Companion* written by V. S. Naipaul,

this depiction of the crowded, disorderly space of Earl's Court featuring "foreigners of every colour" articulates the shattered colonial fantasy of decorum and the disturbing muddle of contemporary, cosmopolitan London – where the certainties of English place are challenged by the spontaneous and contingent transformations of subaltern renegotiations of space. (71)

McLeod suggests that the traditional or colonial London is giving way for something new and challenging. As he continues, "[i]n Naipaul's postcolonial London, the city and Englishness are worryingly at odds" (71). Challenging the predominant and exclusionary understanding of white Englishness is what seems to be the key also in McLeod's reading of Doris Lessing. McLeod continues to argue that

[i]n a similar fashion to Naipaul, Lessing represents London as a transnational location in which dominant models of national identity are being challenged by emergent alternatives that are by no means desirable. But in contrast she turns to London's ruins and urban dereliction not as signs of a lost and better English life, but as images which figure the potential for challenging exclusionary models of English identity, old and new. (75)

Today, Englishness is impossible to define in ethnic terms and it can be argued that the traditional view of Englishness is expanding to include all ethnicities since

(im)migration has challenged the conventional and fixed ideas of nationality based on racial origin and ethnicity. A supporter of this view is the writer Mike Phillips, who stated as early as in 1991 that

[s]cratch the Londoner and you uncover a loony living a British future in which the national project is reassessed, the interpretation of our history is a comparative exercise, citizenship is divorced from racial origins, and you can't tell an Englishman from an Indian or an African or a Chinese. (Phillips qtd. in McLeod 158)

Throughout its history, London has been transformed by the wide variety of its inhabitants and the transformation is ongoing. According to McLeod, "flux is best considered to be London's inevitable condition, its unstoppable and definitive characteristic" (175). In fact, during the last century or so the world has become considerably "smaller," and globalisation, networking and mixing of different cultures seem to be the keywords of the modern digital era. This can also be seen in the rejection of the conventional conceptions of, for example, national purity and immigration policy by the younger generations and their embracing of the modern multicultural state of the world. Furthermore, this means that the idols and role models of today's youth might not be from the same "ethnic group" as they are and thus the youth might desire to be like them. This is something that I will discuss in detail in the following chapters. However, the whole concept of *multiculturalism* is an issue that rouses opinions and for many the driving force behind the seemingly benevolent gesture of accepting the cultural differences is rather a way to hide the continuing discrimination and injustice. Graham Huggan asks in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* that

[i]s multiculturalism a genuine attempt to move toward greater interethnic tolerance – toward a more equitable society in which different groups are awarded equal recognition – or is it a smokescreen that hides the continuing privilege of the dominant culture, and that defuses the ethnic tensions that threaten to divide the nation? (Huggan xiii)

In addition, another issue that Huggan questions is the possibility “to account for cultural difference without at the same time mystifying it? To locate and praise the other without also privileging the self?” (31). Often when one is studying other cultures or is even in contact with foreigners or “others”, one has to use him-/herself as a counterpoint and thus the emphasis is usually focused on the differences between the self and the other. This is also something that I will discuss in detail later.

Whether or not multiculturalism could be seen as actually celebrating cultural difference and thriving for equality or rather to hide inequality, it could be argued that western societies have moved from a multicultural state to a state of postethnicity. According to David A. Hollinger, “[a] postethnic perspective denies neither history or biology, nor the need for affiliations, but it does deny that history and biology provide a set of clear orders for the affiliations we are to make” (13). Hollinger acknowledges the historical and biological facts of the difference between ethnic groups but he also emphasizes “[c]hoice over prescription”. (13) Another issue that Hollinger emphasizes is the fact that, in the era of postethnicity, descent cannot be the deciding factor on the issue of ethnicity. This can be seen in his statement claiming that:

[t]he extraordinary increase in marriage and reproduction across the lines of the ethno-racial pentagon presents a fundamental challenge to the authority of descent-defined categories. A critical mass of acknowledged mixed-race people heightens the credibility of an ideal according to which individuals decide how tightly or loosely they wish to affiliate with one or more communities of descent. (165)

Again, emphasizing the importance of choice and free will, he continues to argue that “[a] truly postethnic America would be one in which the ethno-racial component in identity would loom less large than it now does in politics as well as culture, and in which affiliation by shared descent would be more voluntary than prescribed in every context” (129). Furthermore, Werner Sollors provides a supporting view in *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* by stating that, “[d]escent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements; consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and ‘architects of our own our fates’ to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems” (6). For both theorists, it is crucial that one can escape his prescribed “ethnic role” in society based on descent and rather that one has free will and can choose his own affiliations and destiny. However, one could argue that multiculturalism and postethnicity are attempts to homogenise the world towards a society where the history of discrimination and prejudice has, allegedly, somehow vanished. In any case, it is naïve to simply state that with multiculturalism and postethnicity the inequality experienced by almost every other ethnic group than white is somehow forgotten and I would argue that, more appropriately, the alleged “era of postethnicity” is a natural societal progression towards a more civilized society. In my opinion, Housnlow and Southall of *Londonstani* are multicultural and postethnic

communities and Jas' roleplay further consolidates my claim as it is more likely that a white boy would question his own cultural identity based on descent in a society or a community that allows him to do so. Next, I will take a step back and discuss the dilemma of alleged white superiority and stereotypes.

### **2.1.3 Whiteness and Stereotypes**

According to Gary Taylor's *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop*, whiteness is a complex term. It is something that one is born into and comes to take for granted. Actually, it is a privileged position and almost like a "hall pass" of some kind but an invisible one. As Taylor continues, "for centuries, to open certain doors, you had to be "white," and the word *white* is the key to understanding that locked racial culture" (8-9; emphasis original). Taylor then goes on to argue that dividing people into different "races" based on skin colour is arbitrary and that rather "the variant color of human skin is a biological variety, and the geographical distribution of relatively isolated, differently pigmented human genres until 1400 is a biological, historical and statistic reality" (3).

As Taylor continues to argue, the division of people into different ethnic groups has not so much to do with the actual variation of the pigment of their skin but rather, as semiotic beings, about the meaning given to the words, such as *black* and *white*. For example, the word *white* in a racial sense came about in London in 1613. When one comes to think about it, the generic term *white* is actually a metaphor, "we are not the colour of snow or bleach linen" (Dyer qtd. in Taylor 9). What Taylor is arguing and what is important to realise is that the superiority of the white "race" is something that has been embedded in our language and on a level that it is almost unconscious. It could be argued that the whole idea of white superiority originated from former colonial superpowers and

spread all around the world during the colonial period when the British Empire controlled most of publishing and also English linguistic evolution in the West (Taylor 13). Furthermore, Taylor suggests that white Europeans only understood their own whiteness during the colonial period when they were in contact of other ethnic groups and nationalities and noticed the difference in pigment (10).

Even today, one could claim that in western societies, such as Britain, whiteness is considered to be the invisible norm and the predominant feature. As I have argued above, it is rather a monolithic myth that has existed for centuries and is kept alive by excluding others that are not white. Although it is a myth, it is deeply rooted in the way of thinking in the West. According to Bikhu Parekh,

expunging the traces of an imperial mentality from the national culture, particularly those that involved seeing the white British as a superior race, is a ... difficult task. This mentality penetrated everyday life, popular culture and consciousness. It remains active in projected fantasies and fears about difference, and in racialised stereotypes of otherness. The unstated assumption remains that Britishness and whiteness go together like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. There has been no collective working through of this experience. (Parekh qtd. in McLeod 192)

Supporting this view is Tobias Hubinette who in “‘Words That Wound’: Swedish Whiteness and Its Inability to Accommodate Minority Experiences” in *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities* discusses the way in which the Swedes are dealing with immigration, multiculturalism, and the fact that Sweden is no longer exclusively white. He presents a



very interesting view of the difference between “the bodily concept of race and the cultural concept of ethnicity” – that could arguably be accurate also in Britain – by stating that

In contemporary Sweden, being white means being Swede and being non-white means being non-Swedish regardless if the non-white person is culturally Swedish and was born or grew up and have lived most of her life in Sweden. This means that the difference between the bodily concept of race and the cultural concept of ethnicity has collapsed in a contemporary Swedish context.  
(45)

This is something that I find very important in relation to my study. Although Sweden has not been an imperial superpower and is far behind Britain in dealing with immigration, one could still argue that a similar kind of approach to whiteness and the lack of it is still present in Britain as well.

The idea that Britishness is automatically connected to whiteness and that whiteness is considered to be superior to others is embedded in western culture through stereotyping. As Roland Barthes suggests, there are certain commonly accepted binary pairs in the western culture and mindset (Barthes 80). These binary pairs, such as culture/nature, man/woman, self/other, native/foreigner and even white/black, can and do affect our perception of certain issues. The pair itself includes an in-built power relationship, where the first of the pair is usually seen to be the dominant one. As a matter of fact, they are so deeply embedded in our way of thinking by society that they seem almost unconscious. One of the best-known theorists in the postmodern and postcolonial field, Homi K. Bhabha, discusses this in *The Location of Culture*. These binary pairs can be seen as being a part of stereotyping, which, according to Bhabha, is a part of the way in which the

colonial powers as well as modern societies try to maintain power by defining certain groups as the other. In Bhabha's words,

[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of fixity in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. (Bhabha 66)

In addition, there are stereotypical representations of different nationalities and ethnic groups, such as "Africans as impassionate singers and craftsmen" and "Indians as ascetic seers" (Boehmer 160). These stereotypes can be traced back to the colonial period, when it was particularly important to impose these "imaginary" identities upon the colonised in order to maintain and justify the colonial rule (Boehmer 160). It was also important to highlight the difference between groups of people and as Chris Weedon argues in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, "difference in patriarchal, racist, capitalist societies always involves oppressive power relations" (179). As the main function of stereotyping was, and still remains to be, to define certain groups as "other" and thus to maintain power, it can be seen as a highly effective device of discrimination. In the critical discussion, I will introduce a certain character who I believe is the representative of whiteness in the novel and argue how Malkani is using stereotypes when describing Jas' parents to hide their true cultural identities. Moving on from the myth of

whiteness and stereotyping, in the next section I am going to explain how “we” reinforce our own identity by maintaining these stereotypes and thus excluding others. I will also discuss the concept of belonging in more detail.

## **2.2 Ways of Belonging**

### **2.2.1 The Self and Others**

As I have suggested, to make someone “an other”, someone who does not belong and exclude him/ her from oneself, is a way of maintaining (desired) power relations. In addition, by excluding someone, one also defines her/himself as something else (usually something better) than “the other”. When discussing others we must first find out who we are ourselves so that we know what it takes to be “an other”. From a psychological point of view, comprehension of the self, gender and sexuality is something that develops based on environment, norms and learned values and is not, therefore, innate. Also, our identity develops along with the development of our understanding of the world. For example, as Weedon points out in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*,

[a]s we acquire language, we learn to give voice –meaning- to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. Having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values, which may well be contradictory, we may find ourselves resisting alternatives. Or, as we move out of familiar circles, through education or politics, for example, we may be exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience which seems to address our interest more directly. (Weedon 32)

However, while the construction of identity is, in essence, a psychological phenomenon, it is also a social construct as can be seen in David Hollinger's statement in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*; "the concept of identity is more psychological than social and it can hide the extent to which the achievement of identity is a social process by which a person becomes affiliated with one or more acculturating cohorts" (6).

What seems to be crucial for the way of understanding the development of identity in this study is that to define oneself, one needs to have someone to compare oneself with. One needs to have a sort of a counterpoint to parallel oneself with to understand who one is or is not. Simon Clarke discusses just this issue of cultural identity in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*. For Clarke, "cultural identities are marked by a number of factors – 'race', ethnicity, gender and class to name but a few; the very real locus of these factors, however, is the notion of difference" (Clarke 510). As has been discussed above, identity and especially cultural identity, could be argued to be a mixture of psychodynamic processes and social constructions (510). Clarke argues with the help of Fanon that "[t]he notion of cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our 'selves' in relation to a cultural other. We start then to see ideas around 'ways of life', 'us' and 'them', and this is at the heart of racism, hatred and exclusion" (Fanon qtd. in Clarke 511). Clarke continues to claim that "[r]ather than celebrate difference our cultural identity is used to pathologize other cultures whilst reinforcing who we are" (520). Furthermore, he continues to pinpoint that "[d]efining our own self by another often leads to a strong sense of who we are not, or more likely who we don't want to be. This necessarily leads to the denigration of the Other and the idealization of 'us'" (527). Once again, it is the question of "us" and "they," belonging and not belonging, that is at the center of the discussion.

Furthermore, as the Caribbean-British novelist Caryl Phillips argues, this question of belonging is “[t]he problem question for those of us who have grown up in societies which define themselves by excluding others. Usually us. A coded question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you *really* from?” (Phillips qtd in McLeod 181; emphasis original). “We” and “us” seem to be important terms in defining someone as “an other”, and it is this feeling of unity, accompanied with these words and reinforced by excluding others. Strangely enough, the whole conception of “we” and “us” based on, for example, nationality is also an issue more complex than it looks. As Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, there is actually no such thing as a nation but rather a group of people who have made up the concept of nationality and thus it could be argued that patriotism and national unity are imagined constructs.

If we return to Barthes’s binary pairs, one could add to the list a new pair, *familiar/strange* next to *self/other*. People who are “others” are unfamiliar and therefore considered as strangers. It is just this unfamiliarity that Roger C. Bromley discusses in his book *Narratives for the New Belonging: Cultural Diasporic Fictions* when he claims that “[s]trangers threaten because they lack the vestments of the local or natural territory – colour, language, accent, religion, cuisine and so on” (12). Another theorist who has studied the relationship between strangers, embodiment and community is Sara Ahmed in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Ahmed suggests that the stranger or the other is “not *any-body* that we have failed to recognise, but *some-body* that we have already recognised *as* a stranger, as ‘a body out of place’. Hence, the stranger is some-body we know as not knowing, rather than some-body we simply do not know” (55; emphasis original). What she argues is that we recognise strangers in relation to ourselves (just like we define ourselves by excluding these strangers) by stating that

“[d]ifference is not simply found in the body, but it is established as a relation between bodies: *this suggest that the particular body carries traces of the differences that are registered in the bodies of others*” (44; emphasis original). What she is arguing is that strangers only come to existence when there is a relation between “bodies”. Furthermore, proximity is an important notion concerning the relation between “bodies”. According to Ahmed, “[o]thers become strangers (the ones who are distant), and ‘other cultures’ become ‘strange cultures’ (the ones who are distant), only through coming too close to home, that is, through the proximity of the encounter or ‘facing’ itself” (12). What this means is that by comparing these strangers to ourselves, we find the differences between “us” and “them” and this is exactly what I was trying to argue earlier with the help of Clarke that by getting in contact with the “other”, we are reinforcing our own cultural identities by finding out what separates us from “others”.

Strangeness is also related with place. For, example, the members of a particular nation make a distinction between those that come from the same nation or share a nationality and others by “an everyday and much rehearsed distinction between who does and does not belong within the nation space” (Ahmed 99). These distinctions construct our sense of national identity, which according to Ahmed,

is unstable, and emerges through multiple encounters between those who assume themselves to be natives and those recognised as strangers, as out of place, in this place. The response to strangeness in the discourse of nationhood is hence built around the question of what it means to be “in place”. (101)

In the novel, the concept of self vs. others is slightly more complicated as the gang who themselves are considered as “others” by some exclude everyone else and in so doing

violently claim their place in the community and define their own cultural identities in relation to every other ethnic group than their own, thus reinforcing their cultural identities as desis. In the following chapter, I will examine being “in place” or “out of place”.

### **2.2.2 The Concept of Home, Displacement, the In-between Space and Hybridity**

When thinking about home, a person usually relates it to the notion of his/ her place in the world. It tells a person where he originates from and where he belongs (McLeod 210). In addition, like McLeod, Ahmed relates the idea of home to security and being in a place where one belongs by stating that

home is England, where I was born and now live, home is Australia, where I grew up, and home is Pakistan, where the rest of my family lives. The different possibilities of ‘home’ are not necessarily either/or: where one usually lives can be where one’s family lives, and this can be ‘one’s native country’. Does being-at-home involve the co-existence of these three registers? [...] Home is associated with a being that rests, that is full and present to itself, and that does not over-reach itself through the desire for something other. To be at home is the absence of desire, and the absence of an engagement with others through which desire engenders movement across boundaries. (87)

In a similar view, McLeod questions the idea of home, or at least what it means for migrants, by saying that “[t]o be ‘at home’ is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves. But what happens to the *idea* of ‘home’ for migrants who live far from the lands of their birth? How might their travels impact upon the ways ‘home’ is considered?” (210; emphasis original). He answers his

own question by claiming that “[m]igrants tend to arrive in new places with baggage; both in the physical sense of possessions or belongings, but also the less tangible matter of beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviours and values. This can have consequences for the ways in which others may not make migrants feel ‘at home’ on arrival in a new place” (211).

The Bombay-born British novelist, Salman Rushdie, gives an insight into the matter in his famous essay “Imaginary Homelands”. Rushdie argues that:

if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the things that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

Thus, for Rushdie and many others, the idea of home can be thought of as being complicated and the migrant may occupy a displaced position (McLeod 211). Rushdie continues to exemplify the process of recalling his childhood memories from Bombay by claiming: “he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (11). Next, I will continue with some theories dealing with the various possible situations that this displacement may create.

Bhabha, who has himself experienced migration first from Bombay to London and then further to America, has been very interested in people who, including himself, live “border lives” on the margins of different nations, in between contrary homelands” (McLeod 217). He seems to be keen on the concept of the border as both physical and imaginative in nature. For him, borders are places where “conventional patterns of thought



are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing” (McLeod 217). Furthermore, Bhabha sees border crossings as challenging “the fixed binary couples, such as native/foreigner and master/slave” (McLeod 217). He also emphasises the importance of these in-between spaces, which he claims exist on the borderlines of different cultures:

[w]hat is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 1)

In addition, Roger Bromley writes about the importance of the *in-between space*. Similarly, he argues that “[i]t is crucial that the migrant should be able to find a space to construct an identity that can accommodate what he or she once was and is now supposed to be: an identity that is somewhere in-between” (12). For these theorists, the *in-between space*, as well as borders can be understood as both physical actual locations and imaginary states of mind. Next, I will move from the state of in-between to a state of hybridity.

As a scientific term, the act of *hybridization* has been considered as a way of mixing or crossbreeding two different “species” or “breeds.” The creator of the term *hybridity* in a cultural context, Bhabha, uses it as “a problematic of colonial representation [...] that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (Bhabha cited in

Young, *Colonial Desire* 22-23). In other words, Bhabha's hybrid is "an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power" (Bhabha qtd. in Young 23). McLeod continues from this notion by claiming that

the concept of hybridity has proved very important for diaspora peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity. Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from crazy-paving. Instead they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription. (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 219)

To clarify, the idea behind the *in-between space*, as has been suggested, is that it provides a new or "third" place between cultures where one can discuss a fresh new outlook on old conventions and perceptions of nationality, identity and the whole society, in the act that is called *hybridization*. Whereas the old conventions are stable and static, these new hybrid forms of thought are in constant motion. Although *hybridity* is often celebrated in postcolonial studies as a new and challenging phenomenon, it must be stated that it places the hybrid identity against the native identity and reinforces the dominant power structure. As Sara Ahmed argues in her book, "I suggest that hybridisation can become a mechanism for the reconstitution of dominant identities precisely insofar as the hybrid subject – who becomes other through knowledge and consumption – remains defined against the 'native subject'" (13). All in all, it could be argued that sometimes celebrating these new *hybrid* forms as a vehicle of resistance against the old conventions can lead to the emphasis shifting away from acknowledging the discrimination and

prejudice that these hybrid forms attempt to escape. However, I think that what is crucial to understand is that even if acknowledging and celebrating hybrid identities might reinforce the dominant power structure by opposing native and hybrid identity, at least it reminds us of the existence of whole generations of *hybrid* subjects around the world for whom concepts such as nationality and belonging to an ethnic group are not as straightforward as to someone, for example, born in Britain to white English parents. In *Londonstani*, the gang considers Britain as their home and may not feel displaced but they are unquestionably still in-between and, in my opinion, represent new hybrid forms of Britishness. In the next chapter, rather than dealing with belonging, I am going to discuss the desire for otherness and the reasons for this desire.

## **2.3 Desire for Otherness**

### **2.3.1 Double consciousness and the mirror stage**

Since the desire to be something else is at the centre of my study it is important to discuss some of the issues that might be responsible for this “identity crisis”. The idea of *double consciousness*, brought into attention by W.E.B DuBois and Paul Gilroy, means the striving of both black Americans and black Europeans to be both American/European and black, and the state of confusion that this phenomenon creates. Taylor has used this idea to come up with his own hypotheses concerning the reasons behind this occurrence. According to Taylor, there are four hypotheses:

1. Every individual identity incorporates more than one generic identity.
2. Whenever any of those generic identities conflict, the individual may experience double consciousness.

3. The emergence, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, of new generic identities based on skin color massively increased the number of potential conflicts between generic identities, and correspondingly increased the number of individuals experiencing the “modernity” of double consciousness.
4. The instabilities of personal identity produced by double consciousness, when multiplied by millions, increased both personal and social mobility, which in turn intensified the conflict between received generic identities, creating a spiral feed-back loop of individual and social instability. (348)

Whereas DuBois and Gilroy have used the idea of double consciousness to exemplify the state of black Europeans and black Americans, Taylor has widened the concept to include everyone by claiming that all of us incorporate more than one generic identity. This is a bold claim that further aids to explain why, in *Londonstani*, a white boy such as Jas is longing for an identity other than the one he was born into. Furthermore, there is another theory that aids to exemplify this phenomenon. A French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan’s translated essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in *Écrits: A Selection* offers an interesting idea of the development of the self. For Lacan, there is a moment in a child’s development that he calls the mirror stage. The mirror stage means the moment when a child sees his/her mirror image for the first time (Lacan 1). The child will then consider this image as the “Ideal-I” (Lacan 2) and will thus always compare his actual self to this unreachable illusion. Naturally, this will create a problem that Lacan calls paranoiac knowledge, i.e., all humans are paranoid insofar as we are haunted by the sense of an “other” who influences our thoughts and actions. (Mills, n.p.) Lacan’s theory is thus helpful in understanding Jas’s

situation and could well serve as a partial explanation for his desire of otherness. However different these theories may be, they are trying to validate the existence of more than one generic identity and the inner longing to be something else that one is not and the struggle that trying to define one's cultural identity creates. From Lacan's observations and from more theoretical possibilities for Jas's desire I will move on to more obvious reasons of desire.

### **2.3.2. Idolising Others and Appealing Masculinity**

In a postethnic society, where, as I have argued earlier, one's role models or the objects of desire do not have to be from the same "ethnic group", it is understandable that the deciding factor when choosing one's idols is not the colour of his/her skin. The possibility of choosing one's identity and idols from a multicultural pool of athletes, artists and entertainers and thriving to be like them has led to a situation where, for example, a white boy from Detroit who once aspired to be a black gangsta rapper is actually at the top of the food chain in a highly competitive art form that is known as the hip-hop industry. As George aptly claims in his discussion of a white rapper Eminem and his role models:

[I]ike every other wigger, Eminem had black heroes who gave him a living model of the kind of man he aspired to be. Both blacks and whites often compare hip hop to sports, especially basketball, because both are nakedly competitive, "Darwinian" arenas where black men have conspicuously bested their white rivals; hoop dreams and hip hop battles are "two contemporary definers of black male genius". (George qtd. in Taylor 350)

Gary Taylor continues from that notion by stating that “[t]hat black genius has helped shape the emergent identities of innumerable adolescents, black and white” (Taylor 350). It is not just the case of Eminem but, once again, the possibility of having multicultural role models enables adolescents around the world to renegotiate their cultural identities and choose or rather mix and match their cultural identities from different options. Furthermore, Taylor sees this as a way of resisting generic “white identity” and as he argues that “[a] sense of generic identity can survive only if it is internalized as an ideal by each new generation, and white generic identity as Locke knew it will not survive once “white” adolescents begin constructing their sense of self in the image of “black” heroes like Jordan or Tupac” (351). In the novel, this situation is something that has already transpired. Jas refuses to be white in spite of the obvious fact that he is white and his role models are British Asian teenagers Harjit, Ravi and Amit who themselves are idolising black gangsta rappers. One could argue that inadvertently Jas is like Eminem as he identifies himself with Harjit and the gang but along with other shortcomings his delivery is not on the same level and thus he fails his performance as a British Asian.

It is considered almost as a universal although a conventional view that young men have been drawn to masculinity and aggression. In the novel, the gang’s masculinity and aggression is at least partially a performance that is learned from their idols, American rap and hip hop artists. For many, hip-hop is almost synonymous with black masculinity. According to Taylor, “[a]t least some (and arguably a lot) of the appeal of many black rappers is their embodiment of a hypermasculine aesthetic that treats every woman as a bitch/’ho and every less testosteronic male as a fag” (354). There seems to be something appealing in the way in which black rappers are disregarding the norms and conventions and rather reinforcing their own masculinity with misogyny and homophobia. It could be argued that what is found appealing is the courage to speak one’s mind and not be

concerned of other's opinions. Furthermore, it could be argued that black masculinity is associated with danger and, more precisely, sexual danger, particularly, from a white point of view and as Michael Eric Dyson claims, black men are seen as "peripatetic phalluses with unrequited desire for their denied object – white women" (Dyson qtd. in hooks *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* 58). In addition, Morgan continues by stating that "men (in general) are bonded across class, race, and nationalities through shared notions of manhood which make masculinity synonymous with the ability to assert power-over through acts of violence and terrorism" (Morgan qtd. in hooks *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* 59). The assertion of power over or control, whether it is physical or figurative, is what many seem to consider being the benefit of aggression and masculine behaviour. In the novel, the use of physical force that the gang exercise almost daily is a natural sign of masculinity. The gang rely on the well-sculpted muscles and the "athletic body" of Harjit that is, according to Brian Pronger in *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex*, "an embodiment of masculinity and, as such, a vehicle of masculine significance in the gender myth" (128). Not surprisingly, for a stammering white boy the machismo displayed in the above passage might seem like a desirable option. Furthermore, this dangerous and thrilling "thug life" that was made famous by Tupac Shakur seems to create a powerful attraction and desire for white youth like Jas who consider whiteness boring and stale and search for more exiting options. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a situation where otherness is seen as exotic and even as a commodity. This is something I will discuss next.

### **2.3.3 "The Postcolonial Exotic" and the Commodification of Otherness**

As I have been sought to exemplify, from a western (white) point of view, ethnicity, i. e. otherness is everything but whiteness. As Abramson argues, it is interesting "to except

white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans from the category of ethnicity [...] and yet it is a widespread practice to define ethnicity as otherness” (Abramson qtd. in Sollors 25). It is still important to remember that from a point of view of “the other” whiteness is otherness and as Sollors continues to argue, “[t]he contrastive terminology of ethnicity thus reveals a point of view which changes according to the speaker who uses it” (25). So, once again, depending on the point of view, otherness is an ambiguous term.

Contrastingly, and yet again from a western point of view, otherness has become trendy and marketable. This exoticisation of otherness/ethnicity is another issue that Huggan is underlining in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Firstly, in the following extract I will try to give a detailed definition of what is meant by exotic in this sense with the help of Huggan:

Although the word ‘exotic’ currently has widespread application, it continues – possibly because of this – to be commonly misunderstood. For the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent *quality* to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive object, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to mystery. The exoticist production of otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and reconciliation, but legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest. Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. Within this circuit, the strange and the



familiar, as well as the relation between them, may be recoded to serve different, even contradictory, political needs and ends. (13; emphasis original)

As exoticism can be used for different purposes and it can be “recoded”, it “has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power” (Huggan 14).

Currently, otherness is something that can be sold to people. In a similar sense, it could be argued that, “[m]ulticulturalism, in other words, turns ethnicity into a commodity, encouraging a view of ethnic cultures, or even culture itself, as ‘a thing that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold or forgotten’” (Bissoondath qtd. in Huggan, p. 140). As Huggan continues to state, “[t]he postcolonial exotic [...] is] the global commodification of cultural difference” (vii; emphasis added). This shows that difference has become a commodity and can be purchased as is increasingly the case, particularly, by white youth who think that to be white is boring and want to spice up their identities by adopting influences from different “exotic” cultures that they see fit. The greatest example of this is a hip-hop (and pop) artist Eminem who once took over hip-hop, a genre that was formerly (and more importantly authentically) dominated by black artists. What makes Eminem an economical mastermind is the fact that he tweaked the commonly black genre to fit the white audience better by sampling rock classics in his songs and thus the songs were easily accessible for white youth who were already familiar with the recognisable rock melodies. Furthermore, Eminem took the aggressive, masculine, misogynistic and homophobic attitude that was affiliated with black hip hop and combined it with his white appearance.

Furthermore, whether it is the preferred state of the modern society or not, commodifying everything, even cultural identity, is the way of the modern neoliberal capitalistic era. Jeffrey J. Santa Ana describes this in his essay in the collection *Asian*

*North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen* as follows: “the turn of people as producers in a community to consumers in a global marketplace” is what we are facing today (15). Santa Ana also discusses the cover page of the *Time* magazine from 1993. It presented a picture of a computer-generated face of a woman that was a mixture of different ethnic groups that was supposed to represent the New Face of America and the effect that immigration and globalisation have on America. For Santa Ana, the use of this picture and “celebration of American diversity for a ‘new international order’ is especially evident in commercial desires for stylized racial features, a form of aestheticized hybridity that is now widely encouraged by the marketers of global consumer culture” (17). And as Santa Ana continues to claim, “[i]f the image of stylized race and gender in transnational marketing promotes and sells products, it also sells identity as a commodity through which one can claim higher socioeconomic status and privilege as a consumer in a First World global economy” (18).

Furthermore, Santa Ana argues that, obviously, the interest towards ethnicity/otherness in marketing and the commodifying of cultural difference comes with a cost to the consumer.

The desire, moreover, is to be associated with the privilege of consuming multiculturalism: to assimilate into the cultural-economic conditions of transnational postmodern commerce. To desire consumer culture’s image of stylized race and ethnicity is to aspire to an imaginary stylized assimilation whose objective is membership in a global economy of euphoric and prosperous consumers. In this sense, citizenship is now premised on – and displaced by – a shared culture of consumption that denotes feelings of enfranchisement and oneness with mutual consumerism in globalization. The

bottom line, then, is that consumption-based assimilation is a transnational multicultural phenomenon that includes only those who can afford to pay for it and leads to an “apolitical egalitarianism” that demands racial and ethnic self-erasure. (19)

For Santa Ana, “[a]ssimilating into the multicultural ethos of the global economy, which is originally based on the formation and coherence of dominant white identity, demands relinquishing and, in effect, misremembering the painful and depressing history of exclusion and oppression of racial minorities” (31). To conclude, what Santa Ana argues is that the commodification of otherness and absorption of the values of the global consumer culture may lead to renegotiating one’s own cultural identity and provide other identities as options to be purchased. In Londonstani, Jas is obviously renegotiating his own cultural identity and the “designer desiness” is a highly tempting option in the marketplace of cultural identities. From commodity culture I will move on to discuss postcolonial melancholia and how it is related to my study.

#### **2.3.4 Postcolonial Melancholia**

The term melancholia appears in Sigmund Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia” in *Standard Edition* in which Freud explains that the difference between mourning and melancholia is that a person who mourns, usually mourns for something that is lost but a person suffering from melancholia does not have an object for his/her grief and thus grieves for something that he/she is unable to achieve, usually unconsciously (243-44). In Chen’s view

In Freud's initial definition of the concept, melancholia is pathological precisely because it is a mourning without end. Interminable grief is the result of the melancholic's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the loved object or ideal effects. In other words, the melancholic cannot "get over" this loss—cannot work out this loss in order to invest in new objects. (671)

This is an interesting theorization for my study because it may offer a partial explanation for Jas's desire to be something else that he is. The concept of melancholia has been used in postcolonial studies and authors such as Paul Gilroy, Ang Chen and Tobias Hubinette have all brought their own twist to the concept in their studies. Hubinette, Gilroy and Chen have contrasting views of melancholia and provide slightly different understanding of the word in cultural context. Chen's study aims to explain the concept of racial melancholia and the study focuses on the many generations of Asian American immigrants and their difficulties with assimilation into American society, whereas Hubinette's and Gilroy's texts are trying to exemplify the concept of white melancholia. Therefore, although Chen makes interesting claims of melancholia in an Asian American context, I will concentrate mainly on Hubinette's and especially Gilroy's texts as they are more closely related to my argument.

Hubinette, who studies melancholia in the Swedish context, sees "white melancholia" as being "obsessively and anxiously invested in keeping the image of Sweden as an anti-racist country alive and has particularly expressed itself in the anti-racist anger towards the entrance of a racist party in the Swedish parliament after the election of 2010" (46). In his study, Hubinette seeks to understand why it is so difficult for Swedes to understand that certain words such as *neger* (Swedish for *nigger*) are highly offending and

have a racial connotation as well as a historical connection to oppression. In his view it has to do with the contradiction of the history of Sweden as a nation of the whitest of the white and the mostly anti-racial and “colour-blind” Sweden of today. In Sweden, white melancholia works “alongside the suppression of the fact that Sweden is today a postcolonial and multicultural society” (Hubinette 45). Similarly, Gilroy sees British postcolonial melancholia as a condition where the British are unconsciously mourning the loss of the Empire because the effects of imperial history and the atrocities it required are something that have never been resolved and “actively forgotten” (98). This leads to an inability to understand that the multicultural state of Britain is a result of the collapsing of the empire and the reverse colonisation it created and not some external threat. In Gilroy’s words,

I want to show that since then (1945) the life of the nation has been dominated by an inability even to face, never mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods that followed the end of the Empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige. That inability has been intertwined with the apprehension of successive political and economic crises, with the gradual breakup of the United Kingdom, with the arrival of substantial numbers of postcolonial citizen-migrants, and with the shock and anxiety that followed from a loss of any sense that the national collective was bound by a coherent and distinctive culture. Once the history of the Empire became a source of discomfort, shame and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten. The resulting silence feeds an additional catastrophe: the error of imagining that

postcolonial people are only unwanted alien intruders without any substantive historical, political, or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects. (98)

Gilroy wants one “to consider the political and psychological reactions which attend the discovery that imperial administration was, against all ethnic mythology that projects empire as essentially a form of sport, necessarily a violent, dirty, and immoral business” (102). I understand Gilroy’s point of view to be that the fact that the British fail to see the connection between immigration of today and the colonialism of the past creates unrest and difficulties as the atrocities of the past, once suppressed but are troubling the British on an unconscious level, surface in consciousness as one learns more about the actual violent and oppressing history of the Empire. All this is leading to a condition that Gilroy calls white postcolonial melancholia that manifests itself as an unconscious longing for the Empire but also as an incomprehensible feeling of guilt for the atrocities of the imperial period. Gilroy also discusses the way in which these “unwanted alien intruders” might remind one of the guilt and shame that the unresolved colonial history has caused and thus induce hostility towards these “intruders”. As Gilroy puts it,

The immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there; that basic fact of global history is not usually deniable. And yet its grudging recognition provides a stimulus for forms of hostility rooted and the associated realization that today’s unwanted settlers carry all the ambivalence of empire with them. They project it into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts and neighbours. Indeed, the incomers may be unwanted and

feared precisely because they are the unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past. (110)

However, it is not just hostility towards immigrants that this condition creates but actually just the opposite: the guilt that I mentioned earlier induced by the injustice and racism of the past also creates resistance against oppression. As Gilroy states,

[h]ostility to the proposition that racist violence and institutional indifference are normal and recurrent features of British social and political life gets intermingled with absolute and sincere surprise at the nastiness of racism and the extent of the anger and resentment that it can cause. Antipathy towards asylum seekers and refugees cannot be concealed, but the idea that it has anything to do with racism or ultranationalism remains shocking and induces yet more guilt. This confusion and disorientation result from a situation in which melancholic Britain can concede that it does not like blacks and wants to get rid of them but then becomes uncomfortable because it does not like the things it learns about itself when it gives vent to feelings of hostility and hatred. (114)

This is truly an odd situation that creates distraction and could somehow at least partly explain Jas's extraordinary situation. In a way, Jas is the ultimate example of the feeling of guilt gone so far that he sees it as an option to not just resent racism but to actually mimic the other and thus showing himself that he is above others and truly not a racist. In so doing he could be seen as seeking to reduce the guilt that he feels. The following passage from Gilroy's work is crucial to understanding the situation of Jas and other white British

adolescents who are both disappointed and bored with whiteness but also, and more importantly guilt-ridden because of the historical and invented superiority of whiteness over others and rather choose to identify with these others. To quote Gilroy:

The nation's intermittent racial tragedies become part of an eventful history. They punctuate the boredom of chronic national decline with a functional anguish. The loss of empire—and *the additional loss of certainty about the limits of national and racial identity that result from it*—have begun, ironically, to sustain people, providing them with both pleasure and distraction. The historical approach tentatively pioneered here tries to seek out a less regular narrative rhythm than strict, even oscillation between identification with the victims of racism, a guilty dislike of them and the changes they have made to the country, and tormented self-digust at the prospect of being implicated either in the problems they import or in their colonial and postcolonial sufferings. (116; emphasis added)

As can be seen in Gilroy's words, to be white in today's Britain means balancing between several cultural and rather societal positions without any of them being necessarily the right one. The interpretation of ethnic or cultural difference and its meaning in Britain particularly among the nation's youth could be seen as confusing and even schizophrenic as, in Gilroy's words again, there seems to be no "certainty about the limits of national and racial identity" (116). Fortunately, according to Gilroy, this does not pose a problem for British youth but that it rather makes "race" insignificant:



Given the extent of Britain's deepening economic and social divisions, it is perhaps surprising that the convivial metropolitan cultures of the country's young people are still a bulwark against the machinations of racial politics. This enduring quality of resistance among the young is no trivial matter. It is much more than an effect of multicultural consumerism and communicates something of the irrevocably changed conditions in which factors of identity and solidarity that derive from class, gender, sexuality, and region have made a strong sense of racial difference unthinkable to the point of absurdity. The fact that so many British youth have been delivered to a place, as Nitin Sawhney memorably put it, "beyond skin," communicates how much those critical formations have changed. (132)

Melancholia in a cultural context and particularly white melancholia are concepts that aim to exemplify the strong reactions that the "native" Swedish and British people have towards immigration and the sometimes unconscious connections it has to the two nations history. As a nation, Britain should rather try to work through the difficult baggage of the past in order to understand the disorientation that denying it creates. A striking example of the disorientation is Jas's role-play. All of the aforementioned appear to serve as a basis for the understanding of a white desire for otherness. Furthermore, as can be seen in the last extract, for Jas and other white kids there might not be something as otherness in cultural terms or if there is, the second-generation Asian immigrants are not representing it for them at any rate. This is something that I will address in more detail in my critical discussion of the novel. Next, I will discuss identities as performances and the concept of racial crossover.

## 2.4 Becoming the Other: Performing and Mimicking

### 2.4.1 Identity as a Performance & Authenticity

One of today's leading queer theorists, Judith Butler, argues in her study *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* that identity could be seen as a performance and is performed to spectators. In her words,

[s]ignificantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (179; emphasis original)

If identity is seen as performance, it could be argued that this validates the fact that it is possible to choose one's identity – or rather cultural identity as, in *Londonstani*, Jas is able to choose a British Asian identity instead of the British identity that he was born into – and that cultural identity is not necessarily bound to descent but rather an option.

Another issue related to the performed or adopted identity is its *authenticity*. This is also a complex term as it is almost impossible to define who could validate this authenticity. Who accepts the performed identity as authentic? And, furthermore, what does authentic mean? Taylor attempts to provide an answer by stating that “[a]uthenticity, in other words, constitutes first and foremost an ethical imperative, put in the simplest possible terms, to be true to oneself” (Taylor qtd. in Huggan 157). Clifford takes this notion further by arguing that “authenticity is something produced, not salvaged”; and it is produced primarily ‘by removing objects and cultures from their current historical

situation” (Clifford qtd. in Huggan 158). In addition, another interesting definition is presented in Huggan’s text: “authenticity is [now] the currency at play in the marketplace of cultural difference’ (Root qtd. in Huggan 158). Authenticity seems to be difficult to explain but one could argue that it has to do with being true to oneself. In *Londonstani*, authenticity is everything for the teenagers. Everyone wants to be an authentic Indian, Pakistani, Hindu or Sikh, even Jas. From here we can access the question that I posed already in my introduction: Is it possible for Jas to pass as an authentic British Asian? Who has the “power” to accept or defy Jas as an equal member of the British Asian community? These questions are also connected to the concepts of consent and descent that have been discussed by Hollinger. Is it really as simple as to just choose your own cultural identity or are there certain boundaries? These are some of the questions that I will try to answer in the critical discussion of the novel. Next, I will explain the various ways of mimicking others.

#### **2.4.2 Racial Crossover: Mimicry, Crossover/Passing and Wiggers**

Bhabha argues that people in former colonies tended to mimic the white colonisers and especially their language in order to gain the power that was thought of as being linked in the western values, habits and education. He also includes the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s description of *mimicry* in his essay. For Lacan, “[t]he effect of mimicry is camouflage [...] It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in the human warfare” (Lacan qtd in Bhabha 85). Bhabha uses an interesting set of words when describing his view of the relationship between the mimicking colonised and the mimicked colonisers. He argues that the colonised never achieve the same “level” as the colonisers by saying that those who are mimicking the white people are “almost the

same but not quite” and as he continues “almost the same but not white” (86, 89). In addition, the term *mimicry* has a negative connotation and it has been argued that by mimicking, the colonised submit to the rule of the colonisers and admit their superior, “unavoidable” power (Boehmer 162). However, Boehmer, and also Bhabha, see mimicry as a strategic device to resist the colonial rule.

[T]o achieve autonomy people had first to find the means to articulate it. To win self-determination they had to develop ways of dealing with negation, self-alienation, and internal hatred produced by colonialist rule. It was at this point, where they were confronted by their own self-contradiction, that many had creative recourse to the very predicament that entrapped them: self-repetition or mimicry. Precisely because they could never be quite white or right enough, native colonials were able to transform the condition of mimicking the coloniser’s moves into a strategy of resistance. Adopting and adapting the white man’s tongue, they learned to speak for themselves. (Boehmer 162)

Thus, *mimicry* can be seen as both submissive to colonial power as well as a device for resisting it. In addition, according to Taylor, power stimulates mimicry (243). More importantly, *mimicry* is not just a phenomenon that dates back to the colonial era but it can also be seen to occur in modern, multicultural societies. In *Londonstani*, there are many examples of mimicry. The British Asians who mimic the white disgust Jas and the gang and are thus called by them coconuts, i.e., they are brown from the outside white from the inside. However, the boys are themselves shown to mimic black gangsta rappers but fail to see the irony of the situation. To make matters more complicated, Jas himself mimics the group of British Asian boys who mimic the black gangsta rappers. This is certainly an

interesting and multi-layered situation that I will continue to explain in more detail in the analysis

Today, the musical term *crossover* is used to define the mixing of musical genres or as David R. Roediger puts it in *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, “crossover also connotes a move by musicians of one race into genres and markets associated with those of another race” (212). In a more specific cultural context away from the music industry, crossover or passing is seen as a desire to be something else than one is, or in a simple manner “the passing subject desires to become (like) the other” (Brinks qtd. in Ahmed 130). In addition, passing, according to Lola Young, is “a sign of racial duplicity which threatens to undermine the stability of racial categorisation” (85). Furthermore, Elaine K. Gingsberg sees passing to be somewhat similar to the concept of *in between space* by arguing that

In its interrogation of the essentialism that is the foundation of identity politics, passing has the potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency: the opportunity to construct new identities, to experiment with multiple subject positions, and to cross social and economic boundaries that exclude or oppress. (16)

Additionally, Susan Gubar also highlights the possibilities of passing which she calls “racechange” by claiming that “[i]n terms of its most liberating potential and despite its history, [...] transracial transgressions can crack open any monolithic notion one might have about the coherent racial self” (244). For many, including Young, Gingsberg, and Gubar, passing is seen as a possibility to reinvent and reconstruct racial boundaries.

However, Sara Ahmed brings into question the difference between a white person who is passing for black and a black person who is passing for white in arguing that

passing is not identifiable as a discrete practice that has discernible political effects. On the contrary, passing is intelligible only in relation to a complex set of social antagonisms; passing for white as a black subject has a very different relation to power than passing for black as a white subject. (Ahmed 126)

For example, she sees a white woman passing for black as a technique that reveals what this white woman is lacking in herself.

Passing for black is a technique of knowledge insofar as it remains tied to the narrativisation of the white female subject's knowledge of herself through her sympathetic incorporation of others (by assuming an image of blackness, it becomes known as that which is lacking in the white self). (133)

In addition, Gary Taylor introduces another important aspect when discussing Eminem. What one needs to take into consideration is the fact that

[o]nly whites have the privilege of temporarily renouncing their generic identity and declaring themselves non-raced [...] His wigger identity lets him have his chocolate cake and eat the vanilla frosting too: he can be white when it suits him, and not-white when that suits him. (Taylor 354)

Thus, a white person performing the role of the other is still a privileged position as one can switch it off when he/she wishes and restore the “original” cultural identity, or the identity based on descent. As can be seen from both Ahmed’s and Taylor’s views, both passing for black and passing for white are ways to strengthen the dominant white/ black hierarchy and only whites have to possibility to opt out. Furthermore, one could ask that where is the gain for a black person passing for white? It certainly does not affirm black identity but negates it. As Boehmer argued, mimicry is also a device of resistance but it requires the black person to first abandon his/ her black identity and mimic the white subject in order to be able to resist the oppression and thus favours the white.

Furthermore, bell hooks criticises crossover, especially in relation to commodities by stating that “[w]ithin commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (“Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” 21). For hooks ethnicity is something exotic that the white people can consume and take in only to later “shit out the waste” (Ahmed 117). In addition, Ahmed questions the intention of a white man passing for a black man by arguing that “[p]assing for black as a white man can be understood as an ‘ability’ insofar as it is a technique; it is a set of practises through which knowledge of strangers functions to affirm a white, masculine identity (to affirm the structure of the white face)” (132). Furthermore, for a white subject passing for black, as Taylor continues to argue, this phenomenon of white cultural adoption “can be patronizing or exploitive; the culture of the white majority can erase or absorb minority difference” (358). For some, artist like Eminem and also Elvis Presley are, arguably, to a certain degree “culture stealers” (White qtd. in Taylor 349) that are said to commodify black culture for easier accessibility for white consumers or more directly act as a facade for a market-driven machine that is trying to benefit by replicating originally black performers and their ways.

Contrastingly, Roediger sees “racial crossover as a telling sign of the dissatisfaction of white youth with whiteness” (213). As a reaction to the dissatisfaction he introduces the recent phenomenon, visible particularly in hip-hop culture, where white adolescents mimic black ways and dress. He introduces the derogatory term “white nigger” or “wigger” as defining “that group of white youth said to be, or claiming to be, imitating African Americans today” (221). Furthermore, according to Taylor,

[t]he word *wigger*, a contraction of “white nigger,” probably originated in the early 1970s in urban African American; it resembles other ironic black compounds – like *witch* (“white bitch”) and *whitianity* (“white Christianity”) – that whittle down *white* to a prefix. (Taylor 342)

Roediger has a more neutral approach to the phenomenon and argues that “[t]hey [*wiggers*] will be seen neither as reincarnating minstrelsy nor as miraculously waving away both centuries of racism and current inequalities in money and power” (223; emphasis added). On the whole, he sees them rather in a positive light and, again, as a possibility to resist racial boundaries. It has been pointed out that the phenomenon derives “from racially mixed neighborhoods and from poverty shared with people of color” (229). One usually identifies with the people who live around one in the same community, which depicts the influence that the environment has on one’s identity and the social construction of identity. Roediger continues to argue that “[w]iggers are by no means all male, but they often are aggressively so and identify with violence, scatology, homophobia and sexism in rap rather than with Black music and culture more broadly” (227). One might ask how white men imitating black rappers are related to a study of British and British Asian youth but what binds them together is that passing and its different aspects including “wiggerdom” are not



simply something that include only black and white people but rather all nationalities and, as Roediger argues, “crossover [...] is plural and international” (237). Furthermore, as Taylor continues to argue, “[a]nglo role-playing, once cited as evidence of a weak and unstable identity without any personal integrity, has now become the sign and privilege of the strongest of all possible identities” (354). Also, in my interpretation of *Londonstani*, performing identity and racial crossover are main themes of the novel. The way in which almost every one of the characters imitates or mimics someone is in itself an interesting aspect. The way in which the performed identities break down cultural boundaries leads to the fact that the novel is coasting in uncharted territories and thus leaves a lot of space for interpretation.

As I have now gathered all of the useful theoretical concepts under one section I will finally start to analyse the novel and show how all of these aforementioned topics are visible in *Londonstani*.

### **3. *Londonstani* Exemplifying the Concept of Racial Crossover**

At first glance, the way in which the novel represents all of the aforementioned theoretical concepts is nearly too obvious. However, behind the conspicuous role-play and mimicry, there seems to be much more underneath the bling-covered surface. As I will show, the novel reflects the postethnic condition of Britain and particularly London. The postmodern/postethnic identities that it displays are significant examples of the effects of the colonial period, the preceding state of postcolonialism, and the lack of a global empire and the void termed by Paul Gilroy as the postcolonial melancholia. This void is something that Jas is somehow trying to fill by identifying with and mimicking the other. I will next explain how the theoretical concepts that I have discussed are present in the novel. I will do this by going through the novel in the same order as the concepts were in theory section. I will start with the legacy of colonialism, continue with ways of belonging and the desire of otherness and finally discuss the different ways of mimicking in the novel.

#### **3.1 The Legacy of Colonialism in *Londonstani***

##### **3.1.1 Postethnic London**

The contemporary postcolonial, postethnic, multicultural (whatever one wants to call it) ambiguous condition of London is something that is portrayed throughout the novel. As a matter of fact, as the story of Jas is been told in a way that it forces the reader to identify Jas with Harjit, Amit, and Ravi and thus make the assumption that also Jas is British Asian, one does not really think that the story is been told from the point of view of a white boy. Throughout the novel, there are several hints, clues, and suggestions that Jas is somehow different than other members of the gang but at no point it is revealed that he would be white. Naturally, this affects Malkani's description of places such as Hounslow and

Southall that adequately further consolidate the claim of London's postethnic state. Hounslow and Southall are described very differently as was for example Bromley in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It needs to be remembered that Kureishi's description of Bromley is set in the 1970s and Malkani's novel describes the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Hounslow and Southall. Also, Kureishi's Bromley is a predominantly white suburb, unlike Hounslow and Southall. Still, the only similarity seems to be the way in which they both describe the outskirts of London as concrete jungles. As in Kureishi's Bromley, where Karim daydreams of escaping to boredom of the Suburbia and its monotonous concrete milieu, Malkani's Jas describes the streets of Hounslow as follows:

[t]he world going by outside the window tells me that in the olden times, before the airport, Hounslow must've been one a them batty towns where people ponced around on cycles stead of drivin cars. Why else we got such narrow roads? Some a them were so narrow that the trees on each side had got their branches castrated to stop them fightin in the middle. In't no leaves on em either, even in the summer. Talk bout a shitty deal for the trees. Castrated an no pubes. Standin there like a giant, upright versions a the dried-up sticks a dogshit that lay at their feet. [...] I hope the skint people who work for the local council would just finish the fuckin job an chop em all down. Make room for more billboards, more fuckin road. Only proper-sized roads round here were the Great West Road an London Road, both a them runnin along either side a this part a Hounslow like garden fences to an airport at the back where the garden shed should be [...] There were hardly any parked cars along the pavement either, partly cos the staff car parks at Heathrow were full but mostly cos all a the houses round here had got their front gardens concreted over an

turned into driveways. Big wheelie rubbish bins an recycling boxes where the plants, flower beds and garden baths between them used to be. No sign a the other stuff I drew on houses when my playschool teacher moved me up from crayons to colouring-in pencils. None a them smokin chimneys an those lollipop-like trees were missin too. Missin, presumed castrated. (16-17)

However, while Kureishi's Bromley seems to be the caricature of Englishness, Malkani's Hounslow is far from that. The novel offers a passage that exemplifies just how different the borough of Hounslow is from the traditional view of London as the former heart of the empire and, as Taylor argued earlier, as the birth place of whiteness. In Malkani's Hounslow,

Some houses had got Om symbols stuck on the wooden front doors behind glass porches, some a them had Khanda Sahibs an others had the Muslim crescent moon. All a them had satellite TV dishes next to the main bedroom window, stuck up there like framed dentist' diploma certificates. If there weren't no symbol on the door, you could still tell if it was a desi house if there was more than one satellite dish. One for Zee TV an one for Star Plus, probly. You could tell if someone was home cos the daal an subjhi smell would mix in with the airport traffic on the Great West Road. (17-18)

Malkani's description is filled with words from Punjabi and Urdu and this further exemplifies the mixing and matching of cultures and the hybrid forms that are created on the borders between different cultures. Furthermore, the associations that the reader might experience when reading this passage might not be connected to a traditional English

setting but of something new and different. In addition, Malkani's description of the few trees that are left in Hounslow further strengthens my point: "the trees and all the posters pinned to them for some Bollywood film that'd been released two weeks ago, the new Punjabi MC single that came out a month ago or ads for a bhangra gig in Hammersmith that happened a year ago" (17). All in all, the feeling that this description leaves the reader with is not necessarily of conventional Englishness (at least not from a western point of view) but rather of some new form of Englishness. The predominant or rather sovereign culture in Hounslow seems to be, at least in Malkani's view, more South Asian than English. Furthermore, reinforcing my claim of postethnic London is the next passage from the novel. Malkani continues to explain the bizarre situation in places like Hounslow and Southall where "[t]hese days, lager louts had got more to fear from us lot than us lot had to fear from them. I int' lying to you, in pinds like Hounslow and Southall, they feared us even more than they feared black kids. Round some parts, even black kids feared people like us" (5). This comes very clear from the opening section of the novel that shows the brutal beating of a gora by Jas's gang. After the beating the victim tells Jas that "I didn't even say nothing, Jas. Nobody would ever be so stupid as to mess with you lot any more" (13). All of the abovementioned passages from the novel display the fact that in "pinds" like Hounslow and Southall whiteness is not a predominant feature and one could argue that the scales have turned in favour of the other. However, this is something that seems almost inevitable in societies with a history of colonialism and particularly with Britain where the constant flow of people from former colonies in the past decades has affected every aspect of everyday life. The transformation of traditional Englishness and London evident in *Londonstani* is something that aptly exemplifies what McLeod and others have been writing about the re-colonisation or rather reverse colonisation where the influencer is not the motherland but every single former colony and their cultures. In Malkani's Hounslow,

there seems to be no room for white traditional Englishness. This lack of white traditional Englishness could be explained by the fact that London of *Londonstani* is a postethnic setting where, as Sollors and Hollinger have claimed, descent is not the deciding factor of cultural identity. In such a space, Jas and other inhabitants of Hounslow are architects of their own fates and are given the choice to escape from the prescribed ethnic “role” if they are willing to do so. However, there is one visible character that, in my opinion, seems to act as the representative of the traditional wasp values that, strangely, seem to be the alternative way of life in Londonstani. Next, I will discuss the role of this character in the novel as well as trying to pinpoint passages that I believe are exemplifying how Malkani is playing with stereotypes in the novel.

### **3.1.2. Mr. Ashwood as a Representative of Whiteness**

As British Asians Jas and the gang are proud of their roots (although Jas is too busy with trying to deny his true heritage) and in no way try to fit in or take an interest in (white) mainstream society. Yet it needs to be mentioned that the gang is more than happy to accept the perks of mainstream consumer society in the form of latest clothes, gadgets and other luxury items. For them whiteness represents boredom, dullness and predictability but also authority that they want to avoid by any means. The gang refers to whiteness as being “poncey”. For them whiteness and following the rules are synonymous and somehow pretentious and even feminine. In the novel, whiteness is not something to be desired or envied but rather to be loathed. The boys’s behaviour is brimming with anger towards the allegedly suppressing and discriminating white society. This anger and resentment appears to have to do with much more than just the British society but the boys have seemed to channel all their disappointment towards it as, naturally, it is easier to blame some inhuman and abstract machine, the system or “the man”, for everything that seems to be wrong in

their life rather than getting perspective, taking a look at oneself and admitting that there might be something wrong with their own attitude and actions. Nevertheless, aggressive rejection of any advice from anyone willing to guide them and turning a deaf ear to everything and anything that reminds them of something formal or authoritative is their way of dealing with daily life. Furthermore, as teenagers, it seems to be awfully important to rebel against something and with the exception of Jas, the rest of the group rebel against oppressing white society rather than with their parents, because “you gotta respect the elders, innit” (68). For Jas, whose parents are white and thus the incarnation of everything that his newfound identity as an Asian loathes, the rebellion takes in the form of avoiding his parents as well as disdaining the white society. Jas’s rejection of his white identity is something that I will discuss in more detail later.

However, because Jas is depicted as an Asian and his true identity is revealed only in the last pages of the novel, throughout the novel the only clearly white perspective belongs to the gang’s old teacher Mr. Ashwood. Arguably, Mr. Ashwood is the spokesperson for the white society in the novel and by being a middle-aged white male he could be said to represent the white patriarchal English society. As Mitchell writes Mr Ashwood is “the only representative of ‘Britishness’” who “is built as a powerful figure who will return the gang to values based on education, respect and the rule of law” (337). Mr. Ashwood is genuinely worried about the behaviour of the gang and as Ravi tries to steal his phone he gets a chance to speak with the gang and tries to offer them a possibility of private counselling with him rather than going to the police with the phone theft. Mr. Ashwood is trying to make the gang see that their attitude towards mainstream society is something that hinders their assimilation by stating that “[y]ou’re the ones throwing your education away because most of us teachers are tainted with the misfortune of being white. Don’t think I

didn't notice the way you boys used to show more respect to Mr Sharma and never sat next to fellow white students. I wasn't born yesterday" (125). He continues by stating that

Don't you see, all I wanted to do was to turn you boys into great people – future newspaper editors, director-generals of the BBC, Cabinet members, even a prime minister. But how can I do that if you lot want nothing to do with mainstream society. Look at Trevor McDonald. Trevor McDonald is a proponent of integration and as one of the most respected newscasters in the country he should be a role model for all ethnic kids. In fact, I read an interview with him once and he said quite clearly that if you don't want to integrate, why did you come here? — We din't fuckin come here, innit, goes Ravi, — we was fuckin born here. Anyway, dat man is jus anotha BBC ponce. (127)

As Mr. Ashwood represents Britishness and that certain kind of Britishness to whom the BBC represents the common attitude or the “truth”, he believes that the best way to affect that “truth” is to be one of the people who can decide what is being broadcasted and how issues are dealt with in the media. On the whole, those are the positions where one can have an influence on many and that is why it is so important for him to make the gang interested in such media institutions as the BBC. This can be seen in the last passage where he is trying to refer to a black BBC newscaster Trevor McDonald and his role as “a role model for all ethnic kids” (127). Reasonably enough, Mr. Ashwood is trying to make the group understand that in order to disentangle old stereotypes and beliefs and thus resist discrimination, one needs to get in those positions of power over media. Unfortunately For Jas and the gang, institutions like the BBC represent the ultimate whiteness that they are



against. How can one make Jas and the gang interested in the very proponent of whiteness and conventional values, i.e. the BBC if it represents everything that they rebel against? What Mr. Ashwood fails to understand is that the boys do not even want to assimilate or fit in. In a postethnic setting, it is possible for them to make their own choices and ways of living that the society needs to allow for and not the other way around. It might have been important in the past decades to act white but today it is not necessary but a choice. The boys know their own place in British society and have no need to assimilate as they do not feel displaced or out of place.

Moreover, although Mr. Ashwood's attitude towards the boys is benevolent and his intentions seem to be sincere, his interest in teaching the gang to appreciate the mainstream society could be read as a sign of something much more than exceeding his role as a teacher. If we take a look at the passage below where Mr. Ashwood offers the boys a deal where, instead of calling the police, he suggests private discussion sessions where they could talk about the way in which they see the society they live in, it is clearly visible that he feels the need to guide the youth to what he considers to be the right direction.

[t]hat's all I'm asking. You sit down and let me try and get you boys interested in our mainstream, multicultural society again, in books, plays, politics, public institutions like the BBC. We can even analyse rap lyrics if you like. Just give me a couple of evenings [...] And don't think I'll be talking down to you either, I intend to learn just as much as you will from these sessions. I mean, I for one would like to be clearer about where all this macho nonsense comes from in the first instance. Maybe it has nothing to do with racial tensions, but we can't know unless we talk about it more. I mean, maybe we'll find that deep

down you boys just don't believe there's such a thing as society. Maybe the Iron Lady was right all along? After all, we live in a world where television tells us we should be out there gratifying all our desires. How can you boys possibly be expected to square that with feeling positive about school or society, with the bond of marriage even? Or then again, maybe this all just comes down to you not being taught to share your toys with others when you were children? I mean, who knows? Unless we talk about this stuff, who really knows? (128)

Although it is understandable that Mr. Ashwood, as the boys' former teacher, wants to help them in every way he can, his willingness to educate the boys could be read as exemplifying the concept of "white man's burden". By this I mean that by meddling in the boys' life he places himself in a higher status than the boys and thus feels compelled as the more educated and "civilised" white man to educate the "uncivilised" British Asian teenagers. This might sound like a far-fetched idea but I believe that the patronising and didactic attitude shows well in the novel. As a sidenote, the situation is similar as in an American film *Dangerous Minds* where a white teacher, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, strives to win the trust and respect of mostly black and Hispanic students. In both the film and Malkani's novel, the teacher represents whiteness and white mainstream society and understandably struggles to connect with students who see it as oppressive. However, in Malkani's novel, whiteness is not the sovereign feature as it depicts a view of a society where in some locations being the other is the norm and whiteness becomes otherness. Whatever way wants to read the role of Mr. Ashwood in the novel, it is clear that he alone represents the traditional Britishness in the story that is told from a viewpoint that might make one understand cultural as well as generational differences a little better. Next, I will

discuss the way in which Malkani plays with stereotypes by making Jas's parents appear as they would be something else than what they are.

### **3.1.3 Playing with Stereotypes: Jas's Parents**

An interesting feature of the novel is the way in which it plays with stereotypes by not revealing everything and by offering little clues along the way that the reader can use to make his/her own interpretation of particularly the characters. The obvious twist is of course the main character Jas and the way in which Malkani reveals his white identity only in the last pages of the novel. But what serves as a proof for Jas's alleged Asian identity is the way in which his parents are portrayed in the novel. The whole discussion of Jas's parents in the novel is playing with stereotypes as they are depicted as Asian although they are white. Jas's parents are rarely mentioned in the novel but when the novel portrays them, there is always something that could fuel the assumption that they are Asian. This is clear from a passage where Jas describes both of his parents: “[f]uckin pashmina shawls everywhere in here. So, stead a coming up the stairs, I can hear Dad head straight to the living room while Mum heads back to the kitchen. I press my ear against the door and can hear Dad open his usual Carlsberg an then turn on the TV to check today's cricket scores” (198). While this passage in no way asserts anything, the pashmina shawls and cricket can easily guide one to assume that Malkani is talking about a British Asian family. Furthermore, the way in which Jas's mother speaks could also lead one to think about the fact that she might be mimicking RP, received pronunciation or Queen's English to sound more British than she actually is:

— I've told you before, don't you dare swear in this house. The trousers look fine, darling. Absolutely fine. Dinner's ready.

—Why d’you always say everything’s fine when it in’t. You sound like you’re related to the Queen of England. (200)

The use of a “poncey” accent is something that with which, Hardjit and Tariq have earlier in the novel tried to fool the policemen with when their fight is interrupted by the police. Hardjit and Tariq switch their register when talking to the police to sound more British: “No sir, don’t worry, Tariq says in a fake poncey accent that I figure is his version a actin polite. — I’m alright, well an truly I am” (111). In addition to more subtle hints, Jas’s comparison of her mother with Amit’s mother may lead one to believe that she is British Asian (although a fairer-skinned one), “I in’t lyin, the two a them could be bhainjis. Mum even looks like a fairer-skinned version a Amit’s mum right now, starin at me like she reckons she knows what’s what” (331).

All of the hints and suggestions above are a way for the narrator to guide the reader to a direction he sees fit and thus by using stereotypes further reinforces the fact that stereotypes exist and can be used to define certain categories of people in a way that seems suited for the people in sovereign position who create and preserve these stereotypes. From the legacy of colonialism I will move on to discuss the ways of belonging in the novel.

### **3.2 Ways of Belonging in *Londonstani***

As I have suggested earlier, in Malkani’s version of London’s Hounslow the second and third generation of Asian (im)migrants do not question their position as an equal member of London’s culturally mixed population but rather celebrate their difference and the new Englishness or Britishness that it represents. This view contradicts the conventional (and racist) view of Britishness that couples it with whiteness, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding as Parekh cleverly notes in his description of Englishness (Parekh qtd. in McLeod 192).

Furthermore, as Upstone argues in her discussion of the novel, Jas and the gang do not see their position in British society as problematic and thus the migrant condition that is often at the centre of the work of such earlier notable writers as Naipaul, Kureishi, and Rushdie to name a few is not visible in Malkani's work. (210) Malkani's characters do not feel displaced or not belonging as their parents or grandparents must have felt upon arrival to Britain. This shows further why some older concepts of postcolonial theory are no longer fully tenable and the focus must shift towards the postethnic "state" where, in an ideal situation, one's cultural identity or the colour of one's skin should not matter. This is the reason why my thesis is concerned with these new hybrid postethnic identities that are combined by "mixing and matching" multiple cultural identities that can be chosen rather than born into. Interestingly, in *Londonstani*, a novel that depicts a postethnic society where skin colour or cultural identity should be non-relevant factors, it seems to be rather the British Asians that are viciously excluding everyone else and thus reinforcing their own cultural identities. In the next section, I will exemplify my claim by analysing a few instances from the novel.

### **3.2.1 Desis and others**

In the theory section, I presented how white men since the "realisation", or rather the invention, of the superiority of whiteness have sought to reinforce their own cultural identity by excluding others who are not white. However, in *Londonstani*, where the sovereign or predominant culture seems to be British-Asian, Jas and the gang reinforce their cultural identities by excluding basically everyone else. In a way, the boys could be seen as being racist too. For Jas and the gang, to be white is not something to be desired and, in fact, as discussed earlier, it is something to be loathed. The next passage, where Jas explains what is a coconut, exemplifies how the boys see whiteness and "acting white":

You could tell from his long hair, grungy clothes, the poncey novel an newspaper on his dashboard an Coldplay album in his car that he was a muthafuckin coconut. So white he was inside his brown skin, he probably talked like those gorafied desis who read the news on TV. Probably even more poncier than the way I used to talk. (21)

The boys' reaction to the "coconut" is something that, furthermore, shows just how wholeheartedly they feel about other desis who are mimicking the white.

— Bhanchod coconut, Amit goes after openin his window. — Ain't your own culture good enough for you, you fuckin gora lover? Amit felt as passionate bout healin coconuts as Hardjit felt bout healin rednecks who used the word Paki an Ravi felt bout healin lesbians [...] Cos we b da man round here n you b da gora-lovin bhanchod who can't even speak his mother tongue, innit. Wat's wrong wid your own bredren, brown boy? Look at us. We's be havin a nice car, nice tunes, nuff nice designer gear, nuff bling mobile. But no, you wanna b some gora-lovin, dirty hippie wid fuckin Radiohead playin in your car. (21-22)

Since the boys are incapable to understand why someone would deliberately mimic the white, their attitude shows how far British society has come from the times when in order to fit in one had to mimic or act white. Jas and the gang are doing anything but that. Rather, they put their own otherness on a pedestal and proudly preach their own desi gospel. Their discrimination towards the non-desis and their exclusion has as much racist tendencies as does everything they claim to be experiencing from white British society.

Moreover, as Malkani himself and Mitchell have both argued, reinforcing one's own cultural identity could be seen as a form of resistance against the more powerful, in this case, the white society. While this may be true for the gang, for Jas it is more problematic because as a white boy his performed role as an Asian resists the more powerful (in this case white) society, but it does not make any sense because Jas himself is white. However, I will discuss Jas's role play later on in more detail. Furthermore, in addition to the fact that the boys do not see mimicking as useful, they think that no one has to do it anymore. In Malkani's London, the new identities that the modern British society creates do not have to follow any rules or traditions. In the western world, where individuality is cherished, one is able to decide how he wants to act out his identity rather than being forced in to a existing category of, for example, white or Asian. To quote the novel:

God had given him brown skin an so he could be a proper desi if he wanted to. He'd made a choice just like I made a choice when I started kickin bout with Hardjit. But the coconut's choice was the wrong choice. In't no desi needin to kiss the white man's butt these days an you definitely don't need to actually act like a gora. Fuckin bhanchod. Didn't matter what you called them. Coconuts, Bounty bars, Oreo biscuits or any other fuckin food that was white on the inside. Good desi boys who din't ever cause no trouble. (23)

Again, the emphasis is on choice. It is possible to choose one's identity rather than being born into one. For the boys, however, the only right choice seems to be brown. This is also something that I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

What is also visible in the boys' behaviour is their questioning of the usefulness of mimicking and fitting in. It seems that whatever identity one chooses to mimic, the end

result seems to be the same: “how many a them’ll still be here in Hounslow in ten year’s time, workin in Heathrow fuckin airport helpin goras catch planes to places so they could turn their own skin brown?” (23). And as Amit puts it: “I remember back in da day when most desis round here were like dat gimp, goes Amit. — Skinny saps pretending like they were gora so no one tret’d dem like dey’d just got off da boat from Bombay, innit. But all da gora fuck’d wid dem anyway” (23). All in all, if there is no gain in being a coconut, why would one want to be one? This exemplifies what Bhabha and Chen see as a characteristic of mimicry: mimicking will always fail as the one who is mimicking, in this case the British Asian, will never be white. To summarize, the boys do not experience the migrant condition that is visible in many earlier texts but they are rather exemplifying new Englishness, a hybrid postethnic condition where one’s cultural identity and heritage does (or should) not make a difference anymore and where one may be free from the fetters of ethnic descent and choose his/her own cultural identity. Although Jas and the gang could be seen as exemplifying a state that should primarily be celebrated for its broadmindedness and tolerance, this is sadly not the case. Whereas the boys feel that they, as British Asian, are (or at least should be) equal members of British society, they still think that they, as desis, are at the top of the food chain. Although they are proudly exhibiting their own version of Indian culture, they are too enforcing their own cultural identities by violently excluding non-desi others. They are even willing to go as far as trying to convert non-desis to desis. This is exactly what they have done with Jas, and the transformation of a skinny, stammering gimp white boy into a proper rudeboy is a moral victory for them in their attempt to purge non-desiness from Hounslow. The next passage illustrates my point clearly.



[t]hing is, if people like Davinder hadn't laid into me so much all the time, Hardjit never have started stickin up for me in the first place. And if he'd never stuck up for me, I'd probly never've become part a his crew. At first I figured the only reason he'd started backing me up was so he could act like Shah Rukh Khan in front a all the ladies. The Bollywood hero always takes care of the underdog, you see. Only difference was Hardjit din't like takin no glory for stickin up for me. He din't even like it whenever I thanked him for doing so. I reckon he was basically so freaked out by how gimpy I was that he felt he'd got to cure me. Like those people who are so homophobic that stead a beatin gay guys shitless, they actually try an turn em into straight guys. (27)

In a way, the boys' mission is no different than those of, for example, early missionaries who were trying to convert non-believers into Christianity and colonisers who acquired physical as well as mental territory in the early colonies. While this may sound to be like a bold statement and, naturally, one needs to take into consideration the violent and immoral history of colonialism and the relative strength between the colonisers and the colonised, Jas's reverse mimicry appears as an ultimate example of "the Empire writing back", showing how colonialism has turned its direction and now its rather the once-colonised who are acquiring territory (both mental and physical) in the former heart of the empire. Next, I will discuss the differences between generations of (im)migration and how the focus has shifted from displacement to a loud claim for an own place in British society.

### **3.2.2 From Displaced Strangers to a New Breed of Englishmen**

Thomas Jefferson makes an apt observation of generational differences by comparing the differences between generations to the distance between America and England. According

to Sollors' description, for Jefferson "generations were as separate from each other as America was from England" (Sollors 209). So, even when generations might be somewhat close to each other temporally, the opinions, values and generally everything they believe in can contradict each other crucially. The difference between generations and the difficulties it brings for families is (as well as being an universal fact) something that is addressed throughout the novel and a common issue for many British Asian, as well as for any other "minority" or culturally mixed author. This might be related to the fact that in *Londonstani* and also in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and in *My Son the Fanatic* the protagonists are (or are portrayed to be) (im)migrants, second- or first-generation. This further highlights the generational differences as usually the first-generation immigrants have lived in a totally different society than their children. For many parents, like Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Hardjit's mother in *Londonstani*, it is difficult to understand their children's point of view and they sometimes feel that their children are too "Westrenised" (*Londonstani* 242) as they do not respect their traditions as they should. Sometimes the situation is turned upside down as in *My Son the Fanatic* where it is the son who is a fundamentalist and almost fanatic Muslim and it is the first-generation (im)migrant father that is the more "Westrenised" one (242). In *Londonstani*, The boys' reaction to Mr. Ashwood's marvelling at their insistence to keep to themselves and only associating with "their own kind", i.e., desis, is a clear indication of the generational differences:

But you boys do have some kind of worrying anti-integration, anti-assimilation ethic going on [...] Do you boys have any idea how hard your parents worked and how hard they fought to be accepted by mainstream society? [...] And all for what? So you boys could just throw it all away by acting like hoodlums and

by volunteering for segregation? [...] So wat if our parents had to suck British butt? Dat was back then. Now it our turn to teach em some muthafuckin self-respect, teach em not to b so fuckin disgusting. (126)

The fact that their parents' effort to "fit in" is rendered disgusting shows the difference between the generations and how much the British society has changed in merely two generations of immigration. If we are looking at, for example, the difference between Harjit and his parents in terms of their identity and understanding of their position in society, the change is drastic. Whereas Harjit's parents are Indian first and English second and find (or at least have found) their status in Britain problematic, Harjit is like Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* "an Englishman born and bred" (Kureishi) and considers himself as an equal member of society or even as a new and better version of an Englishman. Again, the differences between generations are presented in a similar way as in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the problematic relationship between the son, Karim, and the father, Haroon, caused by the drastic change in British society between the two generations, is highlighted. On the whole, generational differences are not something that may cause problems to just im(migrant) communities or families or, as Cohen puts it, to diaspora communities but they are naturally issues that affect everyone. However, it needs to be highlighted that in families with a history of (im)migration the difference between the experiences of the first generation – who have physically lived in two or more different countries and cultures – and those of the second or third generation – who have lived all of their lives in one place that is usually very different from their parents or grandparents land of birth – is crucial. This is one of the reasons why it is sometimes difficult for the later generations to understand the ways and traditions of their parents and grandparents as they do not always seem to be fitting to the society they live in today.

In Londonstani, the Sikh and Hindu boys Harjit, Ravi, Amit and Arun feel the need to respect their elders, as it is the custom, although even they do not necessarily understand many of the traditions and their relevance in a western postethnic society like London. Malkani's description of Harjit's mother makes her come across as someone who should not be argued with and the boys do everything they can to not cross the line with her:

The only way to dodge Harjit's mum's nastiness was to never cross her in the first place, which might sound like simple advice but it in't easy to follow cos it's really easy to cross her. It's like if she's addicted to being offended. All her friends seem to have this same addiction, especially this one hairy-faced auntyji who was always round there complaining bout this shit or that shit. If holdin a grudge was an Olympic sport they'd all have even more gold to decorate their wrinkly bodies with. They'd play it in teams, especially at wedding receptions. You'd see them there, all sittin together with their fake smiles like rows of substitutes on the bench. (74)

Furthermore, what one can arguably gather from this passage and many others is the way in which Jas sees the British Asian families as Suhayl Saadi describes in his review of Londonstani "irredeemably primitive" and "existentially separate" from the state of "White-ness" (n.p.). However, the respect that the boys wisely give to Harjit's mother comes clear from the next passage that shows how the boys respond to her when she has baked them samosas: "[s]hukriya, Auntyji, we all said like cheerleaders as she placed the tray on the desk. Each a us then gives it another Shukriya as she handed us a mini-plate and then Shukriya again as she put a dollop a that red napalm in it. Gotta respect your elders, innit" (68). The contradiction between respecting the elders and criticising their

ways and actions is what separates Jas and the gang. Naturally, for the gang it is easier and arguably wiser to respect their parents and elders than to openly question them as it might lead to problems in the family and even separation from it. Silently accepting something just because it is a tradition is much harder for Jas who as a white Englishman and a Christian openly questions some of the traditions of the Sikh families that seem almost ridiculous to him. In addition to Jas not showing respect to his friends' parents, his attitude towards his own parents is even worse. Obviously, what follows from Jas's attempted racial crossover is a clash of differing religions, cultures and ideologies. It is virtually impossible to find a straightforward way to circumvent some of the fundamental problems that may arise when trying to mix different cultures, religions and ideologies but Jas seems to be willing to try and at least makes an effort to explain why some of the Sikh traditions do not make sense in western society. For example, in the novel Arun's marriage is an issue that stirs most resistance from Jas. His seemingly benevolent gesture of discussing possible options with Arun is seen as an interference to private family matters and, at least partially, eventually leads to unforeseen actions as Arun commits suicide allegedly because of the pressure that he is put under by his family. Jas could be seen as being responsible for trying to explain his differing Western views to Arun, trying "to open his mind" for other options than strictly following traditions:

[b]e a man, Arun. Course traditions in't there to be honoured. If all we did was sit around on our butts honouring our traditions while doing complicated family-related shits, then nothin'd ever get better, would it? Cos nothin'd ever change. There'd be no equal rights for men an women, no crime committed when a husband rapes his wife. Fuck's sake, we might as well stop our moms

shoppin in Tesco an get our dads to go hunt wild animals for dinner instead.  
After all, it's the tradition, innit? (237)

Thus, Jas could be seen to be, at least inadvertently, responsible for Arun's rise against his parents that eventually leads to a situation where he sees no other option than to take his own life. Whether or not it is Jas's responsibility, duty or (white man's) burden to pinpoint what he believes is wrong with Sikh traditions, is debatable. On the whole, the generational differences particularly in im(migrant) communities further consolidate the fact that these new hybrid forms of Englishness are constantly in motion and usually unable to stabilise their views as they are influenced by so many different institutions and/ or individuals at the same time. In *Londonstani*, these generational as well ideological differences are usually fittingly referred to complicated "family-related shit".

As I have sought to explain the ways of belonging by showing the everlasting segregation of the self and others and moved on to exemplify how the many generations of (im)migration have changed the "role" of the (im)migrant-based population in *Londonstani* from a displaced stranger to a new breed of Englishmen, I will move on to discuss the various reasons for the desire for otherness in the next section of the analysis.

### **3.3 Desire for Otherness in *Londonstani***

After showing that many of the central concepts of postcolonial literary theory are applicable to *Londonstani*, I will now address the reason for Jas's quest or rather desire for otherness. If we are to believe Taylor (and respectively Gilroy, DuBois and Lacan), Jas should "incorporate more than one generic identity" (348). If this is true, then Jas's desire appears basically just as a result of a choice that he has made between the generic identities that has stemmed from "individual instability" and "conflict between received generic

identities” (348). However, this explanation leaves too many questions unanswered. Similarly, as Malkani has stated himself, the reason why he made Jas white is because it is possible today for a white boy to desire to be something else. Unfortunately, I am not satisfied with this explanation either. If what Taylor and Malkani argue is truly the case, then we should look into the reasons that have caused Jas to choose British Asian rather than British identity. Something that needs to be brought into attention already at this point is the fact that, and as Gilroy argues, when discussing the situation of British youth, for (hopefully most of) them race is insignificant. This means that for Jas British Asian and white British identities might not be that far apart as they seem at first glance. Furthermore, as I have argued, London of *Londonstani* is a postethnic setting that is a suitable playground for someone wishing to examine or assess other possible identities. If we are to believe that it is as simple as Sollors and Hollinger suggest and that one can simply choose his identity, then Jas could just choose to be British Asian.

### **3.3.1 Appealing Masculinity in *Londonstani***

If we get back to *Londonstani* and start from the beginning of the phenomenon, I believe that Jas’ refusal of whiteness stems from acknowledging the fact that, in the postethnic British Asian society that *Londonstani* portrays, whiteness is not enough and the frustration it creates. In Jas’s case, his insecurity and self-loathing are a part of the reason why he seems to desire to be something else, and Harjit and the gang of desi rudeboys seem to be just what Jas needs. He seems to be connecting the masculine aggression and bravado to the confidence that he is lacking and believes that by following their lead and mimicking them he will be less of a “khota” (a donkey in Punjabi) (26). The next extract shows how Jas sees himself:

It was just all the usual things. The things bout me that Hardjit'd told Amit and Ravi to just allow. Things like I was a ponce, I acted an sounded like a batty, I was a skinny wimp, I was embarrassing to have around if ladies come by, I wore crap clothes, I used to have braces on both my upper and lower teeth, I'd read too many books, I walked like a fool, I had this annoyin habit a sniffin all the time, I couldn't usually talk probly an when I did I couldn't ever say the right thing. Basically I was just generally a khota, like that coconut we'd seen earlier today except I didn't have my own car. (26)

Another important aspect seems to be the fact that, as depicted in the novel, Jas's stammer could be seen as symbolizing the lack of voice, i. e., opinion, influence and authority in society and by adapting the desi rudeboy style and manner he is finally able to speak up for himself. Jas's frustration towards his inability to voice his opinion intelligibly is clearly visible in the next passage:

Every time when it's important to use this gob a mine I hear my voice, which never normly works proply an so I panic. It's as if there's some other voice a mine givin it, Don't say that, it'll make u look like a gimp. An so I'll go, Yeh, maybe so, but ... Then I'll realise that the other person, the one I'm s'posed to be talkin to, can hear me. So I'll quickly shut my gob, only to hear the other voice go, You fuckin sap. Now you look like you can't even talk. Which you can't, you stammerin piece a wasted shit. For fuck's sake, just speak up [...] I just slated the way I was thinkin, same way my mind slates the way I speak. I slated it even before I finished thinkin it never mind sayin it, so I ended up soundin like a dick. An it's like I know in my head an can even tell to you why



I talked like a fuckin pehndu. But I couldn't ever say it. Couldn't ever explain it to anyone with my mouth. (*Londonstani* 30)

What comes clear from the above passage is that it is a clear indication of the existence of more than just on generic identity that is trying to surface. Furthermore, as Jas is constantly putting himself down and resenting himself and everything that he is lacking, it is only natural that he might take others as role models. Unsurprisingly, the role model of choice is a highly masculine and confident rudeboy that Jas sees as compensating his lack of confidence. Therefore, Jas's desire is based also on masculinity and gender as well as ethnicity. Furthermore, the control over something and anything is what Jas seems to desire for over anything else. For Jas, Harjit and the gang represent strength, being in control and being able to intelligibly voice one's opinion.

### **3.3.2 Idolizing Harjit and the Gang**

As Jas gives no value to his own self it is understandable that he is open to try out other identities or rather ways of finding confidence because anything seems to be better than to be a "stammerin piece of wasted shit" (30). This is why Harjit and the group of desi rudeboys seem to be the perfect choice for role models, as they take no shit from anyone and stand up for themselves. It seems to be Harjit's verbal ability and "proper" way of speaking that Jas envies the most as seen in the next passage:

I ain't shamed to admit I'm envious a Hardjit. Most bredren round Hounslow were jealous of his designer desiness, with his perfectly built body, his perfectly shaped facial hair an his perfectly groomed garms that made it look like he went shopping with P Diddy. Me, I was jealous a his front — what

someone like Mr. Ashwood'd call a person's linguistic prowess or his debating dexterity or someshit. (3-4)

It seems fitting that a late teenager suffering from the shame and insecurity caused by his stammer would look up to someone who is quick at repartee and seems to be able to appeal to others with his verbal "dexterity". Another instance where Harjit's extraordinary vocabulary is visible is a scene in a gym where Jas wonders how a "gym geek" like Harjit can know so many words: "[t]he most ridiculous thing bout workin out with Hardjit was suddenly he'd come over like a teacher, using double the number a words normal people normly knew. I asked him why one time an all I got in reply was, U gots 2 get yo'self a voluminous vocabulary 2 proply do dis shit [...] gym geeks like Hardjit were full of clever but basically boring shit" (191-2). It needs to be made clear that what Harjit and Jas mean by speaking "proper" is not what it usually means, i.e., standard language but a strange mixture of Punjabi, Hindu, Urdu and English combined with colloquialisms and abbreviations. At times, the language has similarities with African American English that the group has adapted from rap lyrics. Furthermore, in the novel, there can be found what Malkani calls "Rudeboy Rules" and Rudeboy Rule #4 is about speaking "proper":

***Rudeboy Rule #4:***

According to Hardjit, it don't matter if the proper word for something sounds fuckin ridiculous. If it's the proper word then it's the proper word. (45)

However, speaking proper is not the only thing that Jas is envious of. As Jas describes himself as a skinny and small teenager, unlike Harjit who is described as he is carved out of stone and is the perfect epitome of a desi, it is not a surprise that Jas envies

Harjit's physical appearance as well. Harjit is an alpha male and naturally the self-proclaimed leader of the pack, someone whom no one wants to cross. Jas's, Amit's and Ravi's sheep-like obedience is clear in the following passage where Harjit is kicking the living daylight out of a "gora" who allegedly called the gang Pakis:

Again, punctuation came with a kick, but with his left foot this time so it was more like a semicolon. — Call me or any a ma bredrens a Paki again an I'ma mash u an yo family. In't dat da truth, Pakis? - Dat's right, Amit, Ravi and I go, — dat be da truth.

The three of us spoke in sync like we belonged to some tutty boy band, the kind who sing the chorus like it's some blonde American cheerleader routine. Hardjit, Hardjit, he's our man, if he can't bruck up goras, no one can. (Malkani 3)

Harjit is portrayed in the novel as some kind of a physical specimen or a superhero and he is the one that everyone "summon" when they need a hand in settling differences with physical force. The next passage shows how Harjit is compared to Batman:

So it was up to some other Sikh guy to sort things out, an round here that other Sikh guy normly meant Hardjit. Even Hindu kids called on him when they'd got beef to settle. You know how the people of Gotham City've got that Bat signal for whenever they need to call Batman? The homeboys a Hounslow an Southall should have two signals for Hardjit: an Om for when Hindus needed him an a Khanda for when Sikhs needed him. He always used to go on bout how Sikhs and Hindus fought side by side in all them wars. Both got beef with

Muslims. Both support India at cricket. Both be listenin to bhangra, even though Sikh bredren dance better to it. (81)

Furthermore, all extracts discussing Harjit, spell his name with a letter D in between the letters R and J, i.e. as “Hardjit” and this is something that he has come up with by himself because he believes that even his name needs to be more masculine. This shows how superficial and, to put it simply, idiotic the gang and its eminent leader are. Mr. Ashwood is trying to point this out to Harjit who is sticking to his new name adamantly:

— Nah man, u ain’t listenin, people really call me Hardjit now. Just check wid ma crew. — If you check with your parents I think I’ll find your name is Harjit. You were quite happy being called Harjit when you attended this school and if I remember rightly your parents were quite happy calling you Harjit. So unless you’ve changed your name by deed poll, I’ll call you Harjit. (117)

Hardjit’s leader status in the group has not got necessarily anything to do with his wisdom but is rather based on his physical strength and his unashamed willingness to use that strength to beat up others to be considered as the alpha male of the gang. There are several passages in the novel that describe Harjit’s perfectly shaped muscles and his handsome features, up to a point that one must wonder if there would be something other than just pure admiration of Harjit’s debating dexterity and masculinity that leads Jas to desire to be like him. As Mitchell argues, there is a slight homosexual undertone in some of the descriptions of Harjit although a full analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. The next passages support my analysis further by revealing that Jas sees Hardjit as an object. In the first passage, Jas compares Harjit’s body to a new concept car in a car show: “[t]oday

he'd even kept his muscles under wraps in a baggy, long-sleeve Adidas tracksuit top, his firm body a new Audi concept car waitin to be unveiled at the Geneva motor show by Czech supermodels wearin nothing but high heels, kachhian and dry-ice mist" (85). This admiration is continued a page later where Jas describes how Harjit is choosing his outfit on a fight day by comparing him to a high-class hooker: "[t]his must be what high-class hookers are like before they go out on a job. Tryin to wear just enough to take off but not so little that they revealed too much too quickly. Something not too skintight but something that'd still stretch over the right places" (86). As I argued, it is obvious that Harjit is the alpha male and he himself knows it better than anyone. Harjit's sculpted body is a testament to his hard work at the gym and as Jas explains, "[t]he guy'd worked every major muscle group, down the gym, every other day since he was fuckin fourteen years old" (5).

Obviously, Jas is idolizing Harjit and as Taylor argues, in a postethnic setting, adolescents do not have to admire someone who is like them, i.e. Jas does not have to admire some white British athlete, actor or artist. As a matter of fact, Jas's idol seems to be Harjit and Harjit's and the whole gang's idols are western gangsta rappers like DMX but also Bollywood actors like Shah Rukh Khan who are always saving the damsel in distress. This exemplifies that it is not necessary to idolize someone from the same "ethnic group" that one belongs to. Jas's idol is a British Asian boy and for the British Asian boys their idols are black gangsta rappers. It could be stated that Jas's desire as an insecure and puny teenager to be an alpha male like Harjit could be seen as a common phenomenon among teenagers in any "ethnic group". However, from a theoretical point of view, this is yet again a clear indication of the societal change in Britain to a state of postethnicity where it is acceptable for a white boy like Jas to choose to admire and mimic someone other than a member of his own "ethnic group". Again, there is a choice or consent to Jas's roleplay

that allows him to freely choose its model. Next, I will move on to discuss other less obvious and more culture specific reasons for Jas's desire.

### **3.3.3 Desiness Representing Otherness as a Commodity**

As I've tried to explain in the introduction, the desi culture that Hardjit and the gang represent mixes western consumer commodities (bling), music and nightlife with Asian "flavor" to form new hybrid forms of youth culture that can be enjoyed by both white and Asian youth. The novel's desi culture, a mixture of South Asian and western elements, seems to put a lot of emphasis on appearance and material wealth. Aspiring to be wealthy and materially successful is something that is characteristic for western capitalism and commodity culture, gangsta rap as well as Sikhism. In the following passage Jas is sarcastically explaining how he sees the Sikhism's duty to be materially well off:

[a]ll the satsang guests tryin to reserve their parkin space in Heaven by leavin their last-year's-model hatchback at home an pullin up in their husbands Benz, Beemer or Audi instead. No jokes, I think one a the holy scriptures that I haven't read yet says extra big ups would be going out to worshippers who showed up in luxury German saloon cars. [...] Back upstairs, I started going on bout artha, which is the Hindu duty to do well for yourself materially. (83)

Thus, it is not strange that the gang are celebrating the desi lifestyle that is associated with bling. In the novel, bling is something that, according to Sanjay, you cannot get enough of.

The word bling has made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary* precisely because it isn't some passing phase, boys. This lifestyle, these material possessions, this is how you big yourself up, as they say. You will forever be judged and judge yourselves by your luxury consumerist aspirations, your nice stuff. And if you stop trying to big yourself up, others around you will make you look small pretty quickly, believe me. So as a dear friend of mine once said, you can never have enough bling [...] To put it crudely, drawing a line and saying that's it, I don't want anymore nice stuff, no more bling, is like stopping sex before you reach orgasm. (167-68)

Sanjay, the novel's criminal mastermind, is the epitome of the desi lifestyle that the boys' desire as he is an educated and successful businessman for whom nothing is ever enough. The difference between the boys and Sanjay is that the boys, as teenagers living with their parents, only dream about the mansions Sanjay lives in and the models he dates. In other words, Sanjay is actually living their dream life and so it is so easy for Sanjay to get the boys interested in his offer. Sanjay calls the boys "card-carrying devotees of all that bling-bling urban youth culture" (167), and that is how they are depicted throughout the novel. Sanjay continues describing the boys later on the same page:

I mean, never mind your D&G T-shirts, I can tell you just from your designer haircut that you don't listen to Radiohead and campaign against environmental pollution, do you? No. Conspicuous consumption, luxury brands, immediate gratification and nice things are much too important to you, that much you guys have already decided. But what you don't realise is that means there's no going back. (167)

Jas's materialistic endeavours are shown towards the end of the novel when the boys start to actually make money working for Sanjay. His preference of London's trendiest nightclubs and luxury brands is a clear indication that he desires to be as "well off" as Sanjay.

This time, the white Calvin Klein chuds come on first, then the high-collar chocolate Reiss shirt, the Reiss trousers, and then I'm back sittin on the bed to pull up the socks again. The other guys'll be wearin their best garms for tonite. But I was wearin my second-best garms (my chunky black DKNY top and grey Prada slacks) for tomorrow's date with Samira. (199)

"The bling generation", if one can call them that, is what the boys represent. "Conspicuous consumption" and "immediate gratification" is what the boys are looking for and it sits well with the western commodity culture that celebrates individuality and short-term happiness at the expense of future sustainability. In a world that the gang in *Londonstani* represent, everything is for sale, and as Sanjay aptly puts it, "[t]his isn't about society becoming more affluent, this is about a subculture that worships affluence becoming mainstream culture" (171). From here it is easy to start discussing in more detail the way in which particularly Jeffrey J. Santa Ana and Graham Huggan see otherness as exotic and even as a commodity.

For Jas, the desi culture must seem different, interesting and most of all exotic. This exoticism and its role as "a currency in the global marketplace" is what especially Huggan writes about and seems to be one of the reasons why I believe Jas is even more drawn into the group. Popular programs such as MTV Base that mixes the newest bhangra-based hits



and the overall Asianness of Southall that was described earlier with a western TV format are reasons for Jas to take interest in the desi culture. It is something that is all around him and made tempting and desirable by the media and advertising. Furthermore, in modern postethnic London, or at least in Malkani's version or remake of it, the youth's usual view of whiteness as middle-aged, stale and boring is not seen as interesting or attracting by any means. Particularly in western commodity culture and in the marketplace of cultural identities where everything needs to be vendible and interesting, whiteness is losing ground in terms of desirability and otherness is raising its stock as new, exotic, and most importantly different. This is what Santa Ana and Huggan argue as well and what Jas seems to fall for badly. Furthermore, bell hooks has stated even earlier that ethnicity acts as a spice in a dish that is the "white mainstream culture" (Hooks, 21). In a situation where affluence, physical appearance and immediate gratification are desirable and characteristics of a certain group, it is only natural that by attaining the aforementioned one can reach the status of a member in this group. In a way, by wearing the luxury brands, getting designer haircuts, dining in expensive restaurants and drinking in trendy night clubs, Jas buys his way into otherness and desiness. And as the desi culture and identity is so closely connected to these commodities, identity itself becomes a commodity as suggested by Santa Ana. By following the desi trends and sharing the consumer values and buying the same things as other desis, Jas acquires his cultural identity as a desi. Santa Ana also points out that by buying one's way into identity one can "claim higher socioeconomic status and privilege" (18). This is an interesting statement when we think about Jas. In Britain, one could argue that to be white would automatically mean to be in a higher socioeconomic status than other "ethnic groups" – at least this would have been the case in the past. In Malkani's London it seems to be the other way around: why else would Jas want to "downgrade" and buy his way into an identity that indicates lower socioeconomic status

(for some). This brings us back to the question of whether the postethnic condition of Malkani's London truly knows no ethnicity and whether race is insignificant there? Or could it be that, as I have suggested before, the tables have turned completely and British Asian identity is the desired option. Either way, this is something I will return to later.

Santa Ana also argues is that if identities could be bought as commodities only those who have the means to purchase them are able to take part in the "marketplace of cultural difference" (Root, as cited in Huggan 158). Another point raised by Santa Ana is that such situation would lead to "apolitical egalitarianism" and also "racial and ethnic self-erasure" (19). Jas, who has the means to purchase "cultural commodities", is able to buy his way into British Asianness although it requires re-negotiating his own cultural identity as a white British boy. Perhaps one could argue as well that to truly become a desi Jas would first need to go through "racial and ethnic self-erasure". Thus, I would like to question what Santa Ana means by this as I see no possibility to cleanse oneself of ethnicity or race as what would be left if one would be able to do so? Is there a certain generic human form that does not carry the characteristics of any ethnicity and is not influenced by any culture and thus has been living in an ethnic and cultural vacuum? How is this kind of ethnic and racial self-erasure then possible? Arguably, it is not and what would be left of this alleged self-erasure is the loss of identity that leads to trauma or melancholia. For Jas, although he desires to be British Asian, the white Britishness that he has been born into will always serve as a reminder of what he at least was at some point and will continue to affect his world view. This will become clearer in the following section where I discuss performed identities and Jas's racial crossover in more detail. Before that I will move on to describe the concept of postcolonial melancholia as one of the possible reasons for Jas' racial crossover.

### 3.3.4 White Postcolonial Melancholia in *Londonstani*

I introduced Freud's term melancholia as well as Gilroy's postcolonial version of it in the theoretical approach and set about to discuss why it is an important issue in my thesis. Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia is not the easiest theory to get a hold of but I believe that it offers at least a partial explanation for Jas' roleplay. As Gilroy suggests, Britain as a nation has suppressed the painful memories of the colonial era and the loss of an empire in way that it has resulted to a condition where the British are unconsciously longing for the empire and the stability it created considering cultural and national identity. It has also created a situation where the British are unable to connect the "others" and the im(migrants) in Britain to the colonial past and thus see them as trespassing strangers. Furthermore, now that the empire is no longer there and the reverse colonisation has brought hundreds of thousands of the former colonised into the former white heart of the empire, it is much harder for the nation to rely on stable and static limits or borders for national and racial identity. This is why I believe it is even easier for Jas to try out and examine other possible options for the white British identity.

Gilroy's argument about postcolonial melancholia's capability of leaving one with "oscillation between identification with the victims of racism, a guilty dislike of them and the changes they have made to the country, and tormented self-digust at the prospect of being implicated either in the problems they import or in their colonial and postcolonial sufferings" (116) is something that could not better exemplify Jas's situation. Throughout the whole thesis, I have tried to exemplify how Jas identifies with the gang and it could be argued that there is a slight undertone of dislike of at least some of the traditions and habits that do not seem to fit in British society. Actually, after examining a passage in the novel where Jas tries to explain to Arun why the Sikh traditions are not relevant in Britain

anymore, one could make the claim that there is more than just a slight undertone of dislike.

Most parents are too narrow-minded an set in their ways to see that all desi wedding traditions just don't make sense thousands a years after they were invented in Indian villages thousands a miles away that probly don't even exist anymore [...] Why can't you tell your parents to open their fuckin minds? All them customs, they're just invented to protect the power a older people cos they'd got the time an power to invent shit to protect their power. An now they spreading this shit round London cos they're the only ones with the time an power to spread it. An the worst thing is they don't even realise they're doing it cos they're so unable to question the system. (238)

Jas's point of view is quite clear and the fact that he is not just thinking these issues by himself but openly criticises Sikh traditions to his Sikh friend Arun shows that these issues are not just something that he secretly dislikes but actually feels the need to interfere in them. Furthermore, the self-disgust that Jas is obviously suffering from might stem from the fact that he believes that he might somehow be responsible for the prejudice British Asian im(migrants) have had to suffer from people like him. There are clear indications in the novel that show just how little appreciation Jas gives to himself and this is something that I was discussing earlier in this section as well but I believe that it might not be just the stammer that is the reason for Jas' self-loathing.

— Yeh, I think I know what you mean, Davinder an that, like. I yer gey ... Well, you know. In't sure like. Dependes what you reckon, I mean, no, depends, sorry.

Hardjit just looked at me, all confused like I was chattin in fuckin Scandinavian or someshit. An I was thinkin, What the fuck is wrong with me? Why the fuckin fuck did people like me say sorry when I weren't? [...] Back in them days, the braces on my teeth weren't the only reason why it was generally a bad idea for me to try an talk. But I was talkin to Hardjit and Hardjit was sorted. You can't give up trying to chat proply when you're chattin to someone sorted, someone like Hardjit. You'll be thinking I fancy him now, won't you? That I really am a batty boy after all? But it in't like that cos I in't batty. I just wish I was sorted as Hardjit is, that's all. (29)

Naturally, to say that Jas's low self-esteem is a sign of guilt produced by his whiteness and thus implicit involvement in colonialism might be jumping to too far too early. However, the key factor in Jas' guilt-induced self-disgust is that it is not him but also his parents who appear to represent the oppressing white British society and that remind Jas of his own whiteness that he would so eagerly like to deny. Again, Jas's self-torment might be related to the fact that he is not comfortable in his own skin and would rather be someone else than a descendant of white oppressors. Jas's reaction to his parents seems to suggest this. If we take a look at some of the occasions where Jas is shown talking to his mother, or rather thinking about her, it is undeniable that he hates her with a passion: “[m]atter a fact I start getting that nausea feelin again, the one I always get when she's around. *Go away, Mum, or I'm gonna oolti all over my new Reiss shirt an trousers*” (199; emphasis original). The next passage indicates the dislike even more:

*I in't gonna say jackshit more than I got to Mum, that's my best strategy for dealing with you [...] Then I'll stuff em all into your mouth, Mum, so you'll shut the fuck up with your poncey voice an get the fuck away from me [...] It's disgusting. I wanna strangle you with your shawl when you chat like that [...] I don't wanna fight with you, Mum, cos I don't wanna chat to you. Matter a fact I don't even wanna see you. Get the fuck away from me. (200-201; emphasis original)*

One last example gives the reader a vivid comparison that proves the point: “[m]um, please shut the fuck up with all this bullshit. You know why I'd rather starve or go on a diet a dog's diarrhoea than have dinner with you an Dad” (202; emphasis original). Throughout the novel, Jas rarely spends any time at home and seldom responds to anything that his parents are saying to him. This leaves her mother in particular wondering where she has gone wrong since her son does not want to spend any time with them. While it could be argued that this is normal teenage angst and the fact that Jas wants nothing to do with his parents is natural for a boy of his age, the fact that he likes to spend time with, for example, Harjit's dad suggests something else. In addition, Jas' mother's threat further proves my point of Jas not liking to spend time at home.

If you fail you're a-levels again, you'll be destroying your life. And my life. How will I show my face? If you're not doing drugs then what is it? Why are you always angry with us? Always running off, not even answering the phone when we call. I think it's time I got together with Harjit and Amit's mothers

again, see what they think you boys are up to, see if they know why my son hates his own home. I must phone and invite them. (202)

The clearest indication of Jas's denial of his white identity is naturally his roleplay but that is something that does not really come clear before the end of the novel. The fact that he is referred to Jas throughout the novel and that his surname is "too fuckin long and too fuckin shameful to fit in my own fuckin gravestone" (294) is also pointing the reader towards thinking that it might be an Asian name. In a way, everything in the novel represents his denial of his white roots but the truth is revealed only in the last pages in his father's statement:

[o]ne of those Harjit, Amit boys. You're not like them. We keep telling you. You don't want to know us because we keep telling you. What's wrong with us son? What's wrong with us that you spend more time with Harjit's father and mother than you do with your own father and mother? I know for a fact Harjit's father never wants to watch football with his son. I know him. I know this. I know these things. Those two, father and son, the *really* don't know each other. But why do you pretend it's the same with us? And while Harjit's father is always saying how his son abuses Sikh religion, I've respected your ways, your youngster's version of Indian culture. And we both tried. Your mother and I. We tried for your sake to be friends with them, to like them, to get to know them. So, that's how we know what we're talking about. Your mother here, she even tried to cook like their mothers. We tried. You're not like them, son. Now look at the trouble you're in [...] What nonsense is this you don't even respond to your own name? Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, do you hear

what I'm saying? [...] — Look, he says. — It says your name here on your medical chart: Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, aged nineteen, white, male. (340)

The fact that we learn this only at the end of the novel makes us reassess all of the events that have occurred before the revealing of the true nature of Jas's cultural identity. Furthermore, his roleplay could be seen as a clear indication of the change in British society and particularly its youth and their resistance of machinations in racial politics that, again according to Gilroy, "communicates something of the irrevocably changed conditions in which factors of identity and solidarity that derive from class, gender, sexuality, and region have made a strong sense of racial difference unthinkable to the point of absurdity" (132). Considering Jas, one could easily make an assumption that this is the case and Jas and the gang are, as Nitin Shawney has put it, in a place "beyond skin" (Gilroy 132). Again, while this would refer to a postethnic society where race is considered insignificant, in *Londonstani* the situation is not that simple. Although Jas welcomes the desi lifestyle and desires to be like Harjit and the gang and thus seemingly has a welcoming attitude towards various cultures, the version of desi culture that the gang represents is highly discriminative towards the non-desis and also violently segregated. As I have now discussed the various ways of desire for otherness and the possible reasons for this desire and explained how they are visible in *Londonstani*, I will proceed towards the final section of the analysis where I will explain in more detail how Jas's performance is carried out and why it sometimes seems to fail. The important questions are who gives the consent to someone who is choosing an identity other than the one he is born to and rather how will society or the chosen "ethnic group" react to this? Furthermore, is this kind of role play accepted and is the performer accepted by the group? These are questions that I will return to in the next and final section of my discussion.



### **3.4. Becoming the Other: Performing and Mimicking in *Londonstani***

In this last section of the critical discussion, I will exemplify how Jas has abandoned the cultural identity that he was born to and chosen to mimic the other. As shown in the theoretical section, there are many terms for this phenomenon such as mimicry, passing and crossover but all of the terms seek to explain the same thing, the attempt to imitate “the other” or rather to transform to “the other”. The main idea seems to be that the person is acting out a learned performance that is supposed to mimic the role model. In Jas’s case, the role model or the preferred subject is Harjit and his “designer desiness”.

#### **3.4.1 Identity as a Performance and Authenticity in *Londonstani***

Butler’s argument of all identities being performances is viable in Jas’s role play. How else could one describe a white boy who is mimicking the British Asians or a British Asian who is mimicking African Americans? In both instances they are playing the role of the other as it seems quite clear that no matter how excellent their performances are, they are only performances. Although it has been suggested by Sollors that in a postethnic context one is able to choose his cultural identity, is it really as simple as that? Naturally, one can choose to mimic anyone they want to but can they acquire the cultural characteristics, both physical and mental, to be accepted by the community or is it even necessary? The authenticity of these performances is what is in question. What I would like to know is who decides whether someone’s cultural identity is authentic or not? On the whole, we could start by comparing the authenticity of the characters in *Londonstani*. Hypothetically, if I would do a field study and ask around with a picture of Jas and a picture of Harjit that which one of these teenagers represents a British Asian teenager, many of the respondents would pick the picture of Harjit. On the other hand, if I would have the same pictures but

would ask which one of these teenagers represents a white British teenager, I believe that many would pick Jas's picture. If, as Taylor argues, authenticity is "to be true to oneself" (Taylor qtd. In Huggan 157), how could mimicking or performing the role of someone else then be considered authentic? Usually, one connects authenticity to appearance and this is one of the reasons why, for example, a 12-year-old white Finnish middle-class boy dressing up in baggy pants, a basketball jersey and a bandana, thus imitating his favourite African American rapper, is considered hilarious by many. In a way, as it crosses so many boundaries and conventions and is often impossible to take seriously, it is thus met with laughter.

However, there are many other novels written about this phenomenon of racial crossover and sometimes they might be even based on somewhat accurate stories of true historical events. In addition, many of these stories have been later on turned into movies and have thus ensured an even wider recognition. A few of the films that deal with a white subject passing as an other – as this is closer to the story of Jas – are Michael Blakes' *Dances with the Wolves* later turned into a hugely popular film by the same name, the Native American story of Pocahontas, and James Cameron's movie *Avatar*, arguably the same story as Pocahontas but with multi-million dollar CGI special effects and a Hollywood storyline. These classic stories deal with becoming the other and also with the difficulty of racial crossover as the community of others, i.e. the Native American community in *Dances with Wolves* has a hard time of accepting the outsider, and "the other" in their eyes, to their community and as a part of that community. In many of these stories, role-play is seemingly successful and the white subject arguably earns his/her place in the community but it still does not erase his/her whiteness. Furthermore, these stories deal with a white subject who is trying to assimilate to a community of others usually far away from his own home or community. What makes *Londonstani* unique is the way in

which Jas' transformation could be read as a mental or cultural exile within his own community.

On the whole, the conclusions we can draw from this speculation are that, one can choose one's identity and perform it, but whether if others, i. e., the spectators of this performance are willing to consider the performance authentic or not is another question altogether. On a philosophical level, it is a question of whether it is enough that the performing subject can claim his/her performance as authentic or whether he/she needs the approval of others to successfully cross the racial boundaries. In *Londonstani*, Jas's roleplay as a British Asian is better accepted by the British Asians in the novel but even them cut ties with him in the end, as he crosses the line by dating a Muslim girl. However, those who seem to criticise him the most and are having difficulties to understand the role-play are his old (white) friends and his parents, who are questioning just this authenticity in particular. This comes clear from a question uttered by his old friend, the unlucky one who allegedly called the gang Pakis and whom Harjit then beat to a pulp: "[w]hy didn't you tell them I didn't say anything, Jas? What's happened to you over the last year? [...] — You've become like one of those gangsta types you used to hate" (13). Furthermore, his parents' approach is even more straightforward and they are trying to tell it to Jas who seems to be having difficulties to grasp their point: "[y]ou're not like them. We keep telling you. You don't want to know us because we keep telling you [...] You're not like them, son. Now look at the trouble you're in" (340). The performance or the role-play needs to be accepted and thus one cannot pass by force or without the consent of the group. Otherwise, the performance is left somehow unfulfilled if it obtains no response or the response is not desired. Although the British Asians in the novel seem to accept Jas's performance – even though it is hard to tell if they truly consider him as one of them as those instances are deliberately left unattended to not ruin the twist in the end – in the end

Jas's performance is not authentic and fails as it is virtually impossible for a white British boy to successfully adopt the role of a British Asian. In addition, this is something that Jas's parents and friends think as well. To be clear, in no way am I suggesting that, for example, the British Asians are less British than the white British in the novel and, in my opinion, nationality does not see colour, race or origin but that the cultural characteristics and signifiers are unchangeable and permanent and divide humans in categories based on appearance. However, it is up to everyone to try to work through these monolithic myths and stereotypes and the power relations between the categories so that the status quo between these categories would be one of equality. Even in an ideal situation like this, passing as an other will never work as the passing subject will always be "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 86). I will now move on to exemplify the different ways of racial crossover in the novel.

#### **3.4.2 Racial Crossover: Mimicry, Crossover / Passing and Wiggers in *Londonstani***

Bhabha's statement takes us to the theme of racial crossover and how the novel portrays the multiple ways one can mimic or imitate others. The term "others" is of course situation-related and as Jas's others are British Asians, and contrastingly, for a British Asian such as Harjit Jas is "an other". In *Londonstani*, there are various forms of mimicry. First of all, there are the British Asians who are mimicking the white, i. e., the "coconuts" and whom the gang considers disgusting. It is difficult for them to understand how someone would deliberately submit to the rules and regulation of white sovereign society but the "coconuts" might not even think of themselves as submitting to anything but being a part of a society that is multicultural, postethnic and thus supposedly free of prejudice and where everyone gets to choose his own identity. As I have claimed before, this is sadly

not the case and the “coconuts” get to feel the full wrath of the “true desis” as we can see in the passage below.

— Wat da fuck happened wid’ chyu you gots to act like a gora for? You think you better than your own kind cos you is so white n you read some poncey books an newspapers? I wipe ma ass wid yo fuckin newspaper. — Look, mate, I’m not looking for any trouble here. I’m just going about my business. — Going bout yo business? Ehh ki hai? Amit goes- — Wat business you got goin? Readin fuckin batty books? (22)

To summarize, passing for white is unacceptable but passing for something else seems to be accepted. I will not concentrate too much on the British Asians who are passing for white, they serve mainly as a point of comparison to Jas’s and the gang’s mimicry.

Secondly, the novel addresses the mimicking of Harjit, Ravi, Amit and arguably and implicitly Jas. To clarify, I will return to Jas’s case later but at this point I will address Harjit, Ravi and Amit. Although they are very vocally criticising those who pass for white, they themselves are idolizing black gangsta rappers and try to imitate them by acting like hoodlums, glorifying crime and violence in a similar manner as their idols Eazy-E and DMX. From a conventional perspective, this is pure stupidity and it can be seen from Mr. Ashwood’s reaction to Ravi’s boasting in the next passage from the novel.

[i] know you boys are always shaking each other’s hands and talking in code under your breath, but what is this? The Hounslow mafia or something? — Yeh, man, nobody messes wid us, we bad muthafuckas, Ravi said, getting all excited an using the fact that he was standing up as an excuse to adopt one of

his gangsta-rap poses. With his neck raised now an givin it another lick-a-shot flick with his right hand, he continues: — Da gangsta, da killa n da dope dealer.

How embarrassing. Brand new creases formed on Mr. Ashwood's forehead an in order to smooth these ones out I now had to explain that my old friend weren't really speaking but stead was just quoting hardcore rap tracks cos, well that's what my new friends do sometimes. It was a track by the Westside Connection, Ice Cube's new outfit with Mack 10 and WC. Ice Cube is the Gangsta, WC is the Killer an Mack 10 is the Dope Dealer. Get it? To our surprise Mr. Ashwood got it, an showed he was even less old an out a touch by knowin who the fuck Ice Cube was. This left us more impressed with him than he was with us.

— I cannot believe you're sitting there and aspiring to be a gangsta at a time like this, Ravi. Because if you want that kind of notoriety, then quite frankly I could fulfil your fantasy by calling the police and having you arrested while they search your houses for stolen phones. (123)

The fact that even Jas is embarrassed by Ravi's stupidity is a clear indication that he has not actually internalized this whole gangsta mentality, which I will return to later. Another example of the boys' distorted image of themselves is the following passage in which Malkani paints a beautiful and hilarious picture of the boys as they appear to a scene of a fight, feeling like characters in an action movie:

We strode into the track like a bunch a badass Reservoir Dogs. Me on the left, Amit next to me, Hardjit next to him an Ravi flanking on the right. Badasses.

Appearing over the horizon in a fly film with a Vin Diesel in it. Fire, foiled feds an fifty burning baddies behind us. Rescued females in front a us. Fit fine females, their long hair blowing in the helicopter wind, walking towards us with their tight skirts and hips ridin in time with our shoulders an the drum machine set to some big pumpin beat in our heads [...] Hardjit set the proper pace. Right. Otherwise our bobbing up an down would make us look like a bunch a penguins or something. Gangsta penguins, mind you, with shrapnel in their legs from some swim-by shooting or someshit. Left. Right. Or maybe just penguins who really needed a piss. (99)

While it is clear that the boys are not actually gangsters or stars in action movies, it does not stop them from wanting to be like them. In addition, as Malkani argues, “the assertion of ethnic identities is sometimes better viewed as a proxy for the reassertion of masculinity” (n.p.). As both Malkani and Mitchell also claim that by reasserting this masculinity one is better able to protect oneself from discrimination based on ethnicity, it could be argued that Harjit’s, Ravi’s, and Amit’s role-play is a defence mechanism against the sovereign white society. However, it does not become clear what Malkani means by asserting ethnic identities. Does he mean ethnic identities in general or one’s own ethnic identity? In either case, as the gang is asserting both their own ethnic identity by their “designer desiness” and black identity by imitating black rappers, I would argue that what Mitchell and Malkani claim is correct considering Hardjit, Ravi, and Amit. However, if we take a look at Jas’s situation, these arguments are not valid. Why would Jas, a white British boy, want to protect himself from discrimination based on ethnicity in Britain if Harjit, Ravi, and Amit believe it is just the sovereign white British society that is the oppressor? Furthermore, as Mitchell argues, “[h]e and his friends realise that the consequences of

failure to achieve one's own performative identity is to be forced into an objective role created by the more powerful" (332). Once again, this is true for Harjit, Ravi and Amit but what about Jas? Who is the more powerful for Jas?

Lastly, we get to discuss Jas' racial crossover – which, in my opinion, is the phenomenon that raises the most questions – and its portrayal in the novel. Jas' mimicry is less straightforward than that of, the others. First of all, by imitating Harjit and the gang Jas does not just imitate them as the gang also imitates their African American idols. Thus, Jas exemplifies the phenomenon that Roediger and Taylor call "wiggers", i.e. white adolescents mimicking usually African American rappers or basketball players. Nevertheless, the actual occurrence is worldwide, and in its simplest form it is used to refer to a white subject that is passing for black. However, one must remember that Jas's "wiggerdom" is only implicit and indirect and the actual object of desire is the British Asian desiness. Secondly, by trying desperately to gain the gang's respect and to be considered as one of the crew Jas imitates the gang in everything that they do whether or not he thinks that their behavior is reasonable. The fact that Jas has to really try to fit in comes very clear in many of the passages and it is obvious that mimicking the gang's behavior does not come naturally for Jas. Rather it could be seen as a way of regaining confidence and self-esteem that Jas obviously believes to be connected to desiness. Furthermore, in the next passage, it is clear that Jas thinks that "speaking proper", i.e., imitating the gang's version of English is a way for him to always know what to say, instead of the humiliating stammer or his "mind slatin the way he speaks".

If I don't speak probly using the proper words then these guys'd say I was actin like a batty boy or a woman or a woman actin like a batty boy. One good thing though: now that I use all these proper words I'm hardly ever stuck for words. I



just chuck in a bit a proper speak an I sound like I'm talkin proper, talkin like Hardjit. (46)

In addition, it comes clear in the above passage that Jas certainly needs to ponder on whether or not he should say something or which words should he use. Again, he needs to make a serious effort to not be considered as “a woman actin like a batty boy” (46) by the group. Jas's inner monologue depicted in the next passage further explains the issue:

[d]on't start stammerin an talkin like some dickless pussy, you gimp. This is Samira Ahmed, the fittest girl in the whole wide London Borough a Hounslow. Talkin to you. Gotta talk back probly when you talkin to someone gorgeous, someone like Samira. Talk like you're as hard as Hardjit. — Yo, 'sup, Samira? Dey tryin 2 keep dis shit one-on-one, u get me. Like a duel or sumfink, know what I'm sayin? That in't bad. That's progress. (101)

So, after adequate preparations and careful concentration Jas is able to produce a pair of phrases that satisfies his inner rudeboy and makes him look hard in Samira's eyes, or at least that is what he thinks. Obviously, Jas's roleplay must give him some newfound confidence and a sense of pride as he certainly is not missing his old self: “[n]o fuckin way I was gonna be hangin round with them saps no more, with those gimpy glasses I used to wear, my drainpipe trousers an my batty books. Fuck that shit“ (23). What is ironic is that to be a “proper rudeboy” Jas needs to stop any intellectual activity, and books as well as glasses deserve to be thrown into the bin. The appreciation of his new identity comes even more clear in the following passage: “[s]till, I carried on staring, thankful that I weren't a

gimp into that whole Britpop/R.E.M. scene no more cos if I was I'd probly still be wearin skintight Levi's 501 stead a my baggy Evisu's" (59).

However, while Jas might try to convince everyone that his role-play is natural and effortless and that he appreciates his new identity as a desi, there are many instances in the novel where his mimicry seems to fail. Actually, there are many more instances where either someone else or he himself, his biggest critic, are criticising his actions and performance. The episode with Samira discussed above is one of the few successful moments of Jas's attempted mimicry and the whole relationship with Samira seems to strengthen Jas' self-confidence and could be considered as one of the highlights of his role play. Next, I will discuss how and why I think Jas' mimicry is a failure.

### **3.4.3 Failed Mimicry**

As Bhabha has argued, the ones who are mimicking will never achieve the same level as the ones who are being mimicked. Similarly, Jas's attempted desiness fails short: no matter how much he desires to be someone else he will always be considered firstly as a white British by anyone who knows him and his history. The rather lengthy passage below describes fittingly what it is that Jas seems to be missing in order to be a proper rudeboy.

“People're always trying to stick a label on our scene. That's the problem with havin' a fuckin scene. First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits. These days we try an use our own word for homeboy an so we just call ourselves desis [...] Anyway, whatever the fuck we are, Ravi an others are better at being it than I am. I swear I've watched as much MTV Base an Juggy D videos as they have, but I still can't attain the right level a rudeboy authenticity. If I could, I

wouldn't be using poncey words like attain an authenticity, innit. I'd be saying I couldn't keep it real or someshit [...] After all, it's all bout what you say an how you say it. Your linguistic prowess an debating dexterity (though whatever you do don't say it that way). The sort a shit my old schoolteachers told my parents I lacked an which Mr. Ashwood even made me practice by watchin ponces read the news on BBC [...] I respect Mr. Ashwood for tryin to help me lose my stammer or whatever kind a speech problem it was I'd got when I was at school. But I'd've wasted less the man's time if I just sat down with Hardjit in the first place. Let's just say Hardjit make a more proper newsreader. (5-6)

However, although he acknowledges that he might not be as good at being a rudeboy as the other members of the gang, he still considers the “lessons” he has learned from Harjit to be more important and helpful than those learnt at school. The passage above also shows that one of the biggest reasons for Jas's failed mimicry is the contrasting values and speech patterns between his old white “geekish” identity and newly found gangsta identity that seems to be even supporting stupidity. In order to fit in, Jas needs to “dumb down” or pretend to be less intelligent than he actually is. Once again, I do not imply that British Asians or African Americans are less intelligent than, in this case, the white British but what I am arguing is that to adapt a “gangsta” or “rudeboy” identity, one needs to adopt the values that are connected to this identity: as I have suggested above, the values connected to “desi rudeboys” include misogynistic behaviour, masculinity, homophobia, materialism and violence. Thus, if Jas wants to be a part of the group and play his role without suspicion from others, he cannot show his true intellect. This is something that is aptly portrayed in the next passage where Jas is attempting to “speak proper”:

— Yeh, motherfucker, an even when you allowed to call someone a Paki, it be Paki wid a capital P, innit.

— Jas, u khota, Hardjit goes, swivelling round so fast his dog tags would've flown off someone with a thinner neck, — why da fuck u teachin him how 2 spell?

I shrugged, deeply lamenting my lack a rudeboyesque panache.

(7)

Again, the lack of “panache” or “properness” is what seems to be the problem. The words show that the clash between a white bookish intellectual – who else would use a word like “panache” in colloquial language? – and a violent “rudeboy” is obvious. Violence is another thing that Jas does not seem to approve of but has no option but to accept.

Anyway, fuck that. I don't approve a all this violence, a course. I think all fights should be settled in a more Gandhi-fied way. If I'm ever called to fight in a war I'll declare myself one a those pansyist things. Pacifists. Pussyfists. Anyway, fuck that. When it in't me who's gotta fight an stead it's someone who enjoys fighting like nymphomaniacs enjoy fuckin, then fuck it, I'll take the violence. Miss Violence, an invisible woman who spreads her virus by jerking off everyone who watches violence, makin Hounslow BMX track the capital a the infected world right now. Anyway, fuck that. Even if you're a pussy an hate violent films or boxing or wrestling, when you're in a crowd a people watching it, you get into it. (108)

In the above passage it becomes clear that one possible reason for Jas's allowance and acceptance of many issues that he might not generally support or accept is peer-pressure. This is something that reminds the reader of one of the reasons for Jas' desire to be something else than he is, i. e., is the longing for acceptance and belonging to a group of some kind. That might be why he allows certain things to happen, as he sees more gain in being in a group and being accepted than harm in abandoning his principles. If we examine other characteristics that I called "rudeboy characteristics", I will next present an example of Jas' disapproval of masculinity as in its ultimate form of bodybuilding. There are many instances in the novel where the focus is on Harjit's well-sculpted muscles and, as suggested earlier, even up to a point of homoerotic admiration. Bodybuilding and muscular appearance are commonly linked to masculinity as I have tried to explain in the theoretical discussion. To quote the novel,

[m]e, I also never normly saw the point in all this Mr. Universe shit [...] Far as I was concerned, all a this bodybuilding business was the worst bit a being a proper desi rudeboy. At school, me an Sunil (that skinny coconut who I don't chat to no more) used to laugh at the way the sixth-form common room used to be like some fuckin beauty contest, only with everything the wrong way around so that guys wore tight tops to show off the size a their tits to the girls. Sunil used to say that it was all the girl's fault for only going for well-built boys [...] Like we'd got fuckin lions and sabre-toothed tigers an shit runnin round the streets a Hounslow that guys had to rescue the girls form like we were fuckin cavemen. Back at sixth form, I bought into Sunil's line that being tonked up just made guys carry on actin like foolish cavemen an putting their

biceps before their brains. Not one time did it pop into my head that maybe I might be the fool, putting my brains before my bollocks. (191)

Jas even goes as far as to suggest that conventional roles between sexes are turned upside down as well-built boys are acting as sex symbols for girls. All in all, it comes very clear that Jas wants nothing to do with bodybuilding but rather forces himself to the gym to please the others. Furthermore, one more instance where Jas finds himself questioning the gang's behaviour is again set at the gym “[s]o I headed over to Ravi an Amit who were busy laughin at a couple a obviously gay guys on the chest press machines. But I couldn't be homophobic enough for them cos some inner conflict with my conscience or someshit” (194). Once again, Jas has difficulties to adapt to the “rudeboy characteristics” because his “inner conflict” prevents him from being homophobic. Furthermore, one can clearly see how Jas is having difficulties with adapting to this rudeboy lifestyle. However, what seems odd is that whether or not Jas' roleplay is working, he still maintains the appearances and acts of mimicking. Obviously, he feels that even this failed performance is better than his “true” self or rather his former identity. One more instance from the final pages of the novel proves that after everything that Jas has had to endure for the sake of his role play, i.e. failing his A-levels twice, burning down his father's warehouse and the hospitalisation after an assault, Jas still seems to be eager to continue his role-play. This comes clear from the last passage of the novel where Jas is flirting with a British Asian nurse:

[t]hen she notices me lookin at her breasts again an gives it, — Are you still trying to guess where my name is from? — Hmmmmm, I give it, — Shilpa Mohan? Sounds Indian. — Well done, she goes, making sure my water jug is full an then hangin my chart back on the foot a my bed. — Sounds Panjabi, I

go, managing to bring out her dimples again. Then she walks back round to my bedside table, grabs the jug an pours me a fresh glaas a water. I wanna show her my good manners by sayin Thank you. But Jazzy Jas Man can do better than fuckin Thank you. I shoot her a look an give it, —Shukriya. (342)

This passage shows that Jas has either found his confidence as he seems confident in trying to “pull” the Indian nurse and finds all the information that he has “studied” for his role play very useful in doing so or then he continues his act and disregards the trouble that it has given him in the first place. Either way, he seems to be more confident in his skin, which may be all that matters. Whether or not Jas’ performance is a failure, I will continue to discuss how this performance works to reinforce Jas’s own white identity rather than transforms Jas into something else.

As discussed already in the theory section of racial crossover’s potential of threatening “the stability of racial categorization” (Young 85) and its possibility to “crack open any monolithic notion one might have about the racial self” (Gubar 244) it could be argued that whether the passing subject is white passing for black (or in this case Asian) or black passing for white, the difference is huge. As Boehmer has argued, a black subject passing for white is mimicking in order to gain the privileged position that the white subject is holding over him and thus it could be seen as an act of resistance towards discrimination but also as submitting to the power of the sovereign (162). Either way, passing for white could be seen as an attempt to improve one’s position and as a conscious effort to better oneself. Contrastingly, a white subject passing for black is seen as a technique or an ability to reinforce one’s white identity by “studying” the differences between the two identities and the two positions. Thus, Jas’s roleplay could be seen as a kind of a field study where he is able to better point out the differences between the

positions and thus, again, to reinforce his white identity by comparing the two identities. There are plenty of instances in the novel where the contrasting values and philosophies collide when Jas's role play is not strong enough to hide his differing views of many issues. The best example of this is when Jas, who is naturally raised to follow white Christian values decides to interfere in Arun's premarital problems and tries to urge Arun to stand up to his parents. Although Jas is making valid points of some Sikh traditions relevance in 21st century Britain, it is not necessarily his role to get involved in someone else's "complicated family-related shit". However, as his white identity finds these traditions unacceptable, he has no choice but to butt in: "[f]uck's sake, I go, — doing something cos it's tradition, cos it's the way things are done, is the shittiest reason ever to do something. It in't even a reason, it's a lame excuse for not havin a proper reason" (237). This passage and its message is what clearly indicates that Jas's performance underlines the biggest problems and differences between his white British identity and the performed British Asian identity. Thus, the whole role play could be seen to reinforce his white identity as he finds out what the British Asian identity seems to lack in comparison to his white identity. Furthermore, the next passage exemplifies the clash between Jas' philosophy and the philosophy of Amit's and Arun's parents who are not too happy of Jas' nosiness.

— But vhy you talk? You don't understand such things, so then vhy you telled him such things? Vhy you talk? Vot you know about our proper style of shaadi? Nothing. You not understand nothing, Arun not understand, Amit not understand even, only we understand. We know vot needs to be done, not you boys. You not know our ways. These bloody badmarsh ideas you put into my son's head. Look vot you've done to my house. [...] —You told him to say to



me You fuhking bitch? Huh? You telled my son to call his mother a Fuhcking bitch? Huh?

— No, Aunty, I did not tell anyone to swear at anyone. If he's angry with you that's not my fault. A minute ago he was sittin on the floor snottin over himself like a tramp drinkin tear gas, so if you've made him mad enough to use the F-word then that in't my fault. I just told him to stand up for himself. We all know who holds the chapples in this house, maybe Arun thought it was time he tried to be a man. He's s'posed to be getting married, might do him good to be a man. In't that right, Arun? (261-263)

What Jas's intervention might also symbolize is what I suggested with Mr. Ashwood's didactic attitude as well. As I have stated earlier, Jas' interference might symbolise the white man's burden, i.e., Jas may believe that it is his responsibility to educate Arun. This comes clear from the next passage where Malkani is comparing Jas to Morpheus from the Matrix:

[s]tead a using Nazis, suddenly I'm fuckin Morpheus from *The Matrix*, tellin Arun to free his mind, fight the system, save mankind [...] I tell Arun to wake up, smell the masala tea, I say he's accepting a world that imprisons him. I argue that maybe we're meant to challenge traditions, defeat the system that allows our elders to exploit us. (236)

However one might want to read all these passages, it becomes clear that ultimately Jas's performance is not a triumph and that his attempted role play is rather a way of pointing out the differences between the white British and British Asian identities than creating a

hybrid identity free of racial categorisation and prejudice. It could be argued that Jas's performance is exemplifying a certain new kind of Britishness. However, this new kind of Britishness (or in this case desiness) continues racial categorisation and discrimination based on ethnicity. Furthermore, it shows an instance of the British society that is changing rapidly but a performance like Jas's will not bring an end to inequality based on ethnicity. Arguably the vicious segregation performed by the gang in the novel shows that the youth in Southall are not delivered to a place "beyond skin" (Sawhney as qtd. in Gilroy 132).

In sum, the novel exemplifies many of the earlier postcolonial theories and concepts but it also witnesses the ever-changing nature of postethnic societies. Very few things are stable and change is the only thing that is inevitable. In addition, *Londonstani* portrays a world where racial crossover is possible and, as I have shown, there are plenty of reasons for this desire for otherness but it also explains that even in this kind of world one is not free from stereotypes and prejudice based on ethnicity. As I have shown in this study and as can be seen from the novel, while Jas is able to act out his role as an "other", it is debatable if a white boy can fully transform to another cultural identity. Still, the reason that makes *Londonstani* a novel worth reading is the fact that it portrays a brave new world where a performance such as Jas's is not shot down immediately by society and where it is possible to buy or act one's way into another cultural identity. However, whether this role play is accepted or not and thus whether the performance is authentic or not is a matter of interpretation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have introduced my topic that considers the reasoning behind someone's desire to adapt a different cultural identity than one is born to and whether or not this adaptation is considered successful. In addition, I have introduced the general features of British Asian fiction and their relevance to serve as background information for the understanding of the novel. Furthermore, I have acquainted the reader with Malkani and his novel *Londonstani* as well as discussed the novel's reception and earlier studies. Furthermore, I have revised the theoretical approach of my study and discussed a wide variety of topics. Lastly, I have discussed how these theoretical issues can be seen in the novel by giving examples and analyzing them. In this last section, I would like to make a few claims that I have come across in this study of the desire for otherness and the possibility for role-play. I will try to divide my arguments in four sections starting with societal reasons as a platform for racial crossover that allows one to try out different identities. Secondly, I will try to explain the reasoning behind the need for this role-play and what the original identity is lacking if one chooses to pass for an "other". Thirdly, I will explain how one needs to have a role model for the role-play, i.e. some exciting and exotic alternative to mimic if one chooses to pass. Then, I will show how it is possible to mimic others, whether or not this mimicry is considered successful or not.

##### **4.1 Possibility for Racial Crossover: Postethnic Society**

As I have suggested in this thesis, Malkani's description of Hounslow and Southall portrays the situation that Sollors and Hollinger describe as postethnic. The society has transformed from the predominantly white heart of the empire into a multicultural bazaar that offers something for everyone. The constant flow of the descendants of the once colonised to Britain, i.e., reverse colonisation is what makes the British society a place

where the boundaries of cultural and racial identities are easily blurred and thus the possibility to try out different identities is made easier. As I have shown earlier, it is now the once colonised that are acquiring territory, both mental and physical, from the motherland. One could even go as far as to say that in places like Malkani's Southall and Hounslow, the tables have turned altogether and it is the white British who are the other and British Asianness is the sovereign "entity". This phenomenon is visible in *Londonstani* where British Asianness has conquered the space once inhabited by white Britishness as comes clear from Malkani's description of Jas' neighbourhood in the novel. There are "Om symbols", "Khanda Sahibs" and "the Muslim crescent moon" on the house doors and "the daal and subjhi smell" is mixing with the traffic (17-18). In addition, I have suggested that the sensation one obtains from Malkani's description is not one of traditional and conventional Englishness or Britishness. Rather, the novel shows some new form of Englishness that is truly postethnic and where ethnicity or the colour of one's skin should not limit his/her opportunities or the possibility to choose one's own identity. This is exactly what has happened with Jas. His role-play is a testament to the fact that in Malkani's London particularly the youth are free from ethnicity based on descent and are able to mix and match identity features and combine an identity that pleases them. What I am arguing is that the current state of London in *Londonstani* is one of multiculturalism and postethnicity and where the boundaries between ethnic and racial identities have been dropped or at least blurred. This creates a possibility for Londoners such as Jas to renegotiate their own innate cultural identities and choose or buy one's way into another cultural identity. However, as I have pointed out, it is an entirely different story whether this role-play is successful or not and who can judge its successfulness. Although Jas's role-play is an obvious sign of broadmindedness and his desire for otherness speaks of his a tolerant and receptive nature, the way in which the gang reinforce their own cultural

identities by excluding others is a step back towards discrimination based on ethnicity and skin colour. Thus, although the gang is representing a new form of Britishness, as I argued before, it is not the kind of Britishness that will eventually make up a society in which race or ethnicity could be considered insignificant.

#### **4.2 Need for Racial Crossover: Desire for Otherness**

From the possibility of role play that the postethnic state of Malkani's Britain has created we can move on to discuss the reason or the need for this role play. With the change of the society to allowing one to choose from a vast variety of possible cultural identities, whiteness – as the cultural norm at least in the western world – has lost its interest in the eyes of the youth as boring, stale and standardized as the commodity culture seems to be favouring otherness as the more exotic option. This is something I will discuss in the next section. As I have shown in this study, in addition to the concepts of the mirror stage and double consciousness as well as the attraction of masculinity and power, the most important reason for questioning the white identity is what Gilroy calls postcolonial melancholia. For Gilroy, this condition is best described as an unconscious longing for the empire that brought stability to assessing one's own cultural identity. In addition, Gilroy has argued that the British are unable to fully understand the atrocities that the colonial rule required and thus are experiencing an unexplained feeling of communal guilt that has left them in a state of confusion. Now that the empire has crumbled through time, the British are unable to rely on the stable and static limits for racial and national identity and they are left with a disoriented state and are thus swinging between “identification with the victims of racism, a guilty dislike of them and the changes they have made to the country, and tormented self-digust at the prospect of being implicated either in the problems they import or in their colonial and postcolonial sufferings” (Gilroy 116). I have argued that this

“condition” is at least one of the reasons for Jas’s longing for otherness and the need for racial crossover. Jas’s identifying with the gang, a guilty dislike of the Sikh traditions and ways and obvious self-disgust and refusal of his whiteness are clear indicators that he is “suffering” from postcolonial melancholia.

#### **4.3 Exotic / Exciting Alternative for White Identity: Model for Racial Crossover**

Naturally, in order to fill the need for role play, one needs an exciting model for his/her role play. As both Santa Ana and Huggan have argued, otherness is made exotic and thus tempting by the media and the commodity culture that we are living in the western world. In addition, the situation has gone so far that cultures and identities could be seen as being sold in “the marketplace of cultural difference” and that anyone with the means to participate are free to buy their way into otherness. This is exactly what Jas has done and the “designer desiness” that the gang represent is marketed to him by his environment as seen in the postethnic setting of Hounslow and Southall. Furthermore, as a small and insecure white boy, Jas sees particularly Hardjit as an idol and a role-model and wants to imitate him and the gang in everything that they do because of the gang seems to be standing up for their own members and opinions and thus represents a certain kind of determination and confidence often linked to masculinity that appeals to Jas. In addition, as suggested by Taylor, the role models for white kids today do not have to be white. This is also something that the current state of Malkani’s London allows. Although Taylor is talking about black heroes and role models like Tupac and Michael Jordan, the same is the case with Jas, whose idols are British Asian rudeboys like Harjit. Therefore, I argue that the society in *Londonstani* is marketing otherness to white boys like Jas and the same society allows him to renegotiate his own cultural identity and choose another one that pleases him. As Jas’s role model is a British Asian rudeboy like Harjit, it is only natural

that Jas is “constructing his sense of self in the image” of Harjit (Taylor 351) and thus considers himself as one of the *desis*. Now that we have a platform for the racial crossover, a reason to do so and a role model to imitate, we need to think about how the performance is done and can we consider it successful?

#### **4.4 Performing Identity: Failed Mimicry**

As I have shown in the last section of the critical discussion the various ways of mimicking in the novel, I have also argued that I think that some of the performances seem to fail. This was something that has been argued by Bhabha who has stated that mimicry will always fail because the mimicking subject will never be the same as the one who is mimicked. As I have pointed out, it is a question of authenticity. But what is still unanswered at this point of the study is the fact that who decides whether someone’s performance is authentic or not? I would like to argue that, naturally, it is the group that one is trying to fit in that is doing the evaluation and decides if someone is authentic enough to become a member of that group. When we think about Jas’ situation, it seems to be that Harjit and the gang are accepting him as a member of the group but in every instance there is speculation whether Jas’ is “proper” or “desi” enough to fit in. Furthermore, his old friends and even parents are unable to even understand this role-play let alone accept it and grant Jas the recognition that he desires as a newly formed British Asian. Another question posed earlier is the fact that does one even need the recognition of one’s community or society for one’s performance and whether it is enough that he himself believes that his performance is true? Thus, I will ask again, as I did earlier: if, as Taylor argues, authenticity is “to be true to oneself” (Taylor qtd. in Huggan 157), how could mimicking or performing the role of someone else then be considered authentic? As I have shown with many passages from the novel, Jas is really struggling to make himself appear

as a rudeboy and he needs to put a lot of effort in his performance. How can this forced performance then be considered being true to oneself? From this speculation and from what I have argued in this thesis, we can gather that one can choose his identity and perform it. Yet the performance in Jas's case is not authentic as it is virtually impossible for a white boy to transform into an other and thus change his cultural identity. Furthermore, I will now repeat what I have argued before, nationality does not see colour, race or origin but that the cultural characteristics and signifiers are unchangeable and permanent and divide humans in categories based on appearance. However, it is up to everyone to try to work through these monolithic myths and stereotypes and the power relations between the categories so that the status quo between these categories would be one of equality. Even in an ideal situation like this, I would still say that passing as an other will never work as the passing subject will always be "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 86). In addition, I have argued that one might be able to pass on a mental level but still the original cultural identity will affect his/her decisions. However, if one is able to pass on a mental level, his/her cultural signifiers will always give him/her away unless we take example from Michael Jackson and surgically remove these cultural signifiers. However, this is yet, once again, something that would require a whole another study.

To conclude, sensitive and problematic issues such as ethnic politics are by no means as simple and straightforward as I may have represented them to be in my discussion that has barely scratched the surface. Naturally, questions of identity and ethnicity are individual and it is difficult or rather impossible to offer an all-encompassing account of the ambiguous and debatable nature of the concepts that I have discussed. However, I have argued that the era of postethnicity described in *Londonstani* has served as a platform for the possibility for racial crossover and that Jas's refusal of his whiteness might stem from postcolonial melancholia. Secondly, I have claimed that the postethnic state of Malkani's



London has also assisted in marketing otherness and commodifying desiness and thus made it easier for Jas to idolise someone like Harjit and buy his way into being “a proper rudeboy”. Furthermore, I have argued that even in an ideal situation like Jas’s where there is a possibility for racial crossover, it will often be considered as a failure fail because it is not authentic.

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