



UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA ANGLOGERMÁNICA Y
FRANCESA

IN SEARCH OF NEW SPACES:
CONTEMPORARY BLACK BRITISH
AND
ASIAN BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS

IRENE PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ

Enero de 2009



Universidad de Oviedo

**In search of new spaces:
contemporary black British and Asian British women writers**

Irene Pérez Fernández

Depósito Legal: AS. 03541-2012

<http://hdl.handle.net/10803/83470>

ADVERTENCIA. El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis doctoral y su utilización debe respetar los derechos de la persona autora. Puede ser utilizada para consulta o estudio personal, así como en actividades o materiales de investigación y docencia en los términos establecidos en el art. 32 del Texto Refundido de la Ley de Propiedad Intelectual (RDL 1/1996). Para otros usos se requiere la autorización previa y expresa de la persona autora. En cualquier caso, en la utilización de sus contenidos se deberá indicar de forma clara el nombre y apellidos de la persona autora y el título de la tesis doctoral. No se autoriza su reproducción u otras formas de explotación efectuadas con fines lucrativos ni su comunicación pública desde un sitio ajeno al servicio TDR. Tampoco se autoriza la presentación de su contenido en una ventana o marco ajeno a TDR (framing). Esta reserva de derechos afecta tanto al contenido de la tesis como a sus resúmenes e índices.

WARNING. Access to the contents of this doctoral thesis and its use must respect the rights of the author. It can be used for reference or private study, as well as research and learning activities or materials in the terms established by the 32nd article of the Spanish Consolidated Copyright Act (RDL 1/1996). Express and previous authorization of the author is required for any other uses. In any case, when using its content, full name of the author and title of the thesis must be clearly indicated. Reproduction or other forms of for profit use or public communication from outside TDX service is not allowed. Presentation of its content in a window or frame external to TDX (framing) is not authorized either. These rights affect both the content of the thesis and its abstracts and indexes.



UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA ANGLOGERMÁNICA Y
FRANCESA

IN SEARCH OF NEW SPACES:
CONTEMPORARY BLACK BRITISH
AND
ASIAN BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS

AUTORA: IRENE PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ
DIRECTORA: DRA. MARÍA SOCORRO SUÁREZ LAFUENTE

Enero de 2009

AGRADECIMIENTOS/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Me gustaría dar las gracias a la Dra. María Socorro Suárez Lafuente por todo cuanto me enseñó a lo largo de mis años de licenciatura, por su paciencia conmigo, por su apoyo y por sus sabios consejos durante este largo proceso que comenzó hace ya varios años cuando me inscribí como alumna en el Programa de Doctorado de Estudios de la Mujer de la Universidad de Oviedo. Sin su magnífica labor de dirección y sin su confianza en mí y sin sus ánimos esta tesis no sería hoy una realidad.

Asimismo, debo expresar mi gratitud a la Dra. Carolina Fernández Rodríguez por su apoyo durante todos estos años. Con ella descubrí, en la primera asignatura de literatura que cursé durante mi primer año de licenciatura, que había nuevas formas de leer e interpretar los textos literarios. Aquellas clases cambiaron mi forma de entender la literatura inglesa.

No habría podido dedicar mi tiempo a la investigación de no haber sido por la beca del Programa de Formación del Profesorado Universitario del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia cofinanciada por el Fondo Social Europeo y de la que he sido beneficiaria durante los últimos cuatro años. Gracias a dicha beca he podido disfrutar de una estancia de investigación en la Universidad de York. Esa estancia marcó un antes y un después en mi esta investigación, así como en mi vida personal.

I would like to thank the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York for making me feel at home during the time that I spent there. In particular, I would like to show my gratitude to Professor Gabriele Griffin for her advice and support. Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to Andy Millward, Sanja Bilic, Pranati Mohanraj and Zita Farkas for their encouragement and the nice moments we spent together.

Nunca habría escrito esta tesis sin el apoyo incondicional de mis padres a quien les debo todo cuanto soy.

Finally, I would like thank Sam for his immense support during these years, for his patience and his love. Thank you for teaching me that, wherever we are, we can always create new spaces.

A Raquel y José Manuel

To Sam

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	11
--------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BLACK AND ASIAN POPULATION IN BRITAIN: QUESTIONS ON IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION.....	20
---	-----------

1.1 Introduction.....	20
1.2 Migration Flows from Ex-Colonial Territories and Post-Second World War Immigration Laws.....	26
1.2.a The Construction of Racialised Citizens: The Body as a Space	26
1.2.b. A Long Presence of Black and Asian People in Britain	30
1.3 Black Britain since the 1980s: A General Overview.....	36
1.3.a Social Changes in the 1980s	36
1.3.b Appropriatedness of the Term “Black” in Cultural and Literary Studies	39
1.4. Black and Asian Male Writers in Britain: A General Overview	44
1.5. Black and Asian Women Writers in Britain	55
1.5.a Black British and Asian British Women’s Writing Since the 1980s: A Broad Outline.....	55
1.5.b. Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature.....	66

CHAPTER 2. FINDING ONE’S OWN SPACE IN A NEWLY EMERGING SOCIETY: ANDREA LEVY’S <i>SMALL ISLAND</i> (2004)	78
---	-----------

2.1 Introduction.....	78
2.2 Andrea Levy’s Career and her Recognition in British Contemporary Literature.....	80

2.3 The Novel's Plot and Structure: Playing with Space and Time	84
2.4 Individual Space: Racialised Bodies	92
2.5 The Family: Marriage and Gender Roles.....	105
2.6 The Nation as a Space: The Mother Country	112
2.7 Conclusion	117

**CHAPTER 3. COMING TO TERMS WITH SPACE AFTER A
DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE: FROM A BELIEF IN FATE TO
GAINING ONE'S AGENCY IN MONICA ALI'S *BRICK LANE*
(2003) 119**

3.1 Introduction.....	119
3.2 Reception of <i>Brick Lane</i> in the Literary Panorama.....	121
3.3 <i>Brick Lane's</i> Social Context: Immigration Laws and Racial Conflicts	130
3.3.a Immigration Laws for Women.....	131
3.3.b Racial Conflicts.....	133
3.4 Nazneen's Identity Search: A Displaced Body in a New Environment.	136
3.5 Gendered and Racialised Spaces: Brick Lane	143
3.6 Nazneen's Spaces of Interaction: A Movement from the Domestic to the Public	149
3.7 Fate versus Agency	157
3.8 Conclusion	161

**CHAPTER 4. NEW SPACES OF INTERACTION AND
CONTESTATION: ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH* (2000). 164**

4.1 Introduction.....	164
4.2 <i>White Teeth's</i> Critical Reception	167
4.3 The Novel's Plot and Structure	173
4.4 The Second World War and Post-War Period: A Space of Disruption and Negotiation	180

4.5 Space in the 1980s: Intra and Inter Family Relations	194
4.6 The 1990s: Space of Globalisation and Border-Crossing versus Space of Limitation and Exclusion	206
4.7 Conclusion	216

**CHAPTER 5. NEGOTIATING THE SPACE OF INDIVIDUAL
IDENTITY: DIANA EVANS' *26a* (2006)..... 218**

5.1 Introduction.....	218
5.2 <i>26a</i> 's Critical Reception	222
5.3 The Novel's Plot and Structure	226
5.4 Space and Identity: The Problematics of Twin Identity	233
5.5 Space and Identity: Georgia and Bessi's Unparallel Experiential Spaces.....	240
5.6 Space and Identity: Doppelgängers.....	251
5.7 Conclusion	260

**CHAPTER 6. MALLEABLE IDENTITIES, FLUID BODIES
AND CONTESTED SPACE(S) IN JACKIE KAY'S *TRUMPET*
(1998) 262**

6.1 Introduction.....	262
6.2 Kay's Literary Career	266
6.3 <i>Trumpet</i> 's Plot and Structure.....	271
6.4 The Fluidity of Identity: Reality versus Performance.....	282
6.5 Private/Public Divide: "Lived Life" versus "Reported Life"	296
6.6 Conclusion	309

CONCLUSION..... 311

REFERENCES 326

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the analysis of five novels from recognised women writers in the British contemporary literary panorama who, even though born in England, are familiarly linked to ethnic minority groups from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. The literary corpus of the thesis includes the following novels: Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2001), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1999) and Diana Evans's *26a* (2006).

Levy's, Ali's, Smith's, Kay's and Evans's novels are part of the contemporary British literary canon. Their novels were well received by critics and readers alike. Accordingly, some of the most recent contemporary British anthologies and critical works on contemporary British literature have devoted some chapters to the study of these writers and the discussion of the novels under analysis (English, 2006; Sesay, 2005; Acheson and Ross, 2005; Richard, Rod and Tew, 2003; Nasta, 2004).

These novelists come, as I have already stated, from diverse ethnic background and, by that fact, their work has been also considered by some as contributing to "Black¹ British Literature" (Sesay, 2005), whereas by others it has been included in anthologies of "British Literature" in general² (English, 2006;

¹ There are different ways of spelling the word black in the literature, i.e. with a capital or small "b". In this Dissertation I shall write the word "Black" in capital letters as a way of acknowledging the political implications conveyed by the term and also as a means of emphasising the centrality that this category has to this Dissertation. In quotations, however, I shall spell the word as it appears in the original.

² Discrepancies in the classification of the work of the authors that form the literary corpus of this Dissertation are a consequence of a long debate about the appropriateness of considering the works of ethnically diverse authors as part of the British literary canon, i.e. British national literature, as

Acheson and Ross, 2005; Richard, Rod and Tew, 2003). In the case of the latter, however, the novels under analysis are comprised in chapters or essays under headings that point towards the ethnic specificity of their authors or towards social and racial issues, relevant to the novel's plot, or have been analysed in the light of colonial and post-colonial relations³.

Likewise, some of the literary prizes awarded to these novels are related to the ethnic origins of the authors. As I shall comment on in the chapters dedicated to the study of the novels, both Smith's *White Teeth* and Levy's *Small Island* were awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2001 and 2005 respectively, and Evan's *26a* won the Arts Council England's Decibel Writer Of The Year Award created to promote cultural diversity in the arts.

Levy is probably the only author out of the ones included in this literary corpus that accepts the definition and classification of her work as being "Black British" without any reservations. She openly acknowledges the fact that she writes about the experiences of part of the British population that has been silenced (Allardice, 2005; Greer, 2004). In an interview with María Helena Lima, Levy stated her motivations for writing as being driven by an eagerness to unearth the silenced history of Black immigrants in Britain:

For me [Levy] the starting point of writing books has always been about wanting to make the unseen visible, wanting to show the experience of [my] parents' generation and the children that

part of a Black British tradition (especially emphasised during the 1980s), or as belonging to diasporic, transnational paradigms (McLeod, 2002; Stein, 2004).

³ See for example the chapters: "New Ethnicities, the Novel and the Burdens of Representation" where the works of Ali and Smith are included (English, 2006) or the part entitled "Postcolonialism and other -isms" (Acheson and Ross, 2005) where Smith's work is analysed.

came after, having to live in this country, quite a hostile environment, and how [they] cope with that. (Lima, 2005: 57)

In this respect, Levy is a consolidated example of an author who acknowledges her work as belonging to a part of British literature that has been labelled “Black British”⁴. Kay, on her part, also recognised the fact that she turned to Black roots in an attempt to negotiate her identity as Black and British. She appreciates the influence that Black American authors and musicians have had on her (Kay, 1994; Severin, 2002). However, Kay, as well as Ali, Smith and Evans, all reject their being “branded” as primarily Asian or Black British novelists. They denounce the burden of representation that Black and Asian authors have and I shall comment on this issue in the following chapters of this Dissertation.

Some of the topics raised in Levy’s *Small Island*, Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Smith’s *White Teeth*, Evans’ *26a* and Kay’s *Trumpet* are common, to first- and second-generation Black and Asian citizens and writers. Even if the authors don’t agree on being labelled as Black British or Asian British writers a need arises to briefly picture the situation of the so-called Black and Asian writing in Britain from the 1980s onwards in order to understand the great interest that the novels under analysis arose for the literary critic and the public and to pay homage to previous writers and collective groups who helped to pave their way. Therefore, I shall start this Dissertation with a first chapter where I shall include a general

⁴ Consider the idea of a “Black British Canon” as an achievement of post-war Britain and in the light of the strength that black cultural studies acquired in Britain especially during the 1980s. The emphasis on Black British literature, in this respect, came hand in hand with the debates that originated during the late 1970s and early 1980s as I shall comment on later in his Dissertation. However, it is worth noticing the discrepancies that arouse at the time about the convenience of the use of this phrase “Black British literature” and what constituted it. See Fred D’Aguiar’s essay “Against Black British Literature” (1988).

outline of the work of Black and Asian first- and second-generation writers in Britain.

The five novels explored in this Dissertation have to be seen as being located in a continuum from postcolonial literatures to the British literary canon. Some of the topics that the novels raise are related to those of the early works by Black and Asian authors. Problems of displacement, boundary negotiation and roots searching permeate all of the novels and have been a recurrent topic in the literary productions of migrants and second generation immigrants (Weedon, 2008).

Yet, the novelists included in this Dissertation have been born in Britain and their work has been studied as part of the British contemporary literary panorama. Moreover, one of the main characteristics that differentiates these novels from the works of early Black and Asian authors is the fact that ethnicity, even though being obviously present in all the novels, is not emphasised on as being the cause of conflicts.

It shall be the starting point in this Dissertation that Levy, Ali, Kay, Smith and Evans, by means of their writings, do not only unearth the history of first-generation Black and Asian populations in Britain, rather, they also inscribe the experience of second-generation ethnically diverse individuals. In so doing, they normalise that experience and portray it as ordinary and as an inherent characteristic of multicultural societies. However, in order to contextualise the social circumstances that the novels depict I shall make reference, in chapter 1, to the immigration flows of Black and Asian populations from ex-colonial territories to Britain after the Second World War.

In this first chapter, I shall also outline my reasons to consider the novels as examples of representations of third spaces in contemporary British Literature. The novels put into question any stable conception of British culture and identity for “as it is recognized that cultures are fluid and temporary social constructions, made and remade over time ... it is apparent that movement involves the remapping of cultural identities and practices for *all* those involved. (McDowell, 1997: 210; emphasis in the original)

The analyses that I shall provide of the works of Ali, Levy, Smith, Kay and Evans take as their starting point the idea that space(s) and culture are in a process of articulation. In this respect, I shall consider the novels included in this Dissertation as means by which alternative conceptions of British culture and identity are inscribed. I shall argue that the social production of space, following Henri Lefebvre’s view (2005), is based upon the triad: social practice, representations of space and representational spaces and that literature creates representational spaces that can help to constitute identity and contest authority. Particular organisations of space help to create and maintain certain hierarchical social structures based on class, race and gender differences.

Lefebvre does not mention literature as an example of a representational space. However, following his definition of representational spaces as symbolic works “redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements [that] ... have their source in history – in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people” (2005: 41), one cannot ignore the role that literature might have, as a representational space, in the maintenance and validation of a

particular, pre-given, gendered, classed and ethnically marked, socially created organisation of space.

It shall, therefore, be my aim throughout this Dissertation to focus the analyses of the above-mentioned novels on the identity and spatial dimensions. Theoretical approaches to the concepts of space and identity shall, thus, be present in the different chapters to frame the analyses of the novels. I shall pay special attention to the relation between space and identity in the light of the problematic of finding one's own self and space in an ethnically diverse context.

If Britain is to be considered as a multicultural space then it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of other spaces and other identities that co-exist within this social space. Moreover, if Britain is seen as a "diaspora space" (Brah, 1996) that is:

“[I]nhabited” not only by diasporic subjects but equally by those who are constructed and represented as “indigenous”. As such, the concept of *diaspora space* foregrounds the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of “staying put”. (Brah, 1996: 16, emphasis in the original)

Then, the novels shall depict characters that search for alternative spaces; spaces that emerge as a result of adjustments and interconnections; spaces that offer new possibilities of signification and interaction in the social context, the community context, the family context or the body context where they are located.

I shall consider each novel included in the Dissertation in relation to the above-mentioned spaces and the prominence that those categories have in each of the novels. All the above-mentioned categories are present in the novels and

interrelate with one another in various and interesting ways. Nonetheless, some of those spaces are more central to the plot and more prominently depicted in each novel. Therefore, I shall centre my analyses of the novels included in this Dissertation on that fact.

I shall order the novels following those spatial categories and I shall organise them from the most general to the most specific. I shall consider social space and body space as located at the extremes of this spectrum: the former being the most general and the latter the most specific. I shall include community space and the family space between these polarised categories.

Accordingly, I shall start the literary analysis of this Dissertation with the study of Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) in chapter 2. *Small Island* depicts some of the changes that took place in Britain with the advent of large Black immigration from the ex-colonies. Social space is disrupted by the coming of immigrants and by the effects of the Second World War. This space is presented in the novel as in a process of adjustment. In this "chaotic" space of the city of London, both the native and the immigrant population have to negotiate new senses of identity and belonging. Therefore, post-Second World War London offers to the characters new possibilities of interaction that would mark a turning point in the history of multicultural Britain.

The second novel under analysis in chapter 3 of this Dissertation shall be Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2000). I am interested in examining this novel after that of Levy in order to notice how immigration has configured the social space of London fifty years later. *Brick Lane* shows a different group of immigrants, in this case the Bangladeshi population. This community is depicted as inhabiting a

clearly delimited area in the capital city of Britain. I shall consider the novel as a portrayal of a community-based organisation of society. The novel presents a description of community life; a community that is characterised by a gendered spatial segregation and by internal fragmentation. It is my intention to analyse this community, as well as the social circumstances depicted in the novel, for they have an impact on the life of Nazneen, the protagonist of the novel.

The third novel Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), included in chapter 3 of this Dissertation, readdresses the issue of immigration and the problematics of exclusion and belonging arisen by the first two novels that I shall include in this dissertation. Nonetheless, *White Teeth* portrays multiculturalism as an intrinsic and positive aspect of British society. Smith's novel centres on family space and on second-generation's characters negotiation of identity. By including three families in the narrative, Smith seems to move away from the dual vision of British society – in terms of outsiders and insiders – that Levy and Ali present in their novels.

Finally, I shall devote the last two chapters of this Dissertation to examine the body as the primary space where identity is negotiated. I shall firstly, in chapter 5, examine how identity is constructed in relation to the body as a space through Diana Evans' novel *26a* (2006). Evans, in this autobiographical novel, fictionalised the difficulties of creating an individual sense of identity within a relation of identical twinship. The uniqueness of identity as embodied in one individual corporality is destabilised by the fact that there exists two individual beings with the same body appearance.

This notion of the apparent stability of the body as being the container of a singular identity is further explored in the final chapter of this Dissertation. In it, I shall examine Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1999). Kay's describes the individual body as the ultimate site of subversion. Joss Moody, the main character in *Trumpet*, plays with the portrayal of his/her body and, in so doing, he reinvents himself anew. The body becomes in *Trumpet* a hybrid space where indeterminacy of identity can be inscribed.

I shall concentrate the analyses of the novels that form part of the literary corpus of this Dissertation on highlighting the spatial and identity dimension as being in an ongoing process of formation and change. The novels describe characters negotiating a sense of space and identity in present day Britain that, in most cases, defies traditional norms and conceptions. The novels introduce characters that create and re-invent alternative spaces within the spatial loci where they are located and, in so doing, they validate and inscribe this experience as being part of contemporary British society.

CHAPTER 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BLACK AND ASIAN POPULATION IN BRITAIN: QUESTIONS ON IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant events that affected Britain during the second half of the 20th century was the decline of the British Empire that brought about decolonisation (Darwin, 1988). The effects of this are at the core of the problematics of the inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minorities in British identity, society and literary representations since the aftermath of the Second World War to the present. In order to account for the issues of belonging and exclusion in British literature it is necessary to bear in mind the evolution of the literary production of ethnic minority groups in Britain from “commonwealth literature” to “postcolonial literature” and “Black British literature” to its acceptance as part of “British literature” in the largest sense of the term for this development is very much related to the social and political status given to minority groups in British society.

The novels analysed in this Dissertation should be seen as part of this continuum. To arrive at an understanding of the social situation depicted in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004), Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2001), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998) and Diana Evans, *26a* (2006) in this light, I shall summarize in the first part of this chapter some of the

social and cultural changes that overtook Britain in the decades following the end of the Second World War. I shall pay special attention to the intellectual frays that emerged during the 1980s surrounding the term “Black” and I shall refer to the literary accomplishments by writers from Asian, African and Caribbean origins in Britain that have led to the present-day acceptance and inclusion of the novels by Levy, Ali, Smith, Kay and Evans into the British contemporary literary canon. This acceptance can be judged by the literary prizes the writers have won⁵, the amount of literary criticism that has been devoted to them and the fact that their texts are taught on university syllabi.

In current British society the former colonial dichotomy “us” versus “them” no longer operates as it once did. Relations between British citizens and newcomers since the Second World War had to be negotiated in the same temporal and spatial context, and this brought about, among many other things, the need to acknowledge the presence of the up until that point “other” on British territory and the right of the offspring of this “other” to be part of what is meant by the concept of British identity. As Sarah Lawson Welsh states, “the presence of these ‘new ethnicities’ would lead to a newly inflected sense of ‘Britishness’, one which was both more complex and more ambivalent” (1997: 44).

The problematics of defining what constitutes “Black British identity” or “Asian British identity”, “diasporic identity” or simply “British identity” in its general sense is still an issue of debate, one that does not have a clear answer

⁵ Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* won the Orange Prize for Fiction in June 2004 and the Whitbread Award, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* was awarded in 2001 the Guardian First Book Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prizes, the Whitbread First Novel Award and two EMMAS (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Awards), Diana Evans’ *26a* won the inaugural Orange Prize for New Writers⁵ in 2005 as well as the Arts Council England’s Decibel Writer Of The Year Award in 2006, Jackie Kay’s was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in the year of its publication

(Cohen, 1994; Mirza, 1997; Welsh, 1997; Fludernik, 2003; Hussain and Bagguley, 2005). Debates surrounding these matters proliferated in the second half of the twentieth century and engaged with one another in complicated ways.

As Alison Donnell states:

In a nation state that has experienced the collapse of the Empire, large-scale immigration from its former colonies, the mass women's movement, black power and nationalist movements, institutionalised racism, Thatcherism, multiculturalism, globalisation, and a supposed "flood" of refugees and asylum seekers, *questions of identity, politics and cultural values have undergone enormous, if not radical change.* (Donnell, 2002: 11; emphasis added)

Such ongoing debates have brought about, in turn, problems in the categorisation of the literary works by authors who did not belong by virtue of their descent to what was then meant by being British or non-British at the time when they were writing⁶. As a consequence of this fact, literature produced by non-white writers in Britain since the 1940s to the present day has been labelled in a variety of different ways. "Commonwealth Literature", "Post-War English Literature", "Black British Literature", "Postcolonial literature" or "Diasporic Literature" have been some of the most recurrent labels. In recent years, a transnational focus in the analysis of creative works by ethnically diverse writers (Gunning, 2004) and the label "Transnational Literatures" has also been proposed

⁶ This a complicated issue for it is necessary to bear in mind that colonial subjects held British passports until the collapse of the Empire and this was withdrawn with the successive migration polices that attempted to regulate the coming of migrants from ex-colonial territories after the Second World War.

as a way of recognizing the “crossings – both actual and imaginative – [that] can be discovered throughout twentieth-century Black writing in Britain” (McLeod, 2002: 58).

All of these terms have been influenced by the social context in which Britain was immersed and by the dominant trends in race and racial relations at each period of time. I shall pay special attention to immigration policies and the social relations that operated at the periods of time referred to by the novels under consideration in this Dissertation: mainly the years that immediately followed the end of the Second World War (1945) (Levy’s *Small Island*, Smith’s *White Teeth*), the 1980s (Kay’s *Trumpet*, Smith’s *White Teeth*) and from the 1990s to the present times (Evan’s *26a*, Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Smith’s *White Teeth*).

In the last section of this first chapter, I shall include a general overview of the literary productions of authors from a Caribbean, African and Asian background in Britain since the aftermath of the Second World War to the present. I shall only mention some Black and Asian authors who published their works during the above-mentioned period of time for it would be impossible to do justice to all of them in this chapter. I shall refer to male and female authors in two separate sections. I shall account for male authors first as a way of acknowledging the fact that, especially during the first decades after the Second World War, male writers published their work before their female counterparts. This has been so due to such diverse factors as migration patterns – the migration of men to Britain usually precedes that of women (especially in the case of the Asian population) –, access to education or gender biased policies in some publishing houses.

I am presenting the works in questions in chronological order even if this might not be the most adequate way of engaging with the crossings and diversity that characterise the literary productions of these authors, for “in privileging the national a number of important transnational circuits and axes cannot be mapped” (McLeod, 2002: 58). Nonetheless, this is not only the most common way in which Black and Asian British anthologies have recently been organised (Procter, 2000; Newland and Sesay, 2000 and 2005) but also a productive way of highlighting the footsteps taken in the passage to the inclusion of Black and Asian writers into mainstream British cultural production.

As I shall comment on in this chapter, the term I shall use to refer to the literary productions of Caribbean, African and Asian writers from the 1980s is that of Black British Literature (as a way of engaging and acknowledging the political significance of the term at that time). I shall refer to Asian British and Black British literature to allude to the literary works of authors from the mid-1980s to the present, when the term “Black” was problematised as an organising category to incorporate a heterogeneous view of the literature produced by British-born writers of ethnically diverse backgrounds.

The nature of this chapter and the aim behind the study of the literary corpus that forms this Dissertation is not to revise the debates surrounding notions of what constitutes British literature or where to place the works of writers who are of plural ethnic descent. Rather it is to acknowledge part of the literary production of contemporary British women writers – a part that has been considerably studied by critics and acclaimed by readers⁷ – that engages with a

⁷ In each of the chapters devoted to the novels under analysis in this Dissertation I shall comment on the literary reception of these same texts.

depiction of contemporary Britain that challenges a homogenous view of British identity; a depiction characterised among many other things by its looking back to the British colonial past in an attempt to account for present-day diversity in contemporary society and a depiction marked by its boundary crossings in the social configurations of space.

1.2 MIGRATION FLOWS FROM EX-COLONIAL TERRITORIES AND POST-SECOND WORLD WAR IMMIGRATION LAWS

1.2.a The Construction of Racialised Citizens: The Body as a Space

In this section I shall raise the theme of the body as a location, as a space, and I shall do so in an effort to understand and at the same time acknowledge the historical importance that the body – as the primary site where identity is located – has had for the African, Caribbean and Asian population in Britain throughout history but especially since the post-war years⁸:

Thus being “black” in Britain is about a state of “becoming” (racialised); a process of consciousness, when colour becomes the defining factor about who you are. ... Now living submerged in whiteness, physical difference becomes a defining issue, a signifier, a mark of whether or not you belong. Thus to be Black in Britain is to share a common structural location; a racial location. (Mirza, 1997: 3)

The Black body becomes, therefore, a signifier of exclusion, and paradoxically, at the same time a signifier of belonging. Such a definition of the Black body as a “common structural location” lies behind the use of the term

⁸ The problematics of struggling to define a self identity within a national British identity that has been for a long time described in terms of a hegemonic white ethnicity pertains to the novels under analysis in this Dissertation. Race and ethnicity are common factors in the identity problems the characters undergo. However, their struggle will also be defined by other axes such as those of gender, class, education, etc.

“Black” in the 1980s as a positionality that united people of a non-white descent in Britain. In this light, the term “Black” was politically used to highlight the inappropriateness of defining the British nation as racially homogenous (i.e. white) during post-war Britain and up to the 1980s, as I shall discuss in section 1.3.b.

The consideration of the body as location, as a site, derives directly from the view of the body as a space. For Adrienne Rich, the body is “the geography closest in” (Valentine, 2001: 23). The body is the location from which individuals create links with and to the outside world. It is through the body that the individual relates himself/herself to other individuals and spaces that surround him/her:

Spatiality has been theorised at the level of individual bodies – the body as a surface to be mapped, a surface for inscription, as a boundary between the individual subject and that which is Other to it, as the container of individual identity, but also as a permeable boundary which leaks and bleeds and is penetrable–.

(McDowell, 1997: 3)

In the body our identity and our history are inscribed (Grosz, 1992). The individual body and its context and location have a direct effect on the building up of our sense of identity. Authors such as Donna Haraway (1988) or Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (1995) have pointed out how, in this respect, our understanding of the world is “situated” and variable since bodies are not still but in an ongoing process of dis/location and change. The inner-body’s self interaction with the outside world is clearly delimited by concrete spatial and temporal frameworks:

“The body is in constant motion. Even at rest, the body is never still. As bodies move they trace out a path from one location to another. These paths constantly intersect with those of others in a complex web of biographies” (Pile and Thrift, 1995: 26).

Accordingly, with the theoretical changes brought about by postmodern and poststructuralist theories, the notion of individual subject ceased to be regarded as stable, universal and degendered, as it was described in Cartesian thought. The individual subject started to be viewed as an entity in a continuous process of formation (Grosz, 1992; Mercer, 1992; McDowell, 1999). Consequently, “the individual subject is not, and cannot be, a coherent, unified being, but is always divided and displaced” (Bondi, 1993: 85).

Therefore bodies are understood to be in constant movement and in a permanent process of transformation. Moreover, as much as bodies are thought of as malleable (consider Foucault’s reflection of the body as a site of inscription [1977, 1985]), identity is thought to be a fluid category as well (Bondi, 1993; Butler, 1990). Nowadays identity is no longer *considered* as something fixed and firm per se but it has “a permeable boundary”, following McDowell’s definition (1997: 3). The body’s development depends very much on an ongoing process that is influenced by the space(s) and social circumstances surrounding any person’s life.

The social context with which bodies interact is burdened with practices and ideologies that permeate the body and provide constructed meanings (Soja, 1989). Bodies’ sexual or racial differences are marked, for example, with deeper social meanings; meanings that are not arbitrary and in most cases provide the

background for what Iris Marion Young has described as “scaling bodies” (Young, 1990). The effect of this is the creation within society of dominant groups and dominated ones based on corporeal differences: “dominant discourse defines them [the others] in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs their bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick” (Young 1990: 123).

Race is a factor to be taken into consideration in the construction of bodily differences. Western thought has been characterised by the tendency to create a hierarchy of bodies based on racial differences and it has used this principle to organise society and create social divisions that are transformed in history according to the needs of the particular social circumstances (Payne, 2000). The Black⁹ body has been defined and constructed in opposition to the white one, and the discourse of colonialism has played a crucial role in this respect (Said, 1979; Valentine, 2001). Immigration laws, drawing on and constructing this type of discourse, has been modified during the 20th century in an attempt to regularise the presence of racialised bodies in the United Kingdom.

I shall argue that the novels under analysis contribute to this idea of identity as malleable and fluid at the same time that they pinpoint the ways in which racial relations have operated in Britain at different historical periods of time – from post-war years in Levy’s *Small Island* to the 1980s in Kay’s *Trumpet* or the turn of the millennium in Smith’s *White Teeth*. One of the common themes in *Brick Lane*, *Small Island*, *White Teeth*, *Trumpet* and *26a* is a portrait of socially, ethnically and religiously diverse characters negotiating a sense of place and a sense of space in a common location: London (as well as Glasgow in the

⁹ In this use of the term “Black” I encompass African, Caribbean and Asian bodies. In this respect, I am aware of the political implications that the use of this term has had and, in the next section, I shall problematise such a homogenizing use.

case of *Trumpet*). The fact that two of the main cities in the United Kingdom are hosting such a myriad of “identities” questions any notions of a unique, stable and fixed identity – in this case British identity. The history of colonialism, the decline of the British Empire and the immigration patterns in Britain since the post-war years are at the heart of the present-day diasporic, multicultural British space (Brah, 1996). In my endeavour to contextualise the novels under analysis, I shall address in the next section some of the main historical facts related to these matters.

1.2.b. A Long Presence of Black and Asian People in Britain

In this section I shall briefly outline the presence of people from Black and Asian backgrounds in Britain. I shall pay special attention to some of the immigration laws that were passed in the period following the Second World War that aimed to control the immigration of people from the Commonwealth territories. It is not accurate to state that the history of racism in Britain has its starting point in 1945, coinciding with the beginning of large-scale immigration from the ex-colonies. As Peter Jackson points out, a history of British racism that supports such a view fails to recognize a history of racial attitudes towards other population groups such as Irish and Jewish that pre-dates this moment and the earlier arrivals of Black and Asian people in Britain: “An understanding of the history of British racism must therefore begin much earlier than 1945” (1992: 134). Nevertheless, in this section I shall only concentrate on some of the racial

politics of the 20th century that affected the population groups the novels under analysis cover: Black and Asian.

The presence of Asians and Blacks in Britain has a long history. There are records that evidence the presence of a Black population in London in the 12th century. There is documented evidence of the selling of African men and women as slaves in London during the 18th century, as well as the presence of some Black mendicants in the streets of London. Some of the most famous mendicants in this respect are Billy Waters or Joseph Johnson. Apart from beggars and slaves, there were also successful figures such as the former librarian and later publisher William Sancho, the writer Olaudah Equiano or the performer Pablo Fanque (Sandu, 2004).

Moreover, as Sukhdev Sandhu points out in his book *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (2004), apart from the fact that Afro-Caribbeans were not only a fairly common presence in some of the biggest cities in Britain it is worth bearing in mind some cases of intermarriage between Black men and white women that were taking place:

Throughout the eighteenth century barely twenty per cent of the black population was female. Most men – including the likes of Francis Barber and the writer Olaudah Equiano – married white women. This challenges the common assumption that the high percentage of black-white relationships in Britain today is a recent phenomenon, one that is a by-product of multiculturalism or increased social liberalism. (Sandu, 2004: 11)

Chapter 1: An Overview of the Black and Asian Population in Britain...

The presence of Asians dates back to the early 17th century when the first known baptism of an Indian is recorded to have taken place. The arrival of the Asian population was directly connected to the trading companies in the East Indies and the founding of the East Indian Company. Men and women were brought from India to work as servants and nannies by British families who were returning. Together with this group of servants, the presence of lascars, Indian sailors, in British main ports was also common.

The Asian population in Britain saw continuous and steady growth throughout the 18th and 19th century, but it was considerably increased at the beginning of the 20th century and especially after the First World War and the Second War World. As Rozina Visram points out: “By the early years of the twentieth century Asians from the Indian sub-continent had been living in Britain for generations. In the period between 1919 and 1945 migration and settlement continued despite government attempts at restriction” (Visram, 2002: 254).

Immigration from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom increased even more during the 1970s. Immigration became a means of escaping from the hardships of a war that led to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. These were years of famine, deaths and hardship that prompted the significant migration to the metropolis of a country that had been presented to the migrants through colonial discourses and practices as the “Mother Country”.

As regards to Black immigration¹⁰, the politics of immigration since 1945 are all marked by the feature of how successive governments attempted to

¹⁰ For further reading on Black immigration to the United Kingdom see Marcia Sutherland’s “African Caribbean Immigrants in The United Kingdom: The Legacy of Racial Disadvantages” (2006).

regulate the arrival of Black people. Although most of the immigrants arriving in Great Britain from 1945 to 1954 were from other European countries, especially Ireland and Poland, and the majority of them were encouraged by the government to solve labour shortages¹¹ (known as European Volunteer Workers), the debate focused more on the Black newcomers:

The encouragement given to these two groups of migrants to settle in Britain contrasted with the concern of the government with the social and political consequences of the relatively small scale migration from the colonies during this period. What recent research has made clear is that even at this early stage black migration and settlement was politically perceived in a different way from European migration. (Solomos, 1993: 56)

Throughout the 1950s the political debate about the consequences of Black immigration was maintained and the result was an adjustment in immigration policies that led towards control. This control was to a great extent supported by the media. For Solomos (1993: 62), this fact could be explained in terms of two different trends: the state responding to the pressure exercised by popular opinion or responding to the economic interests of the capital class that wanted to adopt a migrant labour system to undermine the right of Black workers to migrate and settle in the United Kingdom. Rather than seeing both trends as two distinct explanations, it might be more accurate to consider them as co-determinant.

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that during the first years after the Second World War immigration from ex-colonial territories was also encouraged as a way to supply labour. The 1948 British Nationality Act is a good example and by virtue of this Act New Commonwealth and Pakistani citizens were free to enter and settle in Britain.

Chapter 1: An Overview of the Black and Asian Population in Britain...

In 1958 there were significant race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill when attacks on Black people were carried out by whites. The outcome of the situation was an important debate on race relations originating after the Act of 1962. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 aimed to control the entrance of Black Commonwealth citizens into Britain. They were perceived as “swamping” the country when, in fact, in many cases they had come to solve labour shortages:

At the peak of the migration in 1961 (before the Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into effect in 1962) some 50,000 arrived from the West Indies in one year. The migration was, in fact, quite sensitively attuned to labour demand in Britain, partly because of direct recruitment from the Caribbean by London Transport and the National Health Services, and partly from the effects of information flows and chain migration. (Jackson, 1992: 140)

The Act distinguished between citizens of Britain and its colonies, and citizens of independent Commonwealth countries, and introduced an employment system by which entrance to Great Britain was restricted to professional and skilled people. The debate sparked by this Act “reflected a variety of views and was by no means all in favour of it, in fact, a number of lead articles in the press during 1961-2, along with sections of the Labour Party, expressed opposition to the racist thinking behind the Act” (Solomos, 1993: 64).

Racial discourses arise and are articulated in context and immigration policies vary over time depending on the needs and demands of the host country.

The racist attitude towards immigrants in Britain was institutionalized by the state and sanctioned through diverse immigration laws passed after 1945. The most important ones include the so-called British Nationality Act of the year 1981, which was created to amend the Immigration Act of 1971 that classified people as patrial and non-patrials.

By contrast to the immigration policies that regulated migratory movements of Asian and Black subjects, people of European background, especially those coming mainly from Poland and Ireland, were much more widely accepted in part because, at first sight, they were not visibly different. In fact, the coming of Europeans to work was especially encouraged by the British government from 1945 to 1954 (Solomos, 1989: 54-56). In this sense, physical traits became an element of distinction. The body, and more concretely, skin colour, became a signifier for inclusion or exclusion, for acceptance or denial, for success or for failure.

1.3 BLACK¹² BRITAIN SINCE THE 1980s: A GENERAL OVERVIEW¹³

1.3.a Social Changes in the 1980s

The seeds for the social turmoil that accompanied the 1980s were planted after the Second World War with the coming of immigrants from the ex-colonial territories. Debates about racism had already been held since the early 1950s when, after the Second World War, Britain faced what is considered to be the onset of ex-colonial immigration¹⁴. Boundaries collapsed with the decline of the British Empire and the coming of immigrants to the Mother Country has to be understood as a direct consequence of colonial rule. During the 1960s and 1970s, despite the presence of a population of non-white ethnic origin, British identity was continuously constructed in the collective imaginary as homogenous and “white”.

¹² In this context, “black” is a political term that was used in the 1980s to refer to people of darker skin colour in Britain typically coming from Africa and the Caribbean. At times the term also encompassed people coming from the Asian subcontinent. “Politically, this is the moment when the term ‘black’ was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain that came to provide the organising category of a new politics of resistance” (Hall, 1988: 266).

¹³ There are a great number of critical, historical and literary works that were published at this period of time and that will be impossible to cover in a general overview of the type I intend to do in this introductory chapter of my Dissertation. I shall refer to only some of them, those which, in my judgement, serve to exemplify the progressive inclusion of “minority” writings in the British literary canon. For more information on these issues see Newland, and Sesay, 2001 (a literary anthology), Wambu, 1998 (an article covering the literary production of black writers since the 18th century but concentrating on the years after the coming of the Empire Windrush) and Modood, 1997 (a cultural study on ethnic minorities in Britain).

¹⁴ As I will comment on later in this Dissertation, the docking of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury on 22 June 1948 with immigrants from the West Indies is considered to be a landmark event in the history of British immigration.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, race riots took place in the London areas of Brick Lane, Brixton and Tottenham – key areas of the Asian and Black struggle (Procter, 2006: 108), and cities across the midlands and the north of England, such as the city of Bradford. These riots contributed to motivating more debates about race relations and racial policies¹⁵ in Britain that challenged a homogenous construction of what was British. Newspaper headlines at the time emphasised the racial motives of the riots and were quite explicit on this matter (Burgess, 1985). Moreover, to some extent the media coverage of these riots fuelled the idea that the country was being invaded with immigrants. *The Daily Express* accompanied the piece of news about the riots on 6 July 1981 with the following headline: “Black War On Police” (Jackson, 1992: 145). These riots were seen as the culminating point of the institutionalised racism in the form of immigration laws and police persecution that the Black British community had been facing.

The increasing occurrence of race riots during these years between the police and young citizens not only motivated an increasing public debate on racial issues but were accompanied by a boost in the publication of Black British cultural and literary production. The debates on race that emerged highlighted the need to recognise that Britain was the home of other ethnic groups and coincided in time with a growing number of publications by Blacks and Asians in Cultural Studies, fiction, poetry and theatre¹⁶. The increase in publication of literary anthologies containing work by ethnic minority authors (as I shall outline in the

¹⁵ The British National Act of 1981 was passed with the aim of amending the Immigration Act of 1971, especially regarding the right of abode in the United Kingdom and the acquisition of British citizenship.

¹⁶ See Grewal, Kay et al 1988, Ngcobo, 1987, Sesay, 2005, Mirza, 1997 and Griffin, 2003.

following section) and the focus on race and racial relations in Cultural Studies are some of the indicators of this turning point. What was poignant during these years was the need to question what constituted being “British” when colonial values were no longer valid.

There was a re/theorisation of British identity at all social levels that, on an institutional one, brought about the revision of the British Nationality Act of 1981:

The civil uprisings throughout Britain during the spring and summer of 1981 prompted Parliament to enact the revisionary British Nationality Act of 1981, which stipulated that only those whose parents had been born in the United Kingdom, or had been legally “settled” there, would henceforth qualify for the newly created British citizenship. (Arana, 2005: 230-231)

Such a questioning of what constituted British identity, what was meant by “British” and who was included in the definition of Britishness came hand in hand with a proliferation of intellectual works and intellectual controversies on the issue of white British culture and identity as the only predominant one in Britain (Gilroy, 1987; Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler, 1992; Morley and Robins, 2001; Weedon, 2004). A new definition of “Britishness” was asked for; a definition that included diversity.

The 1980s marked a turning point in the social construction of Britain as an ethnically diverse country, though it can be argued that a change started to take place in the last years of the previous decade. An example of the growing

awareness of the need to redefine racial relations in Britain was the creation in 1976 of the Commission for Racial Equality and the passing of a Race Relations Act. Both of these initiatives had as their aims the consolidation of a society free of racial discrimination. Despite these institutional attempts, the truth is that, even if race had been at the core of social relations in Britain in the post-war years, Britishness was for a long time constructed in white terms. During the 1940s and 1950s racism was characterised by the motto: “Keep Britain White” and during the 1960s and 1970s immigrants from non-white backgrounds continued to experience a great deal of discrimination and exclusion based on racial differences (Phillips, 1999).

1.3.b Appropriateness of the Term “Black” in Cultural and Literary Studies

Within the field of Cultural Studies¹⁷ writings on race relations and what “Britishness” meant emerged with strength from the late 1970s and 1980s. Theoreticians like Stuart Hall (1980, 1990, 1998), Paul Gilroy (1987) and Kobena Mercer (1992) are some of the representatives of Black British Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies in the 1980s opened a debate over the question of representation, its politics and its aims. Cultural studies at the time departed from a fixed vision of what constituted “Black identity”. As Stuart Hall explains in his famous essay of 1988, “New Ethnicities”, the word “black” in the 1980s was a

¹⁷ The 1950s are the years of the emergence of Cultural Studies in Britain, coinciding with the disintegration of the British Empire. The pioneers of Cultural Studies such as Richard Hoggart or Raymond Williams, however, “were notably silent on questions of race and migration, empire and decolonisation” (Sivanandan, 2001: 137-138). It was not until the 1970s and early 1980s that Black British cultural studies emerged: Hall (1980, 1990), Mercer (1990, 1992).

unifying term that included Caribbean, African and Asian identities. It was a constructed category that was politically useful at the time. Artists from those ethnic minorities living in Britain were trying, with their works, to depict a “Black identity” that countered the negative pictures the media was creating of non-white citizens. It was, then, a struggle over representation.

At this point, the phrase “Black identity” or “Black experience” was used as an umbrella term to portray a collective, unitary identity strong enough to resist negative stereotypes embedded in the collective imaginary:

In this moment, politically speaking, “The Black Experience”, as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became “hegemonic” over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course, disappear. Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible “other” of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses. (Hall, 1988: 266)

The term cultural identity at that time referred to a stable, unifying and whole meaning. It was thought to encompass any possible differences. This is the position underneath the majority of post-colonial struggles over cultural and identity re-assertion such as “Negritude” or “Black is Beautiful” and is also present in most of the cultural and literary productions of African, Caribbean and Asian-British authors during the 1980s. This position is based on the idea of authority and authenticity. As Hall states: “the first position defines ‘cultural

identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, 1990: 223). The Black subject was represented in essentialist articulations in which dimensions such as class, gender, sexuality or ethnicity were not addressed.

This was a needed step for ethnic minority groups in the process of forming their own identities. During this phase Black artists asserted their rights to create their own representations, to contest the marginalised positions where Blacks were placed and to question the stereotypical nature of images of Blacks. This early stage was followed – though not necessarily as a substitution, rather in the sense of a continuum – by the emergence of theoretical debates surrounding the definition of “Black identity” that pointed towards the need to reject a unitary vision of “Black identity” and acknowledge difference¹⁸.

There is another consideration of the phrase “cultural identity” that views it not as a matter of “being” but as a question of “becoming”. Such reflection goes hand in hand with the idea that identity is never stable (referred to in section 1.3. of this Dissertation) but is a contested term as well:

This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one

¹⁸ At the same time that the notion of “black identity” was being questioned, so was the convenience of the phrase “Black British Literature” as a way of referring to the literature produced by black authors in Britain. See in this respect Fred D’Aguiar’s article “Against Black British Literature” (1989).

experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities ... Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (1990: 225)

This understanding involves some aspects from Derrida's concept of *différance* and the idea that meanings are always being made and signification is deferred. In this sense, meaning is created constantly anew but without erasing the traces of previous meanings: "... meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional and supplementary meanings" (Hall, 1990: 229). In some respects the novels that form this Dissertation's literary corpus draw on this malleable aspect of meaning for, as I shall discuss in the following chapters, the novels portray characters that are negotiating their spatial realities and adjusting their racial, gender and identity signification.

In the 1990s the emphasis given to race as a unifying political location during the late 1970s and 1980s was replaced by an emphasis on ethnicity (Phillips, 1999). A new "racism" arose which was no longer based on biological differences and biological superiority but on an idea of a cultural clash and incompatibility between different cultures (Donald and Rattansi, 1992). This new "racism" was related to questions of ethnicity. During the 1990s, and especially after, ethnicity became a factor that determined racial exclusion. Once racism based on race had been widely condemned, cultural differences became the determining factor for social exclusion.

This new type of racism was especially directed at Asian communities and it brought to light the fact that Asians suffer a double racism which is attributed to culture rather than simply biology (i.e. race)¹⁹. As Tariq Modood writes, racism against Asians “includes cultural racism as well as colour racism” (2005: 7). In this respect, the phrase “cultural racism” is close to ethnicity defined as “the identification of particular cultures as ways of life or identity which are based on a historical notion of origin or fate, whether mythical or ‘real’” (Anthias, 1990: 20; quoted in Maynard 1994: 11). In contemporary British society, ethnicity, rather than race, is the key factor on which social discrimination operates. It should be noted that this is strongly related to the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and the bombings on 7 July 2005 in London which resulted in much anti-Muslim sentiment. Since many migrants from countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslim, their ethnic identity has become the object of racialised discrimination.

¹⁹ This type of racism is evident in Ali’s novel *Brick Lane* in the form of the creation of groups such as “The Lion Hearts” and the “Bengal Tigers” that are confronted on the grounds of the religious and cultural differences that are portrayed in the novel as irreconcilable (Ali, 2004: 238-239).

1.4. BLACK AND ASIAN MALE WRITERS IN BRITAIN: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

At the same time that a more theoretical debate about race and racial relations was taking place in Cultural Studies, a number of writers coming from ex-colonial territories were giving voice to the experience of migration and the problems of racism, dis/placement and social exclusion that were a daily reality for most immigrants; they were by means of literature engaging with the above-mentioned debates on representation. Some of the most acclaimed first-generation immigrant male writers who published their works in the late 1970s and early 1980s are Linton Kwesi Johnson, David Dabydeen, Salman Rushdie and Fred D'Aguiar.

Before them, the 1950s and 1960s saw the arrival of some of the most recognised figures in postcolonial literary and Cultural Studies. Poet James Berry, thinker Stuart Hall, writers Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wole Soyinka or Chinua Achebe came to Britain together with the early waves of migrants with the aim of studying or settling (Donnell, 2002). Black authors who migrated to Britain and endeavoured to publish their works at a time when Britain was undergoing the first stages of immigration from the ex-colonies had in the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices*²⁰ a launching point for their careers. Authors such as VS Naipaul (born in Trinidad), Edward Kamau Brathwaite (born in Barbados), Sam Selvon (born in Trinidad) and George Lamming (born in Barbados) were provided a “literary space” in that programme (Wambu, 1998).

²⁰ The show was a weekly programme focusing 20 minutes on the literary production of authors from the Caribbean. It started running in 1946 and was conducted by Henry Swanzy (Wambu, 1998).

The first novels written by these authors focused on the place of origin, that is, the Caribbean space for these authors, rather than on life in the “Mother Country”. VS Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *Miguel Street* (1959) and *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), Sam Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), *Of Age and Innocence* (1958) and *Season of Adventure* (1960) are examples of that tendency: writing about a time before their arrival in Britain and dealing with themes of independence in the ex-colonial territories.

However, these novels were followed by literary works that attempted to account for the first experiences of migration and for the drudgeries immigrants had to face in Britain²¹. George Lamming’s novel *The Emigrants* (1954) and Sam Selvon’s novel *The Lonely Londoners* published in 1956 are perhaps the most widely known instances of this trend. In the early novels of these authors that were settled in Britain the topics of exile, migration and discrimination have a central role. As Chris Weedon argues: “The novels are set in a Britain disfigured by racism and ethnocentrism that had claimed to be the ‘Mother of Empire’ and had invited her former colonial subjects in the 1950s and 1960s to come and work” (2008: 18). These narratives focus on racial discrimination more than on identity problems since “it was not their identity that was under threat ... rather it was their rights that were under threat” (Donnell, 2002: 12).

²¹ Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004) resembles in some aspects these first literary works that concentrated on life in post-war London. However, as I shall argue in the chapter devoted to the study of her novel, Levy presents a wider view of the social problems affecting that period of time by acknowledging that the coming of immigrants to Britain was a two-way process that had an effect on both the newcomers and the white British population. Moreover, unlike that which is the case in Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, Levy also gives voice to a part of the immigrants that had been frequently silenced in previous literary works: the female population.

Unlike that which had been the case during the colonial period and the post-Second World War period, from the late 1970s and 1980s the authors that were writing in Britain were giving voice not only to the experience of migration but, in the case of authors born in Britain, to what it signified to be a “second-generation immigrant”²². The latter group encompassed authors who were born in the “centre” and, therefore, are writing from this position rather than from the “periphery”, that is, from colonial territories²³ or from a temporary location in Britain (like the first-generation writers) but with their cultural roots elsewhere.

Political struggles at the time were also linked to the problematics of spatial identification. Some Black authors were establishing new connections between the space where they found themselves located (Britain) and their identity status in that location. They were asserting their rights to define their sense of “Britishness”:

[W]hat was emerging in the 1970s was a “rooted” as opposed to a “routed” engagement with Britain ... This generation was resisting, demonstrating and sloganising; they were entering public discourse and places and asserting a politics of occupation that not only demonstrated their demands for social justice but also their investment in national space. (Donnell, 2002: 14)

²² Paradoxically, the phrase “second-generation immigrant” keeps on engaging with notions of migration, displacement and dislocation. In this respect the phrase should be critically revised since it refers to a generation of British citizens that did not migrate to Britain but were born there.

²³ This is the case of those referred to as “native intellectuals” (Fanon, 1967) who address the “centre” in their writings in an attempt to create national literatures in their colonized places of origin.

This latter group “investing in national space” was formed by a number of second-generation novelists who, by means of their literary production, were reasserting their right to be accepted as forming part of the definition of what was British at the time. Issues of identity and belonging are, therefore, central at this period of time and permeate the majority of the literary works produced by second-generation authors (Weedon, 2004). For some critics, this change in preoccupations marks a generational divide that is reflected in the topics first- and second-generation writers raise: “If novels that address first-generation migrant stories focus on dislocation, poverty, racism, and the effects of cultural difference, fiction about growing up in Britain has a different emphasis, focusing more centrally on questions of identity and belonging” (Weedon, 2008: 28).

The 1970s bore witness to a remarkable shift in literary genres within Black writing. The previous two decades, the 1950s and 1960s, were characterised by the production and publication of prose narratives. The following decade, however, is distinctively recognized by a larger production of poetry works. Such interest in poetry as a form of cultural representation is directly related to a turning to vernacular and Creole linguistic forms as a form of self-identification in the Black artistic community (Procter, 2000: 97). Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Jamaican Linton Kwesi Johnson are perhaps the best-known representatives of this trend. The former published *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969) that were later reissued in a single volume entitled *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973), the latter is well-known for *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1974) and *Dread, Beat and Blood* (1975).

Some of the literary figures of this period, especially playwrights, emerged from community centres such as the Keswidee Centre established in North London in 1970 (Wambu, 1998: n.p.). In theatre, there were many critically acclaimed works such as Hanif Kureishi's theatre play *My Beautiful Launderette*²⁴ (1986) and Caryl Phillips' first play *Strange Fruit* (1981). Playwrights started to portray a vision of Blacks that questioned essentialist paradigms and mapped a more diverse Britain. In so doing they were questioning and enlarging the term "Britishness" and were proof of the diversity that characterised Britain:

[T]he new, post-1980s English literature takes possession of the definition of Englishness^[25] to include diversity *within* Englishness; it is decidedly not a faction that attempts to internalise and, thus, to disintegrate the country's culture and discourse. Its objectives are quite the opposite of "globalisation", "internationalism", and "universalism". Post-1980s British literature in general portrays the new England, the new Scotland, and the new Wales as *still*, English, Scottish, and Welsh, respectively, though culturally *modified* and updated. (Arana, 2005: 232; emphasis in the original)

²⁴ Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Launderette* was made into a film in 1985 and it was directed by Stephen Frears.

²⁵ The use of the term "Englishness" as a signifier of "Britishness" shows the historical and cultural supremacy that England has had in Great Britain. A supremacy that has its origin in the history of imperialism, for the British state was imperial in a double sense. There was an external Empire with its colonies and also an internal Empire: "England in this view was the imperial nation that had annexed the territories and subjugated the populations of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland" (Kumar, 2001: 43). In this sense, "the lordly English habit of subsuming British under English ... is a constant reminder of ... England's hegemony over the rest of the British Isles" (Kumar, 2001: 41).

The writers who were publishing during the 1980s also saw the recognition of the critics. Examples of prizes received by Black and Asian writers at the time are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* which won the 1981 Booker Award and Grace Nichols who won the Commonwealth Poetry prize in 1983 for *I is a Long Memored Woman* (Wambu, 1998: n.p.). Moreover, at this period of time some of Grace Nichols' poems were set as part of the national curriculum.

The 1980s, then, marked what can be considered as the movement from postcolonialism to multicultural Britain (Wambu, 1999: 28; Sesay, 2005). Before this moment, authors from African, Caribbean and Asian origins were merely defined by their country of origin. Their literary works, in particular the texts published in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, were not meant to be dealing with Britain, were not considered as forming part of the British experience: "Britain was not interested in how these authors saw Britain. Britain was more interested in seeing the worlds outside of Britain through these writers, even if the world was physically located in Britain" (Dawes, 2005: 257).

In this period, there appeared publications that were sensitive to the literary production of authors from a diverse ethnic background such as the journal *Wasafiri* and *Chic* in 1984, *Third Text* in 1987, and a number of newspapers such as *Asian Times*, *African Times* and *The Voice*. Likewise, Channel 4 started to broadcast "with a mandate to cover ethnically diverse topics of multicultural interest" (Arana, 2005: 235).

It is in the 1980s, thus, when the generation of British-born writers began to establish their voice: the "Black British Voice"²⁶. There was a change then that

²⁶ However difficult it is to define what constitutes Black British Writing, as I have previously stated.

marked the movement from writing about “being Black in Britain” to problematising a “sense of being Black British” – and also a sense of being African-British, Caribbean-British and Asian-British – and this evolution can be read in generational terms (Donnell, 2002:11). Some of the writers publishing during this period of time, the 1980s, “will reject any lineage with the writers of the fifties and sixties and quite arrogantly (if understandably), and, perhaps foolishly, assert a new invention: the Black British voice” (Dawes, 1999: 19).

The 1990s were marked by the publication of literary works that continued to problematise a monolithic view of Black Britain and at the same time herald diversity. It is in this decade when the need to distinguish within the label “Black” the specificities of Asian, African and Caribbean writing and writers was strongly demanded. It is the decade that witnesses the coming to an end of “the Black British renaissance”. This is the decade of the “collapse of the political unity between Africans, Caribbeans and Asians under the erstwhile banner of ‘Blackness’” (Sivanandan, 2001: 139). Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* published in 1990 is the best-known example of the depiction of an ethnically diverse identity. Likewise, his second novel *The Black Album* (1995) also deals with the problematics of growing up in London as a young man of Asian background.

Works were published that moved beyond biographical narratives or denouncing poetry that characterised previous decades. Literary works published at the time highlighted hybridity and advocated a re-invention of what constituted being British (Nasta, 2004). Black and Asian authors started to produce works in

different genres such as crime fiction with Mike Phillips's *The Late Candidate* (1990) as its clear exponent and Black pulp fiction mainly published by X-Press (Wambu, 1998: n.p.).

Likewise, female novelists started to receive recognition as I shall explain further in the following section. Bernardine Evaristo and Andrea Levy are some of the new voices arising in this decade. Levy's first novels *Every Light in the House Burning*, *Never Far from Nowhere* and *Fruit of the Lemon* were published in 1994, 1996 and 1999 respectively. The work of gay cultural critics and that of the above-mentioned female writers together with others such as Pratibha Parmar, Moniza Alvi, Jackie Kay, Merle Collins, Jean Binta Breeze and Rukshana Ahmad since the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s "played an instrumental role in the destabilisation of 'Black' as a singular, containing category" (Procter, 2000: 194). Two other important novels published at the time are Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996) and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*²⁷ (1996).

The fact that the Booker Prize was won during the 1990s by two non-white writers – a trend that has continued – and one of those female, could be read as an indicator of the achievements by the Black and Asian authors writing in English during this decade. Ben Okri (Nigerian) won The Booker in 1991 for *The Famished Road* and Arundhati Roy (India) won it six years latter for *The God of Small Things*. The two of them are examples of the diversity of topics and styles that are dealt with in this new decade.

²⁷ As it was the case with Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*, Meera Syal's novel *Anita and Me* was also made into a film. It was directed by Metin Hüseyin and released on the 22 October 2002. The adaptation of novels to turn them into a film script has, to some extent, contributed to the "popularisation" of Black and Asian British writers.

Chapter 1: An Overview of the Black and Asian Population in Britain...

Several new literary and cultural anthologies that compiled the works of a great part of the authors previously commented on saw the light and some others were republished at the turn of the millennium (Sivanandan, 2001). In 2000 James Procter's *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Onyekachi Wambu's *Empire Windrush* (1998), Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay's *IC3: the Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* (2001) and Kwesi Owusu's *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader* (1999) were some of the anthologies that attempted to "fill the gaps punctuating the narrative history of post-war Britain" (Sivanandan, 2001: 140).

These anthologies show the diversity of topics, genres and the richness that characterises contemporary Black and Asian British writing. Such works were followed in the subsequent years by literary and critical texts that continued addressing questions of Black and South Asian British writing in the light of multiculturalism, social exclusion and cohesion, and cultural diversity –some of the major preoccupations in contemporary Britain. Among those stand out James Procter's *Dwelling Places* (2003), Sukhdev Sandhu's *London Calling* (2004), Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), and Kadija Sesay's *Write Black Write British* (2005).

Mark Stein's engagement with these ideas of the diversity of topics, the variety and the possibility of transformation that characterises Black and Asian British literature is stated in the introduction to *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* where Stein argues:

Black British literature 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. This writing is related to
Britain in many ways while being concurrently endowed with
perspectives that are not manifest in all of Britain's literatures.
(2004: xii)

This enriching asset of contemporary Black and Asian British writing is
closely related to the transnational characteristic of this kind of literature
“deriving from all over the globe and written in different forms of the English
tongue” (Nasta, 2004: 1) that is central to some critics (McLeod, 2002). There is
significant interest in the past as a means of understanding individuals' relation to
the present space. Mengham Rod, in the general introduction to *Contemporary
British Fiction* (2003) which she edited together with Richard Lane and Philip
Tew, begins with what she refers to as a paradox in contemporary British fiction,
the fact that a great deal of it is concerned with other times and other places:

Perhaps rather surprisingly, the history of Britain and of the
peoples inhabiting it, the temporal and spatial relations that
determine the margins of Britishness, have all been questioned
and amended by the more ambitious fictional projects of a time
in which the scale of history itself has been revised. (Mengham,
2003: 1)

Such a view of the thematic interests of contemporary writers might be
considered as limited and over-generalising. However, it is relevant for the novels
that form the corpus of this Dissertation. Monica Ali's, Andrea Levy's, Zadie

Chapter 1: An Overview of the Black and Asian Population in Britain...

Smith's, Jackie Kay's and Diana Evan's novels as I shall discuss in the following chapters, look back to the history of Britain and to the geographical roots of its characters as a way of acknowledging and, at the same time, understanding their characters' present condition. The negotiation of the characters' identity goes hand in hand with a revisiting and revision of history – Britain's general history or their immediate family history – necessary to allow for a construction of their pluralistic British identity in a multicultural British society.

1.5. BLACK AND ASIAN WOMEN WRITERS IN BRITAIN

1.5.a Black British and Asian British Women's Writing Since the 1980s: A Broad Outline

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the consolidation of Black British feminism (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983, 1993; Collins, 1991) that had its origins in the struggles and activism of Black and Asian immigrant women who came in the late 1940s and 1960s from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent (Mirza, 1997) and was influenced by the works of American feminists such as bell hooks (1984). Black British feminism arose in a period of time when the importance of the concept of “difference” in feminist thought, as it was also the case in Cultural Studies, was of great importance.

Black British feminism countered the idea of a universal and homogenized view of women and women's experiences. Much has been written since the 1960s about the fact that studies dealing with gender had left race untouched – this has been one of the main critiques white feminism received. However, what had not been pointed out until the consolidation of Black British feminism was the fact that theoretical analyses of race did not deal with gender. Those who centred their studies on race in America in the 1950s, such as the civil right activist W.E.B. Du Bois, influenced thinkers who were studying race in post-war Britain (Solomos, 1989) and their work was characterised by “the fact that analyses of ‘race’ often disregarded gender [and this fact] is frequently ignored” (Maynard, 1994: 12). Black British feminists, just like their American counterparts, demanded

recognition not only from the white population but also from their own community.

Early attempts to theorize the interconnection of race and gender were homogenizing in their conclusions since they simply implied that race increases the degree of inequality:

This ignores the fact that “race” does not simply make the experience of women’s subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of that subordination. It is within this context that writers have turned to the idea of “difference” as a concept with the potential to encompass the diversities which ensue.
(Maynard, 1994: 13)

Nonetheless, race is not a coherent category. It has been challenged by the diversity of experiences inscribed by Black women. Debates on these issues show the need to make visible the experiences of African, Caribbean and South Asian women in Britain and brought to light the heterogeneous nature of their particular circumstances. Such circumstances varied in different ways, in terms of ethnicity, race, class, age, context and location. From the mid-1980s there was also an increasing interest in inscribing these experiences through literary works.

Writing by Black and Asian women, and women’s writing in general (Freixas, 2000), has been silenced and invisibilized; it has been set apart from the academy and it has been ghettoized, “considered a separate class of writing that is somehow discredited, less authentic, not part of the main body of literature” (Ngcobo, 1988: 14). It has mainly been ascribed to specific groups and

workshops. Two of the most famous groups are Asian Women's Writers Collective and Caribbean Women Writers Alliance (Nasta, 2000).

The literary accomplishments of writing groups formed by Black and Asian women writers, mainly in the form of short stories, were published at the time. *Right of Way*, the first anthology of the Asian Women Writers Workshop, was published in 1988; it tried to "voice" the daily lives of female immigrants and collectives of women immigrants in Britain. The flourishing of writing groups within the Black community such as African Caribbean Educational Resource (ACER) and the support that was coming from African American authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker also favoured the publication of works by Black British women writers (Wambu, 1998). Moreover, organizations such as the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean and African and Asian Literature (ATCAL) were also formed with the aim of trying to convince the examining bodies of the need to incorporate literature produced by those groups in the syllabus.

The increase in the publication of Black and Asian women writers was also directly connected to a commitment of publishing houses to support the publication of works by women who wanted to make visible the traumatic experience of migration that affected women and that was previously hidden in the British literary mainstream. Such publishing houses included Women's Press, Virago, Sheba, Onlywoman Press, Akira, Karia, Dangaroo, Karnak House and Black Womantalk (Weedon, 2008; Wambu, 1998). In this respect, fiction was used in realistic terms as a mode that allowed the exploration of the questions of immigration, race and patriarchal relations and women's search for identity.

Quests for roots and topics dealing with ancestry and past history were key aspects in the writings of early Black and Asian women writers.

Black women writers during the 1980s, as was the case with male authors, also chose poetry as the medium to express themselves. Poetry, as a genre, allows for freedom of expression and showed engagement with native forms of orature at the same time that individual poems are easier to publish in magazines and journals. Two women writers that are representative of this tradition are Marsha Prescod and her book *Land of Rope and Tory* (1985) and Valerie Bloom with *Touch Mi; Tell Mi* (1983) (Ngcobo, 1987: 2).

Established first-generation Black women writers in Britain such as Nigerian-born author Buchi Emecheta and Jamaican author Joan Riley²⁸ started publishing their works in the late 1970s early 1980s. Joan Riley's best known novel *The Unbelonging* was first published in 1983. Emecheta also published the great bulk of her literary production in those years: an autobiography *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Naira Power* (1982), *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) and *A Kind of Marriage* (1986). Riley on her part published *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) and *Romance* (1988). Likewise, another important author whose voice started to be heard at that period of time was that of Beryl Gilroy who wrote about her experiences as a teacher in north London in *Black Teacher* (1976). In the late 1980s Trinidadian Amryl Johnson published two collections of poetry: *Long Road to Nowhere* in 1985 and *Sequins for a Ragged Hem* in 1988.

²⁸ For a study of Joan Riley's literary production see Isabel Carrera Suarez's article "Absent Mother(land)s: Joan Riley's Fiction" (1990).

The emerging interest in Black and Asian women writers' works brought about the publication of anthologies of women's writing and non-fictional studies such as Stella Dadzie, Beverley Bryan and Suzanne Scafe's *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985) or Margaret Prescod-Roberts's *Black Women: Bringing It All Back Home* (1980). Some of the best known anthologies include Sneja Gunew's *Displacements: Migrant Storytellers* (1982), followed by *Displacements II: Multicultural Storytellers* (1987), Centreprise Trust's *Breaking the Silence* (1984), Barbara Burford, Jackie Kay et al's *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets* (1985), Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins's *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (1987), Laretta Ngcobo's *Let It be Told* (1987), and Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay et al's *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (1988). In 1978, Amrit Wilson's "voicing" of the almost until then unheard experience of Asian women immigrants in Britain, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, also saw the light.

The relevance of these anthologies lies in their effort to "tell" the realities of African, Caribbean and South Asian immigrant women as a way of acknowledging their so long silenced presence in Britain. At the same time, the aim of these early works was not only to assert their presence but, as in the case of Black Cultural Studies in general, to gain access to representation. By so doing, they were empowered to provide a self-expressed depiction of their realities that went beyond the so often caricatured and undermining stereotypes that circulated at the time. Non-arbitrarily, this literary production coincides in time with the establishment within Cultural Studies of a political kinship between the African,

Caribbean and South Asian population in Britain. Therefore: “narratives of shared history and ancestry are also crucial to constructions of identity in the work of Black and South Asian British writers who evoke both imagined and remembered countries of origin” (Weedon, 2008: 20).

This double aim of their first writings (self-assertion and access to representation) is clearly expressed in two of these early anthologies. On the one hand, Laretta Ngcobo in the introduction to *Let It be Told* (1987) states that “It behoves us to define our position not as others see us but as we ourselves identify our reality. ... Black people are now irrevocably part of Britain” (16-15). Their presence is recognized and this is an important step in the way to inclusion: “from now on we exist. ... In books such as this we are carving for all Blackwomen [sic] a niche in British society” (34).

On the other hand, Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay et al explain in the preface to the anthology *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (1988) that their anthology departs from what constitutes “Blackness” in Britain. This is a contradictory idea because it encompasses a diversity of experiences and unsettles a unitary view of Blacks. Nonetheless, the anthology takes the experience of migration and the metaphor of the journey as the amalgamating factor common to all immigrant women, and the importance of self-image representation is also stressed:

This is what we are doing – preserving, extending and redefining ourselves in order to create a situation in which “blackness” as commonly understood, has no social meaning. In effect we are consciously choosing to continue our migration

into a better, more comfortable place where we are made in our own, ever-changing image. (1988: 5)

Moreover, these early writings by women point towards one of the problems that affect immigrants: the issue of belonging (which was also present in the male writings). Experiences of migration and settlement together with questions of identity, belonging, Britishness, social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, racialised boundaries and racialised identities were the preoccupation of female novelists who were writing in the context of the 1970s and 1980s²⁹ (Weedon, 2008)

Ngcobo foresees that second-generation writers from an ethnically diverse background will face similar problems of dislocation: “the great majority of Black youth are British-born and what is remarkable is that they too feel they do not belong, at least not emotionally. They feel sufficiently estranged not to regard Britain as a permanent home, even though they have no other experience to which to relate” (1987: 11). Metaphors of dislocation – from physical to emotional – permeate the writings of Black and Asian women in Britain and this is directly related to a search for origins and roots. As stated in *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*: “this is the baggage that the migrant carries with her – remnants of the past and visions of the future, while the present never quite seems to match up with either – yet it is from this that her life must be fashioned” (1988: 6).

²⁹ For Weedon, *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali can be considered an example of writing by Black and South Asian British writers published since 1970, one that depicts the effects of migration and settlement on first- and second-generation immigrants.

Thus, one of the topics that seems to be recurrent and also shared by second-generation writers is “the imperative to remember and voice a marginalized history” (Weedon, 2008: 8) as a way of challenging “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1988). The need to inscribe the obliterated history of “minority” groups in Britain is precisely, as I will comment on later, one of the aims behind Andrea Levy’s writing as she herself expressed in some interviews (Allardice, 2005; Greer, 2004). Women writers such as Andrea Levy and Bernardine Evaristo share “the belief that they are writing British literature even as they tell the story of the black who are British” (Dawes, 1999: 20).

Some recent studies on contemporary Black and Asian feminism, culture and women’s writing include Heidi Safia Mirza’s *Black British Feminism* (1997), Gabriele Griffin’s *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (2003a), Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996) and Yasmin Hussain’s *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women Culture and Identity* (2005). The work of contemporary Black and Asian writers such as the ones studied in this Dissertation has also been dealt with in anthologies of contemporary British fiction that are not specifically devoted to female writing and were referred to in section 1.4. of this chapter.

A brief look at three of the best known and prestigious awards given to novelists writing in English, namely: the Booker Prize, the Costa Awards (formerly Whitbread) and the Guardian Fiction Award show how, in the last ten years (from 1998 to 2008), few prizes have been given to women writers. In general, Black and minority ethnic women writers, have been, in this respect, even

less acclaimed. This was even the case with the Orange Prize which is limited to women authors.

Three women writers have received the Booker Prize in the last ten years: Canadian Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* in 2000, Indian Kiran Desai in 2006, and Irish writer Anne Enright in 2007. Three women novelists as well won the Costa Book Awards: Rose Tremain's *Music and Silence* in 1999, Andrea Levy's *Small Island* in 2004, and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* in 2005. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Susan Fletcher's *Eve Green* and Stef Penney's, *The Tenderness of Wolves* won the Costa Award in the category First Novel in 2000, 2004 and 2006 respectively. Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* won the Guardian Fiction Award in 1998, so did Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in 2000 and Yiyun Li's *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* in 2006.

Out of the above-mentioned female novelist whose work received literary recognition in the form of awards, only Linda Grant, Kiran Desai, Yiyun Li, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy come from an ethnically marked background. Linda Grant is a second-generation Russian and Jewish immigrant living in Britain, Kiran Desai is Indian, Yiyun Li is Chinese, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is Nigerian, and Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy respectively are of Asian-British and Caribbean descent, respectively.

The success that novelists such as the above-mentioned have received during this last decade seems to have gone hand in hand with an interest in portraying Britain as a multicultural, diverse and ethnically tolerant land. Susheila Nasta's opinions on the issue of literary recognition of "minority writing" are, in this respect, quite revealing:

And although in the past few years a popular interest in literary prizes combined with the globalization of the publishing industry have drawn the diversity of contemporary writing to the attention of a much wider international readership, many unanswered questions still linger, questions that remain indissolubly linked to the perpetuation of stark global inequalities, old and new imperial histories, as well as the ever-present realities of race and class. (Nasta, 2004: 7)

The apparent huge success of “minority” writers does not mean that it is easy for “minority writers” to be published. It responds, to some critics, to a specific attempt to “make appear” rather than presenting what is the real situation of “minority” writing in Britain:

A number of new black, minority ethnic and mixed race authors have topped the bestseller charts in recent years, including Monica Ali, Andrea Levy and Zadie Smith. Based on the visible success of authors such as these, talented writers have an equally good chance of commercial success regardless of their ethnicity. Analysis of the recent Nielsen Book Scan charts, however, shows that authors from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups wrote only 50 of the top 5,000 bestselling books during

the 13 weeks to 1st April; in other words, 1%. (*Books For All*, May 2006: 8)³⁰

The “real” degree of inclusion and the growing visibility of works by authors from ethnically diverse backgrounds into the mainstream is still the object of debates as this quotation shows. Some critics claim, in this line, that “Black writers in Britain have been rendered invisible mainly because most of the literature they produce is ushered into a separate canon distinct from the larger body of work produced by white writers” (Walters, 2005: 314). Such comments and figures might contrast with the apparent huge media interest novelists such as Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy or Monica Ali³¹ generate. As I shall point out in the following chapters, the release of their novels was accompanied by considerable critical acclaim. In this light, James Procter states that “accounts of contemporary British fiction since the millennium have been dominated by media coverage of two debut novels: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003)” (2006: 111).

³⁰ *Books For All*’s special report on “Books diversity and your business” has, in turn, been criticised for not offering an accurate depiction of the situation. A *Telegraph* article entitled “Literary Life” denounces the segregation that reviews like this type create. The article goes further to explain how “this meaningless statistic comes from analysis of Nielsen BookScan charts conducted by *The Bookseller*. An accompanying chart of fiction by BME authors [black and minority ethnic groups] reveals that Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* sold 37, 561 copies in this period, Diana Evan’s *26a* 22,553 copies and Vikas Swarup’s *Q and A* 13,142 copies” (*Telegraph* 3/06/2006: n.p.).

³¹ The recent unprecedented impact in children and young adults’ literature of the work of Black female writers such as Malorie Blackman’s *Noughts and Crosses* (2001) or Zizou Corder’s trilogies *LionBoy* (2004) and is also worth mentioning. The name “Zizou Corder” is the pen-name of Louisa Young and Isabel Adomakov Young a white mother and her mixed-race daughter. Together they have co-written the trilogy and a new novel entitled *Lee Raven Boy Thief* (2008).

1.5.b. Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature

Following some of the theses put forward in Kadija Sesay's *Write Black Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature* (2005), I shall argue that the novels under analysis in this Dissertation have to be considered as situated in the continuum from the post-colonial literary production of first-generation immigrant writers in Britain to second-generation integration. Even if that is the case, the problematics that their writings address goes beyond the logic of post-colonialism and at first sight question categories such as "insiders" and "outsiders". The literary production of Monica Ali, Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith, Jackie Kay and Diana Evans differs from that postcolonial tradition in the sense that their position as British-born writers situates them at the core of the British society and its literary production. Nevertheless, their novels, as I shall argue, provide a different, contesting view of this space of the centre.

Their writings, I shall demonstrate, focus more on asserting a space of their own in a society they are also entitled to. However, this space is problematic. It is characterised by ambivalence and an ongoing process of juggling of notions of "belonging" and "exclusion". As Sesay argues in the introduction to her anthology:

[C]an the Black British writers discussed in individual chapters here also be termed as post colonial? I don't think so. They are writers born in Britain, educated in Britain and because of heritage and parentage, their "take" on Britain is viewed through different glasses from those born elsewhere, and possibly raised

and or educated here. ... They are reminded constantly that they are “not of here” even though they believe and feel that they are, so they consider the “hybridity” of themselves and their situation in a way that does not refer to their “alienness” and even a different kind of “otherness” than their “post-colonial” writer peers. (Sesay, 2005: 15-16)

This in-between situation of “belonging” and “non-belonging” where ethnically diverse writers find themselves located has also affected the critical categorisation of their work³². Debates surrounding this issue become even more problematic when the authors reject a consideration of their work in terms of a specific literature. Some authors will easily agree to a classification of their work as “Black British” or “Asian British” (Andrea Levy and Jackie Kay, as I shall discuss in the analysis of their novels), whereas others deny their role as representatives of any community (Monica Ali and Zadie Smith).

In reference to the latter, James Procter states how Zadie Smith “defended herself against the tendency of reviewers to locate her novel in a Black literary tradition, which she felt reduced her to the role of spokesperson on issues of race and ethnicity” (2006: 102). Monica Ali, in turn, in a conversation with Hanif Kureishi that took place in London on 9 November 2007 at the Institute of

³² One significant event marking the problematics of the adequateness of labelling the work by Black authors as “Black British Literature” occurred in the Black British Conference that was held in 1998 at the London Museum when one of the founders of Bogle L’Ouverture (one of the publishing houses set up in the 1960s to publish literary works by Black authors) asked the following question: “Is it not now time for us to do away with the term “Black British Literature”, and simply demand that our writing, that is writing by Blacks in Britain, be called simply ‘British Literature?’” (Quoted in Dawes, 1999: 24).

Contemporary Arts (ICA) after the preview of the film adaptation of *Brick Lane*³³, when asked about the question of representation, refused to accept that her writing of *Brick Lane* derived from any position as representative of a community: “I wrote out of character” she states (Ali, 2007) and went on to declare that:

There is a sort of tyranny of representation. James Baldwin’s phrase is still in force and the irony is that, you know, fiction succeeds to the extent that it is particular, not representative and nobody would dream of it working any other way if it weren’t at [sic] a minority group. So, it’s, it’s, it’s, I don’t know, it’s kind of depressing and I think it’s related to the growth of identity politics. (Ali, 2007)

Such varied positions on the part of ethnically diverse women writers are an indicator of a larger debate that is taking place in contemporary British literature, a debate that could be considered to derive from those raised by Cultural Studies in the 1980s over the question of representation. Kobena Mercer, in this respect, in his article “Black Art and the Burden of Representation” (1990), problematises the status as spokesperson that the Black writer is given in Britain.

This problematics has not only affected Black writers but it has put into question the white writer’s legitimacy to create a non-white persona in their literary works. Novelist Maggie Gee, an “indigenous white writer” (Nasta, 2004: 5), addressed questions of migration and cross-culturalism in her novel *The White Family* (2001). Gee also commented on the question of authenticity that, for her,

³³ Despite campaigns led against the shooting of the film, *Brick Lane*, the movie, directed by Sarah Gavron and produced by Chris Collins, was released in the United Kingdom on 16 November 2007.

was directly related to the politics of representation. Gee explained how there seems to be a questioning in contemporary British literature (one that has had a long history) of the right of an author to adopt identity stances beyond her own identity and location (Gee, 2008: n.p.).

Regardless of the labelling that the novels under analysis might have received, all of them have been very “visible” in contemporary British literature (consider the literary awards received, the huge advertising campaigns and the literary success that accompanied their publication) and have been included in the British literary canon (take as example the fact that they have been incorporated in anthologies of contemporary British literature, such as James F. English’s *A Concise Companion...* [2006]).

So far, the incorporation of the works of ethnically diverse authors into mainstream British literature has been a crucial step in the process of re-defining “Britishness”. As Sarah Lawson Welsh already stated in 1997: “the growing visibility of their own creative and experiential mappings of nation, of the complex state of (un)belonging in Britain, has been central to the problematizing and unsettling of received versions of Britishness as well as in undermining notions of a fixed, unchanging construction of nation” (Welsh, 1997: 52). In this respect, the significance of the critical acclaim received by Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* has also been analysed by Patricia Bastida Rodríguez who has pointed out that the “prominence [of literary works by ethnically diverse writers] is now more than evident and has been highlighted by critics like Roger Bromley, who has called it, using Stuart Hall’s words, ‘the literature of the third scenario’” (Bastida, 2009: 150).

This apparent acceptance and recognition of their work in contemporary British literature should in turn be seen, in many respects, as an outcome of the past struggles for publication that postcolonial and second-generation authors underwent:

Although Zadie Smith took the publishing world by storm on both sides of the Atlantic, few in Britain, will not forget that this was built on several years of writing that came from Black British women, years of building and developing to enable writers of her generation to emerge and move directly into the mainstream. (Sesay, 2005: 17)

Ali's, Levy's, Smith's, Kay's and Evans' work is also directly related to the position they occupy at the "centre" and is inevitably influenced by the literature produced from this perspective: British literature. The ambivalent position in which these British-born, ethnically diverse authors are located is the product of the interaction of these two literary traditions. And the outcome is the fusion of Black and British or Asian and British literature. Tracy Walters theorises this complexity in the works of ethnically diverse writers. In her study of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* as the epitome of the fusion of Black and British Literature she sheds light on the fact that this "hybrid" literature "reform[s] both literatures and prov[es] the two to be mutually exclusive. ... [It creates] a new Black/British text, a story ... that includes the experiences of characters from diverse ethnic backgrounds, whose racial differences actually account for the commonality of their shared experiences and their Britishness" (Walters, 2005: 321).

Ali's, Levy's, Smith's, Kay's and Evans' thematic preoccupations and the ethnically diverse backgrounds of the characters they portray need also, in some respects, be understood in relation to the problematics of postcolonial authors and first-generation immigrant writers, particularly in questions of identity (both cultural and individual). The characters in *Brick Lane*, *Small Island*, *White Teeth*, *Trumpet* and *26a* find themselves in an in-between position where it is imperative to negotiate a new identity.

The novels account for first-generation and second-generation characters that can be analysed as examples of diasporic identities. The notion of diaspora reverberates the image of a journey that is normally materialised in a real displacement but can also be associated with a cultural and psychic one (Brah, 1996). First-generation characters in the novels under analysis suffer an undeniable diasporic experience: they undergo physical dislocation when they leave their countries of origin to come to Britain. Second-generation ones might not have undertaken a diasporic journey but due to the fact that they inhabit a border space, a hybrid space, a third space (Bhabha, 1990), they are also located in a "diaspora space" which can be defined as "multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries" (Brah, 1996: 194).

My contention in the following chapters of this Dissertation is that the identity search undergone by the characters presented in the novels by Ali, Smith, Kay, Levy and Evans and the social spaces they are made to inhabit are characterised by hybridity and negotiation. The fluid identities and the contested spaces presented in the literary corpus of this Dissertation are the result of an enriching process of hybridisation. Hybridity is in this sense defined as something

productive, as a means of questioning culture as a stable entity that confers a homogeneous identity (Bhabha, 1994).

As Carolina Fernández Rodríguez has pointed out, the use of the term “hybridity”, or the phrase “cultural hybridity”, has created debates in the field of Cultural Studies. Other theorists such as J. O. Ifekwunigwe, as Fernández Rodríguez argues, have rejected these phrases in favour of “cultural *métissage*” to account for the experiences of “individuals who ... embody two or more world views or, in genealogical terms, descent groups” (Fernández Rodríguez, 2003: 67). Nonetheless, as Fernández Rodríguez also argues, the term hybridity has been very convenient as “a destabilizing concept that constantly forces us to question all preconceived notions, such as, for example, those of ‘cultural purity’ and ‘unified national identities’” (Fernández Rodríguez, 2003: 68).

This possibility of change that hybridity offers entails a notion of cultures that, in the same way as the concepts of identity and space, are defined as malleable and not static. Cultures “are fluid and temporary social constructions, made and remade over time” (McDowell, 1997: 210) and they are in a process of formation that involves “the remapping of cultural identities and practices for *all* those involved” (McDowell, 1997: 210; emphasis in the original).

In his “proposal for a workshop-seminar-conference [that focused] on current innovations in British academia and the arts” entitled, “Reinventing Britain” (1997), Homi Bhabha clearly stated the hybrid aspect of contemporary British society and how this entails a change in the process of cultural articulation that is bringing about cultural transformation³⁴. In this light, the Parekh Report on

³⁴ In an interview that was transmitted by BBC radio 3 programme “Night Waves” regarding the above-mentioned proposal, Susheila Nasta has pointed out that the acceptance of hybridity and the

The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain published on 11 October 2000 identified some of the factors that were central in the changing of Britain over the last thirty years and that contributed to the creation of a sense of a more diverse and less homogeneous British society. The report pinpointed the need to redefine “current norms of Britishness” and denounced how “a sense of national identity is based on generalisations and involves a selective and simplified account of a complex history. Much that is ignored, disavowed or simply forgotten” (Parekh 2000: 16, quoted in Weedon, 2004: 30).

Literary works produced by ethnically diverse women writers such as the ones under study in this Dissertation participate in this process of cultural re-definition and by inscribing the history of part of British society that has not been widely dealt with in literature (as is the case of Andrea Levy’s account of Caribbean female experiences of immigration and settlement in Britain in *Small Island*) they interrogate official accounts of British history. These novels portray a multicultural space where a homogenous cultural identity is questioned throughout. In Bhabha’s terms such literary works show how “culture is less about expressing a pre-given identity (whether the source is national culture or ‘ethnic’ culture) and more about the activity of negotiating, regulating and authorising competing, often conflicting demands for collective self-representation” (Bhabha, 1997: n.p.). These literary works, by presenting a dynamic representation of spaces in British society stress hybridity and, therefore, celebrate the “third space”. Following Bhabha’s thesis:

questioning of cultural homogeneity in British society has been very much resisted: “¿cómo es que aceptamos la naturaleza de la modernidad como algo “híbrido” en muchas ex-colonias británicas, mientras que Gran Bretaña se mantiene como la “última colonia”, por decirlo así, en modificar su visión, como la más reacia a permitir una revisión de su propia imagen? (Bhabha and Nasta, 2000-2001: 33; Trad. Fernando Galván).

The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original movements from which the third emerges, rather hybridity... is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to a something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (1990: 211)

Bhabha’s thesis and the deconstructive idea conferred by the term “hybridity” lie precisely behind my contention that the novels under analysis subvert an ethnically homogeneous view of contemporary British culture and society. The novels undermine traditional configurations of social space by questioning gender, class and racial social divisions. The novels under analysis are literary works by authors who belong to Britain in every respect, yet they are using fiction as a way of representing a hybrid reality that for them is not extraordinary or marginal but part of their ordinary life. They are writing about what they know, what they experience and what they feel as ethnically diverse British citizens, and their novels echo this diversity. Their experience is to be British in a multicultural location where identity is fluid.

Identity and its performative character become an issue once the idea of belonging to a place, that is, the connection between space and self is broken: “the thought of ‘having an identity’ will not occur to people as long as ‘belonging’ remains their fate” (Bauman, 2004: 12). Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman draws

attention to the fact that “the problem of identity” is a modern phenomenon in that it is brought about by the disassociation of the concept of birth and nation as a once single cause-effect factor (Bauman, 2004: 24). For Bauman we are all living in “liquid modernity” characterised by a lack of stability and radical change. In such a life setting, “identities are perhaps the most common, most acute, most deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence” (32).

Ethnically diverse authors born in Britain experience this disassociation and this ambivalence even more since they occupy an in-between space where traditional cultural representations of Britain fail to encompass their “hybrid” identity. In some respects, following Bauman’s postulates, their identity status has to be seen as located in a continuum of opposed forces of belonging and exclusion, communitarism and individualism (77). They have had for a long period of time in the history of Britain an “underclass identity” which is the identity left to those without the power to define their identity; they “are cast outside the social space in which identities are sought, chosen, constructed, evaluated, confirmed or refuted” (Bauman, 2004: 39).

Thus, having access to the spaces of representation that literature bestows allows ethnically diverse female writers such as the ones under analysis to deal with the daily experiences of “hybrid” individuals and redefine social spaces that acknowledge their hybrid identity. Hybridity, in this sense, and as noticed by Isabel Carrera Suárez in her article on Canadian women writers (2002), becomes “a hegemonic strategy” that sets the grounds for resistance and is mediated by context: “All strategies of resistance, of feminism and ‘multiculturalism’, all interpretations of the ‘hyphen’ continue to coexist, in Canada as elsewhere, but

there seems to be a gradual move towards less essentialist more strategically submitted propositions: an emphasis on location as a mediating factor, and on the compatibility and the interaction of various aspects of identity” (Carrera Suárez, 2002: 31).

The novels under analysis are contextualised in the multicultural city of London. Ali’s, Smith’s, Levy’s, Kay’s and Evans’ characters problematise, at different levels, the space in which they are located and the relations they establish in that space: with their parents (*White Teeth*), with their peers (*Brick Lane, 26a*), with the nation in which they are located (*Small Island*), with their sexed and body identity (*Trumpet*). Moreover, I shall understand space as a geographical location as well as a set of social relations following feminist geographer Doreen Massey’s ideas (1994, 2005). This view of space is very productive in the study of the literary representation of the multiplicity of heterogeneous spaces that are found in contemporary multicultural societies. The spatial dimension is an important factor in a multicultural society because in such a setting spaces are in an ongoing process of negotiation and change. And as Massey argues, recognising the existence of alternative spaces entails the acknowledgment of plurality itself:

The argument is that the very possibility of any serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity itself depends on a recognition of spatiality. The political corollary is that a genuine, thorough, spatialisation of social theory and political thinking can force into the imagination a fuller recognition of

the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell. (2005: 11)

This idea highlights the fluid nature of space and is central to a spatial reading of Ali's, Levy's, Smith's, Kay's and Evan's novels. As I shall argue, all the novels depict a series of characters interacting within spaces that are permanently contested. Hybridity is not only found in the diverse ethnic origin of the characters the novels portray, but also in the representations of the spatial loci where the characters interact. The novels celebrate the "third space" by presenting a dynamic representation of space in contemporary British society.

CHAPTER 2. FINDING ONE'S OWN SPACE IN A NEWLY EMERGING SOCIETY: ANDREA LEVY'S *SMALL ISLAND* (2004)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the social changes that took place in Britain in the aftermath of the Second World War, as they are portrayed in Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004). The chapter concentrates on the impact that the war, together with the immigration and settlement of members coming from different parts of the Empire, had on the spatial configuration of the city of London. The war disrupted the previous social order and, therefore, the novel deals with characters that were radically displaced and forced to redefine their relation with the spaces they moved in.

In this sense, the chapter examines how social space is depicted, drawing on the notion that space is a social construct and that it is in a continuous process of formation and modification (Lefebvre, 2005; Valentine, 2001; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1997), which is taken from social and geographical studies. Within this understanding of space, the chapter covers three different levels on which the relation body-identity-space (Keith and Pile, 1993) operates. These three levels are individual space, the space of the family, and the nation as a space.

The Second World War is the main historical event that functions as the background against which the plot of the novel develops. This event disrupted and

challenged the traditional social order. The previous organization of society and its division in terms of class and gender were subverted by the need to mobilize the whole population to work in the war effort. The traditional dual division of space into spheres of production (public) and reproduction³⁵ (private) and its association with men and women respectively was confronted by the fact that women had to take over the job vacancies left behind by men who enrolled as soldiers in order to keep the economy going. The war affected the racial organization of society as well since subjects of the Empire were coming as workers or to incorporate themselves as soldiers in the British army and their presence in Britain became part of everyday life.

This exceptional situation thus offered alternative and subversive spatial configurations of society. This period of social upheaval was followed by a need to negotiate readjustments in the body-identity-space relation. Accordingly, the chapter examines the way in which the characters, with special focus on the female ones, find a space of their own in the newly emerging spatial and social order of the city of London.

³⁵ This distinction is sensitive to class differences, being more evident in middle- and upper-class households, and overlapping in the lower classes where the need to earn a living forced women to work outside the house as well.

2.2 ANDREA LEVY'S CAREER AND HER RECOGNITION IN BRITISH CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Andrea Levy's novel forms part of the latest best-sellers in British contemporary writing. Like in the case of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2001) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Levy's novel entered with strength into the British contemporary literary panorama. *Small Island* was greatly acclaimed by the public and obtained critical recognition by winning two of the United Kingdom's most prestigious literary awards. *Small Island* was awarded the Orange Prize for Fiction in June 2004, as well as the Whitbread Award and Levy was the first author "to carry off the double in the same 12 months" (Ezard and Ward, 2005). Levy won the Whitbread Award (since 2006 called the Costa Book Awards) in both the categories of "novel award" and "book of the year". Together with these two important literary prizes, the novel also received The Commonwealth Writers' Prize³⁶ in 2005.

Despite the recognition that Levy obtained for *Small Island*, she had to struggle throughout her literary career with a great deal of discrimination due to what she described as a shortage in Black female writer predecessors. As she herself denounces, she had to face the difficulties of getting published because editors thought she would only be read by a Black readership and that meant "less than a million people and they don't read anyway" (Allardice, 2005: n.p.). Before

³⁶ This prize is organized and founded by the Commonwealth Foundation and its aim is to encourage new Commonwealth fiction and ensure that works of merit reach a wider audience outside their country of origin. It covers the Commonwealth regions of Europe, Africa, South and South East Asia, the Caribbean, Canada and the South Pacific. Zadie Smith was the "Best First Book" winner of this prize in 2001 for her widely-acclaimed novel *White Teeth*.

Small Island Levy wrote *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) but although these novels were critically acclaimed, they were not so widely read. In fact, there are some novelists such as Maggie O'Farrell that complained about Levy's lack of recognition in the public opinion: "I remember feeling frustrated when everyone fell over Zadie Smith. I kept thinking, why hasn't Andrea got the attention? She's been doing this for years" (Allardice, 2005: n.p.).

In fact, Monica Ali and Zadie Smith were acclaimed, as I shall explain in chapter 3 and chapter 4 of this Dissertation, for putting into the spotlight the lives and experiences of hyphenated British citizenships. Yet, in her first novel of 1994 Levy had already dealt with what it meant to have a Black-British identity in the United Kingdom. From the very beginning of her literary career, Levy's intention was to contribute to an increase in the number of novelists who write about the experience of being Black and British at the same time. Levy began writing in 1988 when she attended a writing course at the City Literary Institute (Brace, 2004, n.p.). From the very beginning Levy's aim was to account for the experiences of those people whose hybrid identity was the direct result of British imperialism. As she herself claims, she is "a bastard child of the empire" (Allardice, 2005, n.p.). By saying so, she puts herself in a political stanza by which she denounces the notion of British citizenship. Levy uses the adjective "bastard" to highlight the hierarchical organization of British society and the differences existing in equality between Black citizenships and white ones (Solomos, 1993).

In fact, Levy claims that she is interested in writing about the fact of being Black and how Black identity is conformed, understood and negotiated in Britain: “‘Black British identity is what interests me’, she has said. ‘I write about what I understand. What I know’” (Allardice, 2005, n.p.). Levy takes her own experience of being the daughter of first-generation immigrants who came to England in 1948 as the starting point of her writing. For Levy writing is something personal for she began to write after her father’s death: “My dad dying was the impetus. He died in 1987, and I think I just wanted to make him visible, record something of his life, and also the experience that we’d gone through with it” (Fischer, 2005: 362).

Levy is aware that her work is the result of her “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1997), which she claims that far from being restrictive, it allows her to understand humanity:

I call myself a black woman writer because “black” and “woman” are the two lenses through which I explore myself and the rest of my fellow human beings. But sometimes if you use that term, other, often younger, black writers consider it to be a kind of ghettoisation. For me, it is just the opposite – it gives me a pathway into the great stream of human history. I have within my grasp Hamlet’s “uncover’d country”, which is not death but another way of writing about life. Black women and our lives is the story that I mine over and over again, in different media and in different ways. To me, every good writer is really only telling one story. (Greer, 2004: n.p.)

Levy's purpose is, thus, to re/inscribe the history of Black-British people, of ordinary men and women, and bring it to light. Another of her aims was to fill the gap in British literature for successful Black writers: "she had reached the point where she needed to read her own story, place her life and the lives of people like her into the canon" (Greer, 2004, n.p.)

Small Island is the most political of all Levy's novels. It took her four years to write and she had to conduct quite a lot of historical research. It is also the most autobiographical one since Levy takes the experiences of her parents' coming to London as a source of inspiration and knowledge for her novel. It should be also born in mind that the same autobiographical data is to be found in Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), in which the parents of the family share features with the characters of Gilbert and Hortense Joseph in the novel under analysis and come from the same real original background than Levy's parents. The connection between the characters of Gilbert and Hortense Joseph and Levy's parents is clearly expressed in the following quotation: "My dad was from Jamaica – born and bred. He came to this country in 1948 on the *Empire Windrush* ship. My mum joined him six months later in his one room in Earl's Court" (Levy, 1994: 3).

2.3 THE NOVEL'S PLOT AND STRUCTURE: PLAYING WITH SPACE AND TIME

The novel tells the story of the changes undertaken in British society during the Second World War and its aftermath. Levy concentrates on the lives of two couples, one white and the other Black, creating a duality in the narrative. The novel recounts the particular story of these two couples but at the same time the events in which they are involved can be extrapolated to account for the general experiences of both British citizens and Black British subjects.

The novel deals with the social circumstances of a country that was in a state of change and upheaval. Society had been broken by the war and was beginning to face massive social changes, not least with the coming of immigrants from the colonies. Over the first two decades of the 20th century western societies experienced a rapid transformation in relation to the economic and social infrastructure. A remarkable issue in the case of Britain is the coming and settling down of ethnic and racial minorities. This social and cultural transformation has to be analysed in relation to political and economic post-war changes (Solomos, 1993: 8).

In the years after the Second War World a newly multicultural British society emerged. Race began to be established as a field of analysis in sociological studies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These early studies such as Ruth Benedict's *Race and Racism* (1943) or John Rex's *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (1970) concentrated on the patterns of immigration and the relation between these "Black" immigrants and the British "white" population.

They drew on prevailing colonial stereotypes and sought to account for the new social situation.

In this sense, Levy focuses her novel on two important historical events related to the colonial history of Britain that mark a difference in the general attitudes that are to be found within a single generation in society towards colonialism and its consequences. There is a movement from a colonial Britain in which the boundaries between the "I" and the "other" were clearly demarcated to a society that has to negotiate the coexistence of different British "identities" within its national boundaries. One of the ways in which the characters in the novel are forced to re-adjust themselves to the new situation is the emergence of a racial consciousness within Britain. The "other" is now part of the national imagery. This social reality affects both the "immigrant" and the "native" population. On the former dawns the shocking fact that they are excluded from the notion of British citizenship and the latter faces the encounter with the "other" in their own national space.

To draw this distinction in the way social space develops and changes throughout time, Levy opens her novel with a depiction of present and past spatial social reality. Levy starts the novel with an epilogue which includes an account, by a "native" white woman (Queenie), of the Empire Exhibition that took place in 1924. She follows her narrative with the encounter of a Black woman (Hortense) with the "Mother Country". The first passage describes the encounter of the white female protagonist, Queenie, with the "other": Black people in a well-defined, controlled and bounded space, ie: the Empire Exhibition. The chapter following this epilogue shows, however, a drastic change in social space since the

protagonist is now Black (Hortense) and the “objects” of her gaze are the white population she sees when she gets off the ship that has brought her from Jamaica. There is thus a reversal of the dichotomy “I”/“other”.

The novel starts with the description of the Empire Exhibition, a colonial exhibition held at Wembley in London in 1924 and 1925. The Exhibition reproduced the entire Empire in a small place:

The Empire in little. The palace of engineering, the palace of industry, and building after building that housed every country we British owned. Some of them were grand like castles, some had funny pointed roofs and one, I was sure, had half an onion on the top. Practically the whole world to be looked at. (3)

It can be analysed as a question of mapping space, of representing space and, in such practice, the exercise of power is implicit. The colonized territories of the British Empire are displayed as “objects” for the British population to look at at the exhibition. They are constructed as the “other”. This is particularly evident in the novel by the attitudes of the people who visit the exhibition. One example of this is the organized trip that takes Queenie’s family and her father’s professional association of butchers to the Exhibition. The different populations that are members of the Empire are viewed with both admiration and fear. This depiction of the attitudes of the people who come to see the event can be analysed in the light of postcolonial theories such as those of ambivalence and mimicry (Bhabha: 1990). This is made explicit in Queenie’s reaction when she has her first encounter with the “Other” inside British territory. Queenie’s reaction continues to perpetuate and sustain dual stereotypes. These stereotypes are central to the

construction of the colonized and the colonizer's identity (Said, 1978). Queenie's description of the first Black man she encounters draws upon the negative construction of the Black body:

A monkey man sweating a smell of mothballs. Blacker than when you smudge your face with a sooty cork. The droplets of sweat on his forehead glistened and shone like jewels. His lips were brown, not pink like they should be, and they bulged with air like bicycle tyres. His hair was woolly as a black shorn sheep. His nose, squashed flat, had two nostrils big as train tunnels. And he was looking down at me. ... He could have swallowed me up, this big nigger man. But instead he said, in clear English, 'Perhaps we could shake hands instead?' ... And I shook an African man's hand. It was warm and slightly sweaty like anyone else's. (6)

This is all told from the perspective of Queenie when she is still a child and this fact helps to account for the adults' lack of knowledge of other cultures and other countries that were part of the Empire. It is a humorous beginning but at the same part it has deeply sad connotations if the many negative implications of the history of colonization are taken into consideration: domination, power, the existence of racial hierarchies in society and the notion of "us" versus "others". The description of the Wembley Exhibition is narrated using irony since it is told from the perspective of a child who is therefore allowed to be naïve and ignorant of the above-mentioned political and social issues:

I thought I'd been to Africa. Told all my class I had ... 'I went to Africa when it came to Wembley'. It was then that Early Bird informed me that Africa was a country. 'You're not usually a silly girl, Queenie Buxton', she went on, 'but you did not go to Africa, you merely went to the British Empire Exhibition, as thousands of others did'. (1)

Queenie's account reiterates the same opinions and views that the first colonisers had when they went to those lands. The whole passage reminds the reader of the idea of the "savage native" who is unable to speak, does not wear clothes and is portrayed as evil. An example of the ignorance on the part of the British population can be seen in the reaction that Queenie's mother has towards the Hindi women who "had red dots in the middle of their forehead. No one could tell me what the dots were for. 'Go and ask one of them', Emily said to me. But Mother said I shouldn't in case the dots meant they were ill – in case they were contagious" (4-5).

The other important historical event depicted in the novel, apart from the above-mentioned Wembley Exhibition, is the arrival of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury on the 22nd of June 1948. This is an important moment in British history because the ship brought to London around 400 subjects from the Caribbean: "The *Empire Windrush*, sailing on 28 May. The cost of the passage on this retired troop-ship was only twenty-eight pounds and ten shillings" (99). By making an explicit reference to the exact price people from the Caribbean had to pay in order to leave behind their "small island" and travel to the apparently "large" land of the Mother Country and by pointing out that the means of transport was a "retired

troop-ship", Levy implicitly shows how immigration to Britain was relatively easy, if not stately sanctioned, in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War.

The docking of the *Empire Windrush* is considered to mark the beginning of mass West Indian immigration to Britain although Black communities had already been present in England since the 18th century. Even though the Black population was small at the beginning of the 20th century, this issue began to play an important role in the politics of immigration because of the supposed social problems that it created.

Therefore, the novel deals with a turning point in the development of British social identity in which both "white" and "Black" British citizens had to find their place in a new social environment. This is probably the intention behind the use in the novel of a double group of characters: Queenie and Bernard, and Gilbert and Hortense. This duality that the novel establishes in terms of characters suggests that immigration is a two-way process which affects the lives of those who emigrate as much as the lives of the native population. In this respect, the novel offers a plural view of immigration by dealing with the point of view of both groups: "Gilbert and Hortense must come to terms with their place in London that is a long way from their expectations; and Queenie and Bernard, too, must make painful adjustments to the new society that is being created" (Page, 2003: n.p.).

Structurally speaking, *Small Island* consists of a prologue, where Queenie's attendance at the British Empire Exhibition is described, and fifty-nine chapters organized by reference to the categories of time and space. On a first

level, Levy makes use of both abstract and concrete references to time: "1948" (the present time in the novel) and "Before" (encompassing the previous period). As subheadings, Levy introduces the names of the characters. The plot is not linear since the events narrated fluctuate between flashbacks and flash-forwards that account for different events.

In my opinion, the fact that the novel is structured using the two categories of time and space contributes to the intention of providing a wider vision of what the social circumstances were at the time. The years work as a reference of time while each character's name accounts for a particular understanding of the historical moment that is at stake. This use of more than one narrative voice and the lack of one single omniscient narrator highlight the inappropriateness of the view of a historical fact as a coherent and objective occurrence. Every character narrates the story in first person forcing the reader to enter into each character's understanding of the social circumstances they are living in so as to comprehend the characters' politics of location (Keith and Pile, 1993). It has been argued that the body is the primary space, the primary location of one's identity. The body establishes the boundaries between the duality "self" and "other" and therefore, the body is a space, a personal space (Grosz, 1995).

As Levy uses characters' names and dates to segment her novel, the idea that space is not fixed or dead but is performative and interactive is also emphasised. The idea that space is performative and interactive and that individuals create a sense of space according to the set of relations they are able to conform to is stressed by the fact that the novel uses the characters' daily lives as a way of accounting for experiences of the war and post-war historical events

taking place in London. The narratives of all the characters need to be put together by the reader as a sort of jigsaw in order to create a vision of the situation as a whole. This use of the gamut of individual perspectives and feelings in order to narrate the story can be related to the view of space as a set of social relations (Massey, 1994). Moreover, it highlights the idea that each person has her own situated knowledge (Haraway, 1998). In this way, Levy is able to depict the tension and social conflicts that occur at that particular historical moment and by means of this complex, non-linear structure the sense of disruption, change, chaos and multiplicity of events is also transferred to the narrative structure.

2.4 INDIVIDUAL SPACE: RACIALISED BODIES

The body is a space. For Adrienne Rich, the body is “the geography closest in” (Valentine, 2001: 23). The body is the location from which individuals create links with and to the outside world. In the body our identity and our history is inscribed (Grosz, 1992). Race is a factor in the construction of bodily differences. Western thought has been characterised by the tendency to create a hierarchy of bodies based on racial differences and to use this principle to organise society and create social divisions that are transformed historically according to the needs of the particular social circumstances (Payne, 2000). The Black body has been defined and constructed in opposition to the white one and the discourse of colonialism has played a crucial role in this respect (Valentine, 2001: 18).

The importance of race is highlighted throughout the novel. It is especially relevant in the case of Hortense. Her “light” colour determines her future possibilities and marks her destiny by allowing her to be educated in a more prosperous environment than her mother, Alberta, could offer. Alberta is described as clearly a subaltern individual with no possibilities of betterment:

Alberta was a country girl who could neither read nor write nor perform even the rudiments of her times tables. I was born to her out of wedlock – it would be wrong to say otherwise. But it was she who gave birth to me in a wooden hut. And it was she who bought me shoes for the journey I was to take holding the hand of her mother, Miss Jewel. I grew to look as my father did. My

complexion was as light as his; the colour of warm honey. It was not the bitter chocolate hue of Alberta and her mother. *With such a countenance there was a chance of a golden life for I.* What, after all, could Alberta give? Bare black feet skipping over stones. If I was given to my father's cousins for upbringing, I could learn to read and write and perform all my times tables. And more, I could become a lady worthy of my father, wherever he might be. (38)

Hortense's origins are described in fairly negative terms. She is an illegitimate child born to an illiterate woman whose skin colour is very dark: "bitter chocolate". In this passage, skin colour becomes the factor by which social improvement can be achieved. Thus, class distinction is inscribed in space (Lefebvre, 2005; Soja, 1989; Harvey, 1989). The "wooden hut" where Hortense was born is a space of misery and poverty (her mother does not even wear shoes) that contrasts with the prospect of being given an education by her father's well-off side of the family.

However, Hortense's "golden future" is soon proved to be feeble and unstable. When Hortense leaves home to go to Kingston to train as a teacher she receives the first hint of what her life is going to be like. Hortense is highly offended by the fact that Mr Philip and Miss Ma do not show much concern about her departure. She feels that she is being thrown away. She has to leave the security of home in a little village to immerse into the open space of a big city such as Kingston and this creates anxiety in Hortense. She feels dehumanized by

this process. She ceases to be the “protected girl” of the house to become “someone else” in the social structure:

Mr Philip and Miss Ma had taken no more notice of my leaving the homestead than if I were a piece of their livestock whose time had come to be sent for slaughter. ... Those diligent years of my upbringing – feeding me with the food from their plates, dressing me in frocks made of cotton and lace, teaching me English manners and Christian discipline – were they to mean no more than the fattening of a chicken on best coconut, which, after they had feasted on its carcass, stripping it of all goodness, they threw out as waste? (61)

At this point in the narrative, there is a move back towards her origins. Hortense goes back to her real roots since it is only her grandmother, Miss Jewel, whom she has always seen as a mere servant and whom she has treated with some disdain, who shows any sign of affection towards her. Miss Jewel hands Hortense a tiny parcel containing “one well folded note and two shiny shillings tied in a white handkerchief that had been stitched unevenly, with my initials in blue and red. ‘You nah need a likkle spell, me sprigadee. De Lawd haffe tek care a yuh’ [sic], was all she said” (62).

Hortense continues to have grand thoughts about herself, and she expects to find a job in the best English school in Kingston. However, she encounters the first instance of racial discrimination. Whereas in her hometown she was used to being considered a privileged woman who looked down on people from a lower

social class such as her students, she is now *déclassée* because of her illegitimate social origin:

My dream was and always had been that I should find employment teaching at the Church of England school in Kingston, for it was there that light-skinned girls in pristine uniforms gathered to drink from the fountain of an English curriculum. ... The headmaster unwittingly shook his head as he asked me of my mother, my grandmother. His conclusion – although no word on the matter passed between us – was that my breeding was not legitimate enough for him to consider me worthy of standing in their elegant classrooms before their high-class girls. (86)

Gilbert also suffers discrimination because of his colour. However, in his case the notion that race and racism are not a static phenomenon but a cultural product is more evident. The way in which people approach him varies throughout the novel making evident how racism is produced and reproduced through social and political discourse (Solomos, 1993; Alexander and Knowles, 2005), as well as institutions such as, in this case, the army. Gilbert forms part of a group of Caribbean men going to fight in Britain during the war. He joined the West Indian RAF volunteers.

The novel shows how at the same historical moment racialised bodies are constructed in two different ways in two different countries: the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Gilbert's regiment is taken to Virginia in the United States and it is here that he realises how race is a social construct. Levy

uses irony together with a comic tone in the narration when Gilbert sees America as a “paradise” (126) in comparison to England. He is amazed at the facilities and food at the military camp: “our bellies full, looking forward to a few days in the land of the free” (127). However, America is everything but the land of the free for Black people, since the privileges that the Black British soldiers are given operate only in the reduced space of the military camp and do not work in the outer social space. The social discrimination of Black citizens in America is portrayed, as well, in the attitude and reactions among the American villagers (137).

Gilbert soon discovers how he, as a subject of the British Empire, is treated with higher respect than the African-American soldiers. While in the American army segregation or Jim Crow is the rule, Black British soldiers are given privileges from which the African-American soldiers are excluded:

Now, from what I could understand, this American officer with the angular head was telling us that we West Indians, being subjects of His Majesty King George VI, had, for the time being, superior black skin. We were allowed to live with white soldiers, while the inferior American negro was not. I was perplexed. (131)

Levy emphasizes the nonsense of the racial situation in the army by describing a rather comical episode in which Gilbert is sent to the US base to retrieve shock absorbers. His being Black poses a great problem in the “racially sensitive” organisation of the American army. The whole episode is ironically humorous since the American officers and soldiers are unable to cope with the

presence of a Black man. Gilbert's attitude towards the whole situation is one of astonishment: "the tale I would take back? The day a mild-mannered Jamaican man caused the US Army to riot" (154). He is addressed as a "nigger" and "Black". However, Gilbert is more concerned with the fact that he is called a plain soldier than with the evident racial discrimination: "But funny thing is, not one of those aspersions caused me so much outrage as the word "soldier"! I am not a soldier, I am an airman" (151). The emphasis on this issue indicates Gilbert's concern with professional status rather than racial one. Gilbert shows a lack of racial consciousness at this point of the novel. However, as it will be commented on, he acquires a racial consciousness mainly by being racialised through a series of racist experiences and especially when he goes back to London after the war.

In Britain during the war Gilbert encounters practices of spatial racial segregation when he goes to the cinema with Queenie and Queenie's father-in-law, Arthur (183). However, these instances of spatial racial segregation were not legally sanctioned as in the case of the United States. This episode marks a turning point in the novel because it provokes a riot in which Arthur is shot dead: "Arthur Bligh had become another casualty of war – but come, tell me, someone... which war?" (193). The rhetorical question posed in this quotation dwells on the social divisions in society between "insiders" and "outsiders", between "white" versus "Black". It also shows the inadequacy of British society in coping with the presence of immigrants, as well as the public debates that arose with the coming of Black immigrants.

The opinions expressed by the characters in the novel show how society is trying to adjust to a new situation and how opposite views on the matter are part

of the general trend. In 1958 there were important race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill when attacks on Black people were carried out by whites. The seeds for racial conflicts were planted. The outcome was a public debate. Especially remarkable was the debate originated after the Act of 1962:

Public debate about the Act reflected a variety of views and was by no means all in favour of it. In fact, a number of lead articles in the press during 1961-2, along with sections of the Labour Party, expressed opposition to the racist thinking behind the Act. (Solomos, 1993: 64)

Racist views towards immigration are well described in the novel as a post-war rather than a war phenomenon. Even if Gilbert faces discrimination during his period as a member of the Royal Air Force, the racist attitudes come mainly, as has been pointed out, from the American soldiers who see the cohabitation of Black and white British soldiers as a threat to the American segregationist system.

In post-war London, Queenie faces disapproval in her neighbourhood for having Caribbean members of the Empire as lodgers. The character of Mr Todd, Queenie's neighbour, is particularly noticeable in this respect. Mr Todd exemplifies the mainstream attitude that the indigenous population had towards the settlement of Caribbean immigrants in Britain after the war; they were seen as a menace towards the British country and identity. Mr Todd maintains that Black immigrants came to the country "for the teeth and glasses" (111):

That was the reason so many coloured people were coming to this country, according to my next-door neighbour Mr Todd. “That National Health Service – it’s pulling them in, Mrs Bligh. Giving things away at our expense will keep them coming”, he said. He might have had a point except, according to him, they were all cross-eyed and goofy before they got here. (111)

Mr Todd shows his total disdain towards the presence of Black people with utterances such as: “Darkies! I’d taken in darkies next door to him. But not just me. There were others living around the square. A few more up the road a bit. His concern, he said, was that they would turn the area into a jungle” (113). Mr Todd blames government policy towards immigration and sees Black immigrants as a menace that is taking over the whole country: ““But these darkies bring down a neighbourhood, Mrs Bligh. The government should never have let them in. We’ll have a devil of a time getting rid of them now’, he said” (117). The idea that the immigrants are “swamping” the country (436) became an important part of the public debate on immigration in Britain.

However, what was being ignored was the fact that some of the newcomers were former soldiers from the Second World War who had fought for a country they thought they belonged to. In this respect, Elwood’s comments are proved to be right. He is Gilbert’s cousin and he tries to deter Gilbert from joining the British army during the war. He predicts that the outcome of the war will have little effect on the lives of the Caribbean people in Jamaica. The scenario he depicts is one of immobility and stasis in the social organisation in which colonial

racial prerogatives of white domination remain operant in Jamaica, and as Gilbert experiences, also in the “mother country”:

Perhaps my cousin Elwood was right. “Man, this is a white man’s war. Why you wanna lose your life for a white man? For Jamaica, yes. To have your own country, yes. That is worth a fight. To see black skin in the governor’s house doing more than just serving at the table and sweeping the floor. A black man at Tate and Lyle doing more than just cutting cane. That is worth a fight. I join you then, man. But you think winning this war going to change anything for me and you?” (129)

In fact, daily life in London shows how the polycultural character of the city in the post Second World War years is characterised by the fact that Caribbean people are within but not part of the city of London. Their rights of citizenship and tenure are continuously put into question (McLeod, 2004). Gilbert has great difficulties in finding a job in London after the war. He came to London with the idea of prosperity. He believes that the privileges that he enjoyed during the war as a member of the RAF will open the door to him for a golden future in London. However, he faces situations of discrimination (312) and only after searching for a long period of time does he get a job in the Post Office that allows him to earn a living and start anew with Hortense.

Thus, Black immigrants suffered racial discrimination together with the common drudgeries of struggling for survival in a post-war environment. There was a great deal of ignorance on the part of the “native population”. Many British people held the view of Black people as primitive and dirty and these negative

stereotypes permeated social discourse at the time. As Levy also shows in many instances throughout the novel (2, 138, 165) this idea of their primitive manners went hand in hand with the fact that: “a question that was posed to many black people in this period was whether they had lived in trees in Africa, and whether they had tails, a question addressed to migrants from the Caribbean as well as Africa” (Webster, 1998: 103).

The novel also highlights some counter-examples to these views. One of the most important ones for the positive consequences that it has on Gilbert is the passage in the novel when he receives a gesture of tenderness and love from a woman at night in the street. At the moment this event takes place, he is totally devastated after having faced social rejection at work and having had a quarrel with Hortense. The encounter with the white woman in the street and the tenderness she shows him gives him strength to go on and makes him believe in the goodness that can be found in humanity. There is still hope in British society, not everybody shows contempt towards the newcomers:

How long did I stare at that sweet in my hand? Fool that I am, I took a handkerchief from my pocket to wrap it. I had no intention of eating that precious candy. For it was a salvation to me – not for the sugar but for the act of kindness. The human tenderness with which it was given to me. I had become hungry for the good in people. Beholden to any tender heart. All we boys were in this thankless place. When we find it, we keep it. A simple gesture, a friendly word, a touch, a sticky sweet rescued

me as sure as if that Englishwoman had pulled me from drowning in the sea. (328)

The fact that this white woman approaches Gilbert directly in the street is not only an act of tenderness but and act of subversion and rebellion. The view of a white woman establishing any type of relationship with a Black man was constructed by the racial social discourse of the time as an abomination. Social racial discourse operated at the level of sexuality and this was fuelled by the fear of sexual intercourse between “white” and “Black” people. This fear of miscegenation was given a central role in the race discourse and at the time there was a fear that the intercourse between a “Black” man and a “white” woman would produce kids who would inherit the worst of both races (Webster, 1998).

The fear of miscegenation went hand in hand with the construction of Black masculinity as an element to control. Black masculinity posed a threat to white masculinity and Levy makes this explicit in the novel in her narration of the reactions of a group of white American soldiers when Gilbert enters a little tea-shop with Queenie in a town in Lincolnshire. Levy depicts an instance of masculine sexual jealousy in which the group of white American soldiers that are seated in a nearby table is enraged at the view of a Black man with a white woman. Queenie is unable to acknowledge the racist attitude of the waitress and the jealousy of the soldiers because, as Gilbert explains: “but for her, of course, there was nothing menacing that she could see in this room” (179). The menace is Gilbert’s sexuality in itself. Black sexuality and masculinity is seen by American soldiers as a threat to Queenie’s white sexuality.

Levy addresses both the issues of Black sexuality and miscegenation in her novel. The novel depicts two instances of sexual intercourse between a “Black” man and a “white” woman. The first takes place in Jamaica between Michael Roberts and Mrs Ryder (56-57) and the second one occurs in London between Michael Roberts and Queenie (301). In both cases white men’s masculinity is placed in a position of inferiority compared to Michael’s Black one. In the first case, after narrating the sexual intercourse between Michael and Mrs Ryder – that is symbolically represented as particularly passionate and wild since it takes place during a storm – Mrs Ryder’s husband is found dead in a fairly dehumanised way: “He was naked, his clothes torn apart from him by the storm ... And around him his butchered insides leaked like a posy of crimson flowers into a daylight they should never have seen” (56). In the second, Bernard Bligh’s sexuality and manliness is put into question by the fact that he and Queenie are unable to conceive a child. Moreover, their marital relations lack desire and pleasure and are described as a chore. They are a bore for Queenie. Queenie is unable to enjoy sexual pleasure in her marital relations and the description of them contrasts with that of her sexual intercourse with Michael.

The descriptions of the former portray a clearly inexperienced and clumsy man who “would sigh as if lowering himself into a hot bath, his hand creeping up my nightie to lie awkward on my left breast. ... [T]hen a grunt that slathered spittle all down my neck, and it was all over” (260). By contrast with this, the sexual relations with Michael were really satisfactory for Queenie and the outcome of them was pregnancy: “I knew I was pregnant. If that miserable doctor

I'd seen before the war was right, then I had to be. They might not strictly have been conjugal relations but, by God, I blinking enjoyed them" (495).

Queenie's pregnancy brings about the issue of miscegenation and the social problems associated with racial discrimination towards mixed couples and Black babies at that time. There was a social discourse that ostracised White mothers with Black children. This prompted some of them to get rid of their babies by means of abortion, as Queenie attempts to do in the novel (496) or by giving them away in adoption. This task was not an easy one because there were few people in society willing to adopt a Black baby³⁷. As Webster argues:

As the recommendations of the Curtis Committee embodied in the 1948 Children Act were developed and reinforced in subsequent legislation, through to the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act, the view that attempts should be made to find foster adoptive parents for those in institutions was increasingly emphasised, but this approach did not extend to black children. (Webster, 1998: 123).

³⁷ The tendency to give up for adoption children of mixed race continued during the 1960s. An example of a literary account of the situation for the adoption of black babies can be seen in Jackie Kay's autobiographical work of poetry *The Adoption Papers* (1991). In this collection Kay writes about the experience of being adopted and brought up by white parents. Jackie Kay, one of the other authors analysed in this Dissertation, was born to a white Scottish mother and black Nigerian father in 1961 and was given in adoption to a white couple in Scotland.

2.5 THE FAMILY: MARRIAGE AND GENDER ROLES

Small Island establishes a clear dualism between the two female characters, Queenie and Hortense. However, the lives of both women prove to have no great differences. They are both taken from a rural environment where their lives have little or no prospect of betterment at all (a butcher's farm in the case of Queenie and a poor and uneducated Black mother in the case of Hortense) to be brought up or educated at the expense of relations in an environment that might provide them with a range of possibilities in the future. Queenie like Hortense has high self-esteem and great expectations for her life: "I should have been a lady. But I was stuck on a stinking farm" (246). She goes to London to live with her aunt and there she is educated to be a proper lady whose main aim is to find a suitable husband. She meets Bernard and even though she does not love him, she marries him to avoid going back to the farm after her aunt passes away. The possibilities for women in the early and middle 20th century are here reduced to marriage.

It is not surprising then that both women use it as a means of escape and improvement on the social scale. Hortense's marriage to Gilbert is a means of escaping from a situation in which she finds herself *déclassée* and without any possibility of improvement:

"A single woman cannot travel on her own – it would not look good. But a married woman might go anywhere she pleased". It took Gilbert only two hours to decide to ask me if I would marry

him. And he shook my hand when I said yes, *like a business deal had been struck between us*. (100; emphasis added)

England is described to Hortense as a promised land. Gilbert contributes to creating an idyllic vision of England: "He told me opportunity ripened in England as abundant as fruit on Jamaican trees" (98). But Hortense is deflated when she comes to England and sees the conditions in which she has to live. London is a city that has to recover from the effects of the war.

In fact, the war, with its disruption of the social order, brought about changes in the life of women that were positive. The war created opportunities for women to work since men went to war. Queenie welcomes the war at the beginning. She sees it as an act that will put an end to her predictable and boring life: "That raid was the most exciting thing that had ever happened in this house. Tingling with life, that was how I felt. I took two steps and leapt up on to the bed. There was no doubt about it, I was looking forward to this war" (266).

The changes in the social order are depicted in the novel by the fact that Queenie starts to work outside the home. She finds a job in a rest centre (277), even though Bernard disapproves of her working. She spends most of her time there where she feels useful. A change is produced in Queenie's character and in her attitude towards people who find themselves in a very difficult situation. Whereas when she was a child and a teenager she despised those coming from a lower social class, particularly the children of miners (243), now she shows empathy for those who have suffered the consequences of the war:

Population, we called them at the rest centre. The bombed-out who'd had the cheek to live through the calamity of a world

blown to bits. Leaving the cardboard coffins empty but filling up the classrooms of the old school building with their tragic faces and filthy clothes that made miners fresh up from the pit look like Christmas fairies. They came in as a crowd like you'd wade through on the Underground or elbow during a department-store sale. *And that's how some saw them – population, not people.* (278; emphasis added)

Queenie becomes sensitive towards those who have been left without anything after being bombed. She sees them as people with names and identities, with a stories to tell. They are not merely “population” for her. She involves herself in the job of helping them as she has never involved herself in anything before: “Twelve-hour shifts, fourteen sometimes, I had to do at Campden School rest centre. And when I got home Bernard would complain that there was nothing on the table except dust” (279).

When the war finishes, Queenie takes lodgers into her house as an act of both rebellion and empowerment. It is true that Queenie needs to earn her living and that taking lodgers provides her with a means of survival. However, she also does so as a way of gaining control over her own life; she makes decisions that defy the social order. She is no longer a woman under the control of her husband. Bernard is still missing even two years after the end of the war. Queenie acknowledges that what she is doing is an act of subversion that will be disapproved of by Bernard:

I was still young and I had a life to get on with. But I wasn't ready for that. So when Gilbert turned up at my door I thought,

I've got the room and I need the money. I took him in because I knew Bernard would never have let me. And if Bernard had something to say about it he'd have to come back to say it to my face. (116)

Queenie's personality becomes stronger after the experiences of the war. She is left to take care of Arthur and she works in the rest centre where she contemplates daily examples of dehumanisation. In fact, Levy depicts in her novel the evolution of Queenie's character from being fairly naïve to becoming a very emotionally strong person. By contrast, her husband Bernard proves to be feeble and, as her father Arthur, needs assistance to recover from the impact of the war. Levy uses this portrayal of emotionally strong female characters and weaker male ones to account for one of the main tasks that were assigned to women after the war.

The post-war period was characterised by a moving back towards the importance of the family and domesticity. Women were addressed as the basic pillars to rebuild the family. There were manuals published at the time to teach and advice women on how to behave at home with their husbands and children after the war:

Mending lives and homes broken by war was a major task assigned to women. ... they were given healing tasks, restoring the lives of husbands and children. The way in which such tasks were assigned to women ignored the extent to which they had also suffered in the war as they were given the main

responsibility for coping with the psychological and emotional aftermath. (Webster, 1998: 7)

This central role given to women after the war, in my opinion, underlines the attitudes of Hortense and Queenie and their positioning in space. The first encounter between Hortense and Queenie could be described as a sort of battle for the right of ownership of space. At her arrival in England, Hortense is resolved to make the little room they have in Queenie's house a space of her own. She starts to tidy the room and organize the little furniture that is there: "I determined then to make this place somewhere I could live ... For England was my destiny. I started with that sink. Cracked as a map and yellowing I scrubbed it with soap until my hand had to brush perspiration from my forehead" (226).

Both women feel that the room is part of their belongings. Queenie enters the room at the same moment that Hortense is appropriating its space: "'Oh, you're tidying up a bit. Men, eh – they've got no idea'. She perused the place as if this was her home. Pushing her nose into corners, she walked the room as if inspecting some task she had asked of me" (227). Hortense is deeply concerned about Queenie's violation of her space: "And then she sat down on a chair and invited me to come and sit with her. But this was my home, it was for me to tell her when to sit, when to come in, when to warm her hands" (229).

Hortense is delimiting her space and is asserting her rights of control over it. Queenie can be said to acquire a fairly paternalistic and condescending attitude towards Hortense since she treats her almost as a child who needs to be shown where to shop, how to cook and where to go. Her discourse emphasises the idea that she is not prejudiced towards Black people. Hortense continuously reasserts

her space and her identity and she considers herself to be in a superior position to that of Queenie since she is a teacher. In contrast, Queenie believes that her “racial superiority” empowers her relative to Hortense:

Now, why should this woman worry to be seen in the street with me? After all, I was a teacher and she was only a woman whose living was obtained from letting rooms. If anyone should be shy it should be I. And what is a darkie? I held the door polite for her and once more said, “Thank you”, in the hope that this would move her more promptly through it.” (231)

Two value regimes clash in the encounter of the two women. One is that of professional status and the other one is racial status. Hortense is unfamiliar with racism since in her life class status has mostly been at issue. Therefore, she does not recognize the race agenda that is behind Queenie’s paternalistic discourse. It is not only until later on in the novel, after experiencing instances of racial discrimination, that she becomes aware of her racial status within British society. A significant episode in this respect takes place when she tries to apply for a position as a teacher, as I will comment on later on.

At the end of the novel, Hortense and Gilbert are able to find a space of their own. They leave the house in Nevern Street in Earls Court and move to a place in Finsbury Park. Hortense is at this point determined to create her own space, her own home out of that house. Her positive attitude towards the new space where they are to live surprises Gilbert:

“Gilbert, come, you no scared of a little hard work. I can help you”. She spun round in the room. “With a little paint and some carpet”. She moved to the corner leaning over to spread out her arms and say “And a table and a chair here,” before rushing to the fireplace with the suggestion, “and two armchairs here in front of an open English fire. You will see – we will make it nice.” All words froze on my tongue. For before me I suddenly saw quite the most wonderful woman. (504)

However, up to this moment when Hortense and Gilbert move out of Queenie's house, the novel accounts for a struggle over power and status between the two women that, in my opinion, is finally resolved at the end of the novel when Hortense agrees to take care of Queenie's baby. At this moment racial discourse marks the social and spatial differences between the two women in relation to their possibilities of motherhood. Queenie is socially pressured into not keeping a Black baby and therefore, the racial difference that the two women were overlooking or attempting to deny – consciously in the case of Queenie with her sympathy towards people and out of ignorance in the case of Hortense – is the one that allows the handing over of the baby.

2.6 THE NATION AS A SPACE: THE MOTHER COUNTRY

Small Island takes as one of its central topics the idea of the Mother Country. Both Gilbert and Hortense imagine Britain in a positive way. Gilbert, like Michael Roberts, forms part of a group of Caribbean men going to fight for Britain during the war. He joins the West Indian RAF volunteers. There is a romantic ideal behind the action of enlisting in the British army as Michael Roberts's mother, Miss Ma, explains: "They need men like my son. Men of courage and good breeding. There is to be a war over there. The Mother Country is calling men like my son to be heroes whose families will be proud of them" (59). Gilbert joins the army encouraged by the romantic idea that the Mother Country is endangered and needs his help. Hortense, influenced by the colonial upbringing of Miss Ma, sees England and its culture as the referent to follow in all her actions:

I did not dare to dream that it would one day be I who would go to England. It would one day be I who would sail on a ship as big as a world and feel the sun's heat on my face gradually change from roasting to caressing. But there was I! Standing at the door of a house in London and ringing the bell. Pushing my finger to hear the ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling. ... Hortense Roberts married with a gold ring and a wedding dress in a trunk. Mrs Joseph. Mrs Gilbert Joseph. What would you think of that, Celia

Langley? There was I in England ringing the doorbell on one of the tallest houses I had ever seen. (12)

The metaphor of the sun is interesting because it suggests that in Jamaica everything is rotten and there is no future, whereas England is presented as the land of promise. These are the first thoughts the reader hears from Hortense. She is a very proud woman, spoiled and totally self-centred, who wants to obtain what she wants regardless of the consequences that this might have for others. However, Hortense soon has to confront the true face of the Mother Country and the social and racial difficulties that characterise the new space in which she is going to be located. The description of how people get off the boat can be taken as a prolepsis of the racist attitudes and drudgeries that West Indian people encounter in Britain:

The only jumping and waving that was done was by the Jamaicans arriving and leaving the ship. Women who shivered in their church best clothes – their cotton dresses with floppy bows and lace; their hats and white gloves looking gaudy against the grey of the night. Men in suits and bow-ties and smart hats. They jumped and waved at the people come to meet them. Black men in dark, scruffy coats with hand-knitted scarves. Hunched over in the cold. Squinting and straining to see a bag or hair or shoes or a voice or a face that they knew. Who looked feared – their eyes opening a little too wide – as they perused the luggage that had been brought across the ocean and now had to be carried through the streets of London. Greeting

excited relatives with the same words: 'You bring some guava, some rum – you have a little yam in the bag?' (14)

Hortense has problems getting used to the situation in England. Gilbert has already suffered the consequences of being Black in a country that is adjusting to a new social reality in which the presence of the "Other" is part of the daily life experience of its native citizens. For him, the metaphor of the Mother Country has already been shattered: "This room is where you will sleep, eat, cook, dress and write your mummy to tell how the Mother Country is so fine. And, little Miss High-class, one thing about England you don't know yet because you just come off a boat. You are lucky" (32-33).

After the war, Gilbert faces repeated dis/encounters with the "Mother Country" embodied in every single act of racial social discrimination that he has to go through. Social circumstances are different in post-war London and his status within this new configuration of the social space has changed from being a welcome member of society (a soldier who is coming to help) to becoming a threat to society (an immigrant who is "swamping the country"). Parallel to the social re-definition of Gilbert's and Hortense's statuses there are modifications in their view of the Mother Country.

There is a persistent allegory of the female body as the representative figure of a territory (Yuval-Davis, 1997). This affectionate relation to the Mother Country is enforced by colonial education and law and is reproduced in every performative act by which the concept of nation is maintained. An example of this occurs when Hortense recalls how she taught her grandmother to recite a poem by

William Wordsworth that she had learnt at school. Unconsciously, Hortense becomes a tool by which the machine of the Empire reproduces its ideology (43).

However, for both Hortense and Gilbert, as they are socially constructed as the "Other", the idea of the Mother Country shatters. The female image of the country is therefore described in negative terms as the novel develops. It becomes exactly the opposite of what the metaphor of the "Mother Country" suggested. It is not young and sensual, but old and abject, and she does not provide protection for her children. It is a bad, uncaring and selfish mother. It might perfectly fit the description of any witch that can be found in western fairy-tale imagery:

Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. ... Then one day you hear Mother calling. Leave home, leave family, leave love. Travel seas with waves that swell about you as substantial as concrete buildings. Shiver, tire, hunger – for no sacrifice is too much to see you at Mother's needy side. ... The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. Can this be that fabled relation you heard so much of? This twisted-crooked weary woman. This stinking cantankerous hag. She offers you no comfort after the journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'Who the bloody hell are you?' (139)

Gilbert is very disappointed and asks the simplest but at the same time most complicated question for what is implicit behind the whole history of colonialism: “let me ask the Mother Country just this one simple question: how come England did not know me?” (141). With this utterance Gilbert denounces the obliteration of the colonial subjects and their reduction to silence in British literature. This is precisely what Levy wants to deal with in this novel: “‘None of my books is just about race’, Levy said. ‘They’re about people and history’” (Allardice, 2005: n.p.).

In the same way, Hortense is finally deceived by the Mother Country. She is humiliated when she goes to ask for a position as a teacher in a London school: “Hortense reeling wounded after a sharp slap from the Mother Country’s hand” (458). She realises at this moment how race operates to exclude her. This is emphasised by the symbolic use of space. She walks into a cupboard, a dark small place where mops and buckets are stored. This symbolises the spaces that are open for her in England: spaces of manual labour not the spaces of education and enlightenment. This degrading episode marks a turning point in Hortense’s attitude. From now on she acknowledges that she has to work hard to create a space for herself in England.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The novel deals with an important historical period in Britain. The old social values prove to be inadequate to accommodate for the changes that society is facing. The previous fixed and homogenous “British” identity is put into question by the presence of other British citizens who embody a different conceptualization of that identity. The post-war period is one of chaos and disruption but it also gives the opportunity to previously relegated social groups to break through and assert a space of their own. Old social configurations of space are suffocating for the characters who, after having experienced the consequences of migration (Hortense and Gilbert) and war (Gilbert, Queenie and Bernard) have been greatly changed and are not able to go back to the state in which their lives were before the war.

The idea of dislocation is not only particular to the case of characters that undergo a process of migration, as I have commented on throughout the chapter, but it also evident in the case of the characters that are displaced during the war to fight in foreign lands. In the case of Gilbert and Bernard perception of the social spaces in which they have to interact before, during and after the war changes. When Gilbert comes back to Jamaica after the war, he realizes that this is no longer a place he feels identified with: “With alarm I became aware that the island of Jamaica was no universe: it ran only a few miles before it fell into the sea. In that moment, standing tall on Kingston harbour, I was shocked by the awful realisation that, man, we Jamaicans are all small islanders too!” (196). Jamaica becomes as suffocating and incarcerating a place as England.

For Bernard, like for Gilbert, England is his “small island”. Bernard joins the army and goes to fight in India and this is his first time abroad (406). When he comes back his vision of England has changed as well:

England had shrunk. It was smaller than the place I'd left. Streets, shops, houses bore [sic] down like crowds, stifling even the feeble light that got through. I had to stare out at the sea just to catch a breath. And behind every face I saw were trapped the remembering of war. Guarded by a smile. Shrouded in a frown. But everyone had them. Private conflicts. Scarring where [sic] touched. No point dwelling on your own pitiful story. Chap next to you was worse off. The man over there far more tragic. Silence was the only balm that healed. (424)

All the characters in the novel go through a process of growth and interior development brought about by the confrontation with negative and traumatic experiences. They are forced by the historical circumstances to redefine their relation to the spaces surrounding them and, by extension, to question their identity status in this new social environment.

CHAPTER 3. COMING TO TERMS WITH SPACE AFTER A DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE: FROM A BELIEF IN FATE TO GAINING ONE'S AGENCY IN MONICA ALI'S *BRICK LANE* (2003)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Nazneen, the main character in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*. Ali's novel is a *bildungsroman*³⁸ that concentrates on the growing process of Nazneen and her personal development from being a teenager to becoming a mature and self-assertive woman (Horspool, 2003: 22). This change in the protagonist is to some extent marked by a geographical movement and a change of location. Nazneen is a young Bangladeshi woman forced to travel to London as a consequence of her arranged marriage to Chanu, a Bangladeshi settled in England who is described to be "at least forty years old" (17).

This chapter starts with the question of how the growing process that the protagonist undergoes is influenced by a change of space and by her interactions with the spaces in which she is located. This issue is complicated by the fact that Nazneen suffers a process of migration and therefore finds herself situated in a foreign country in which she has not yet come to terms with a different culture

³⁸ It is worth noting that the novel has recently been defined as a "multicultural Bildungsroman" as a way of stressing the migratory movement undergone by the protagonist and her ability to adapt and integrate herself into the new environment (Perfect, 2008: 110).

and a completely different language. Moreover, since the novel deals with the situation of an immigrant woman from an Asian background, her race and class mark her relation to space in a particular way.

The novel also raises topics and issues that refer to the protagonist's most personal feelings, emotions, ideas and doubts. The novel deals, in this respect, both with an outside diasporic journey in the "real space" as much as with a journey inside Nazneen's "interior space". In Nazneen's new environment there are four main spaces that affect her: her body, domestic space, the community to which she belongs, and public space. This chapter studies the implications of these four spaces and the way in which they are presented in the novel. In the final part of the chapter I shall concentrate on the development and on the repercussions that the concept of *fate* has on the life of the protagonist and I shall analyse the implication that the above-mentioned spaces, where Nazneen is located, have on her ability to act, to make choices and to find her own way in life, i.e., agency.

3.2 RECEPTION OF *BRICK LANE* IN THE LITERARY PANORAMA

Brick Lane, published in 2003, is Ali's debut novel and it broke with **B** strength onto the British contemporary literary panorama. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in the year of its publication and Ali was included in the *Granta*³⁹ list of novelists. Even before its publication, Ali's novel was thought to be a literary success. This brought about Ali being considered one of the forthcoming leading figures in the literary scene. Nevertheless, the reception of Ali's novel has been characterized by a great deal of expectation as well as debate and controversy.

The novel has been praised as much as it has been criticised. It has been acclaimed for its portrait of the Bengali diaspora in Britain by part of the literary critic: "Surely, *Brick Lane* can't be that good? Actually, it's better. ... Ali's novel is warm, shrewd, startling and hugely readable: the sort of book you race through greedily, dreading the last page" (Lane, 2003: n.p.) or "Ali's splendid first novel" (Wood, 2003: n.p.) The novel was, however, rejected by part of the Asian community who showed their disagreement with the manner in which Ali reflects their way of life, as I will explain later on.

³⁹ *Granta* is a literary magazine that has a long and distinguished history in publishing the early works of many writers who later became well known, such as Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Zadie Smith etc... It was originally founded in 1889 by students at Cambridge University. During the 1970s the magazine ran into trouble and it was relaunched as a magazine of new writing in 1979 by a small group of postgraduates. Nowadays, the magazine publishes new writing four times a year. Pieces which appear in *Granta* must not have been published before in English.

The novel focuses on the life of Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who comes to London's East End after an arranged marriage. Therefore, Ali depicts and puts in the limelight a part of the Bangladeshi community that had been invisibilized and silenced: the life of a young immigrant woman incarcerated at home. From the whole gamut of topics the novel deals with, its outspoken detractors were especially offended by Ali's inclusion of an extra-marital relation on the part of the female protagonist. They considered this to be an "immoral" depiction of Bangladeshi women's lives: "women are not fucking around in this area! Our women, most of them, 99 percent, respect their husbands and respect their tradition" (Katz, 2006), claims Abdus Salique, chair of the Brick Lane Traders' Association, who coordinated the campaign against the filming of an adaptation of Ali's novel⁴⁰.

Many articles were published in different newspapers at the time the novel was released and when three years after its publication the novel was turned into a film script the criticisms arose again (Lea and Lewis, July 18, 2006; Cohen, July 25, 2006; Lea, July 31, 2006; Katz, August 10, 2006). During the summer of 2006 when the film was being shot, the social climate in the vicinity of Brick Lane was marked by demonstrations against the film and a high degree of social controversy that prompted the shooting company, Ruby Films, to move outside the area.

This limited understanding of Ali's work led to an apparently great deal of intra-community upheaval which was followed by the exaggerated interest shown by the media, as Ali herself commented on ("A Conversation with Monica Ali...")

⁴⁰ Despite campaigns led against the shooting of the film, *Brick Lane*, the movie, directed by Sarah Gavron and produced by Chris Collins was released in the United Kingdom on 16 November 2007.

2007). Likewise, Sarah Gavron, director of the film *Brick Lane*, stated in an interview:

We spent months working with the community. We had lots of Bangladeshi crew and cast Nonetheless, just when we were about to start shooting on Brick Lane itself, we got a phone call at midnight reporting threats against us if we went ahead. It was a lesson in how the person who shouts the loudest gets the most attention ... We had many people come out and support us and many others who were concerned that this group were seen to represent the majority view. (Gavron, 2008: 14)

A number of well-known novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Hari Kunzru and Lisa Appignanesi viewed these attitudes as an act of censorship (Lea, 2006) and criticized the manipulation of part of the population who participated in the demonstrations without having even read Ali's novel: "community leaders such as Salique ... have read Ali's book in both English and Bangladeshi but many of those who live in and around Brick Lane and are protesting against the film have not" (Cohen, 2006). Other well-off members of the community, such as Shiraj Hoque (a local millionaire who owns three curry houses in the area), contested Salique's views and pointed out that the Bengali community is a big one and that there are more people who favour freedom of speech and consider Ali's novel as a free exercise of that right (Lea, 2006).

Ali's work has also been criticized for what is considered to be a westernized depiction of Bangladeshi culture. It was judged to be a predictable and, thus, tedious representation of the area of Brick Lane that does not enlighten

anyone already familiar with the Bengali diaspora in Britain. As Bobby Ghosh wrote:

This review is written by an Asian living in Britain, a point worth mentioning because it may help explain why I found Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (Doubleday; 413 pages) as dull as dhal. For those with no personal experience of the book's central milieu — London's Bangladeshi community — it might seem a spicy treat, full of colorful, richly detailed characters and aromatic atmospherics. Indeed most British reviewers have greeted it with effusive praise, many of them endorsing Granta's selection of Ali as one of Britain's 20 best young novelists. But if you've grown up on a diet of Bengali and British-Indian literature, Ali's debut is little more than a lentil broth, warm and easily digested, but predictable and lacking in flavor. And even if this world is brand-new to you, its charms may not transport you all the way to page 413 (Ghosh, 2003: n.p.).

In this respect, *Brick Lane* was disapproved of for being considered as a literary work whose aim was to respond to the commercial needs of a particularly white literary audience (Hussain, 2005: 108). Such critiques focus on the novel's lack of genuineness and accuracy. This is related to the issue of representations of cultural otherness in contemporary British literature. The debates surrounding the representation of cultural otherness move around ideas of the degree that those representations comply with stereotypes or break with them and the extent to which such representations “have come to be considered as either ‘progressive’ or

as 'reductive'" (Perfect, 2008: 111). Underlying these matters are the notions of the "authentic" versus the "commodified".

The novel is deemed as being the outcome of the approach of an author who locates outside of the Bangladeshi community:

It in this sense its 'authenticity' as a text from within the Bangladeshi diaspora is a marketing myth. Whilst the novel shares many of the thematic concerns of the other texts, of migration, gender and generation for example, it provides an outsider's view of the Bangladeshi community and a rather negative one at that. ... To a South Asian reader in particular, the novel lacks that essential verisimilitude as a novel about a South Asian community that would authenticate it for a South Asian audience. It presents an image of Britain's Bangladeshi community which is a textbook definition and it is not a book which is written from 'within' the community it explores. (Hussain, 2005: 92)

These opposite and controversial views about the novel are in tune with Ali's acknowledgement of her own situation as a writer. She described herself as being situated in an in-between position; she is neither fully English nor fully Bangladeshi, she finds herself in a peripheral location (Ali, 2003a). She is the daughter of a Bangladeshi father and an English mother, born in East Pakistan and forced to emigrate to Britain as a war refugee with her mother and brother when she was three years old. Her ambivalent condition both enables and disables her to write about the Bengali community in Britain. On the one hand, as the daughter of

a Bangladeshi father who lived in Bangladesh, she has reverberations of her life that inspire her work. However, on the other hand, she has been criticized for being an outsider, a foreigner who ignores Bangladeshi women's conditions and who has not experienced any of the things she portrays in the novel:

I could set lines of inquiry about my book into two broad camps. Tell us about "them", is one. *The tyranny of representation ... means that when I speak, my brown skin is the dominant signifier.* The other reaction is rather different. What gives you the right to write about "us", when you're clearly one of "them"? ... But the "two camp" split in my case brings me back to the idea of the periphery. How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. *Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of a doorway, is a good place from which to observe. Good training, I feel, for a life as a writer.* (Ali, 2003: n.p.; emphasis added)

Part of the criticism directed towards Ali's work can be understood within the theoretical framework proposed by Frantz Fanon (1967) and his study of the role of the native intellectual. Ali has been criticized by part of the Bangladeshi community, as previously mentioned, for having depicted a rather negative overall picture of Bangladeshis in London. As the daughter of a Bangladeshi man, for those who have critiqued the novel, she should have given a much more positive

description of Bangladeshi women's lives. This type of criticism is directed towards the role of the writer as the spokesperson of and for the rest of the community. In my opinion, what lies behind this type of condemnation of Ali's work is precisely the idea of her supposed duty as a "native intellectual".

Frantz Fanon's development of the role of the native intellectual in the 1960s culminating in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) was the product of the particular social context of colonialism. Nevertheless, his ideas about the creation of a national literature after a process of colonization can be taken into consideration within the context of the growth of a literature produced by second-generation immigrants in Britain. Fanon divides the process of giving rise to a national literature in three stages, namely: assimilation, revision and finally the arising of a truly national literature. In Fanon's first two stages the native intellectual turns towards the culture of the colonizer or the dominant group and uses it as the referent to follow in order to create her/his own work (assimilation) or rather adopts a critical attitude towards the main culture and her/his own culture (revision). It is finally in the third stage, when the intellectual has found her/his own space and has negotiated her/his own identity that her/his work contributes to the creation of a particular national literature.

Fanon's third stage cannot be directly extrapolated to Ali's *Brick Lane* since Ali is a British citizen and, therefore, she is already writing within the field of her own national literature. Nonetheless, Ali has been burdened with the responsibility of providing an "authentic" representation of a community to which, due to her diverse ethnic origin, she is believed to belong. Moreover, Ali's work has been judged in this light. This demonstrates that Ali's role as a writer in

contemporary British literature is, for some literary critics, still negotiated in relation to post/colonial issues of representation and belonging.

Therefore, some of the reactions that the publication of the novel caused could be explained by Fanon's thesis and the problematics exposed in chapter 1 of this Dissertation in connection with the issue of whether novelists should be representatives of their communities. As Jane Hiddleston, in her analysis of the critiques to Ali's work, points out:

[T]his tendency is perhaps particularly notable in the context of "minority literatures", as, according to Nicholas Harrison, "it is indeed 'members' of minority groups who are most liable to be read as representative, that is, liable to stereotyping, and who find themselves unable to act as individuals to the extent that their every action may be taken as typical of the type to which they find themselves assigned". (2005: 70)

Ali's supposed "responsibility" would be that of participating in the making of a positive ("authentic") depiction of a community to which, to some extent, she belongs, rather than matching a British pre-established ("commodified") vision of Asian traditions. In this sense, Ali has been criticized for having taken "the easiest path" and conformed to the way Asian immigrants are represented in the British traditional collective imaginary.

The opposite argument in this controversy, defended by Ali herself, is that one should simply analyse her novel as a literary product in itself, without taking into consideration any further cultural references. In this sense, she has a right to write about Bangladeshi women or whichever topic, as does any other writer:

“any literary endeavour must be judged on the work alone. It stands or falls on its own merits regardless of the colour, gender and so on of the author” (Ali, 2003: n.p.). This claim serves to justify her right as a writer to produce a literary work. In my opinion, behind this definition lies the fear to be pigeonholed in a category of writers that is considered to be outside the “canonical mainstream”. This is common to many women and “minority” writers who want to be “categorised” just as writers because being considered in other ways entails occupying an inferior position in the literary hierarchy (Freixas, 2000).

As far as I am concerned, Ali's novel should be contextualised as the literary production of a female novelist from an ethnically diverse background who is accounting for the identity problematics that affect first- and second-generation immigrants in Great Britain and who is particularly interested in portraying the repercussions that migration has for female characters. Regardless of the appraisals and criticisms that Ali's work received, the novel is interesting from a literary and theoretical point of view, not least because it is a good example of the importance of space and the modes in which space and identity interact.

3.3 BRICK LANE'S SOCIAL CONTEXT: IMMIGRATION

LAWS AND RACIAL CONFLICTS

Before comment on the interaction between space and identity in *Brick Lane*, I shall explore the social context and the immigration laws passed by the British Government that would have had an effect on the life of the protagonist. Nazneen undergoes a process of migration from her native village, Goiripur, in East Pakistan. Although the novel does not narrate any other events of Nazneen's childhood except for her birthday, in 1967, she would have experienced the war that led to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The result of which were years of famine, deaths and hardship that prompted the immigration of many citizens to the United Kingdom. A number of laws were passed during the 1980s to reduce the number of immigrants coming into a country that was still affected by the economic recession of the previous decade (Brah, 1996).

As is common in such cases, in the United Kingdom there was a tendency to blame the newcomers as being responsible for the economic situation of the time. It was often forgotten that previous immigration policies in Britain, as in other European countries, opened the doors to Asian immigrants due to a need to solve the shortage of labour after the Second World War. This important wave of immigration was preceded, at the beginning of the century, mainly during the 1920s and 1930s, by another major wave of Asian immigrants.

3.3.a Immigration Laws for Women

Although the novel does not relate anything about the immigration conditions under which Nazneen comes into in London it is important to point out that there have been a series of laws specifically created for women who came to Britain in order to get married. In the case of women, sever immigration policies were also carried out, some of which went beyond the respect for human rights. Women such as Nazneen who came to join their husbands were likely to undergo unreasonable detention and a succession of x-rays to determine their age, as well as sexual examinations, such as virginity tests (Parmar, 1982; Mama, 1992). These were performed at Heathrow Immigration Department and were accepted by part of the population:

Q. Do you approve of a woman having to have a vaginal examination as part of the routine medical examination to enter Britain?

A. The fact of the matter is that medical examination is carried out to see if they have any communicable disease. If they do, it is thought unwise to allow them to come and settle in this country by and large. If they had a communicable disease and it entailed investigating the vagina to find out, then I suppose the doctor is entitled to do that.

This firm statement of principle looks even more impressive when one considers that white women entering Britain are not subjected to these examinations. (Wilson, 1984: 76)

These discriminatory practices were described as a way of protecting women from arranged marriages that were despised on the grounds of being a way of oppression and a proof of uncivilized Asian traditions. This went hand in hand with a paternalistic attitude on the part of British culture that was considered to be of a higher order, whereas Asian cultural practices were deemed to be problematic.

Immigration policies are an example of the way power is exercised over women, as well as an instance of how cultural differences are produced and reproduced following biased ideas and prejudices towards the communities of the newcomers. In the case of Asian women there is a typical stereotyped vision that presents them as powerless and this favours discriminatory practices:

'The Asian woman' is subject to contradictory and ambivalent stereotypification. This figure acts variously as the symbol and chief bearer of the admirably strong, tightly-knit family and culture, as the oppressed subject of traditional Asian patriarchal practices, as a problem because of her failure to learn the language and customs which might allow a smoother integration of her community and children into 'the British way of life', and full of sexual charm and allure produced by a demure seductiveness replete with the promise of a mysterious Oriental eroticism. (Donald, 1992: 19)

This kind of definition relies partly on the association between femininity and maternity and the portrayal of women as re-producers both in a biological and ideological level. The woman is seen to embody the nation but “while she embodies it she does not really have it, in that it is only in recent times that her citizenship has stabilized” (Mohanram, 1999: 85). In this respect, Nazneen’s status in London is also problematic. It could be argued that Nazneen’s initial status within British society would be that of a marginalised citizen not only because she is depicted as a minor under the control of her husband, but also because she does not actively partake in any aspect of British society. When she does so, Nazneen is invisible to the eyes of a great part of society: “But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her anymore than she could see God” (Ali, 2004: 56).

3.3.b Racial Conflicts

The new racism that arose in the 1980s⁴¹ brought about the revival of neoconservative movements that claimed a reinforcement of notions such as patriotism, community membership and strong family bonds to name but a few. It can be argued that these types of policies also re-emerged after the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001, in Madrid on 11 March 2004 and the London attacks on 7 July 2005. Those attacks fostered prejudice and

⁴¹ See in this respect the previous section on this Dissertation entitled “Social Changes in the 1980s and the debates on the term “Black” in Cultural Studies” in chapter 1, page 33.

discriminatory practices against the Muslim population by a part of British society. At the same time, there has been a rise in radical Islam in some Muslim communities as a way of countering discrimination and seeking to assert a sense of identity.

These tendencies are addressed in the novel by means of the description of the racial riots and conflicts between a part of the Muslim and the young British population in the area of Brick Lane. This idea of the revival of community membership⁴² is highlighted in the novel by the creation of the group called "Bengal Tigers" as a counter-group to the group known as "The Lion Hearts". The former is an Islamic group whereas the latter is an extreme right-winged, predominantly white, group (2004; 238-239).

The "Bengal Tigers" is "for Muslim rights and culture. ... for protecting [their] local ummah and supporting the global ummah" (241). They are sensitive towards Muslim problems around the world such as the situations in Iraq and Palestinian conflicts. The political motto that guides their actions is the famous idea of "think global but act local" (287) as Karim (who is the president of the Muslim group) utters in his inaugural speech. The "Lion Hearts", by contrast, are worried about "the islamification of [their] neighbourhood" (257). The latter show quite a racist attitude towards other communities. Such feelings are not the result of individual distrust for "others" but are supported by what anti-racist intellectuals think that really matters: "It is not individual beliefs and prejudices about 'race' that are the main problem, they argued, nor the contents of different

⁴² The revival of community membership at the turn of the millennium and the investigation of radical Islam will also be dealt with by Zadie Smith as I shall explain in my analysis of *White Teeth* in chapter 3 of this Dissertation. Moreover, the exploration of radical Islam groups in London also recalls Hanif Kureishi's *Black Album* (1995).

traditions. What matters are the structures of power, the institutions and the social practices that produce racial oppression and discriminatory outcomes” (Donald, 1992: 3).

Such racial discriminatory views are to be seen in the context of social deprivation, low levels of education and poor housing conditions that characterise some areas in Britain such as London's Brick Lane. These social problems are, in the majority of cases, a direct result of capitalist culture and have been fuelled by social and religious upheavals at the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, this confrontation depicted in the novel has to be read as an example of the split in that social level between the Asian communities and part of the local British white population and should be contextualised in this light.

3.4 NAZNEEN'S IDENTITY SEARCH: A DISPLACED BODY IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Nazneen undergoes a compulsory diasporic experience at quite a young age (she is only 18 years old when she goes to London) and this has great implications in the development of her identity; she is a teenager when she is uprooted from her family and her native land and flies to London after her marriage. The process of displacement that Nazneen endures when she leaves her native home renders her in a position in which she has to re/define her identity and her self. Moreover, Nazneen's relation to space varies from the beginning to the end of the novel as much as her personality changes.

Identity and space are interrelated issues. It is necessary to take into consideration the direct connection that space has on everyone's process of identity formation. As Liz Bondi points out there is a direct relation between identity and space. For her, in order to be able to answer the question "who am I?" one should first refer to the query "Where am I?" (Bondi, 1993) and this is such a relevant factor that it might determine a person's identity possibilities. The answer to the question about the spaces that affect the individual covers a wide range of possibilities that go from the most immediate one, the body, to the interaction of the latter with a broad and more general space in which a person lives, society.

Nowadays, identity is no longer considered as something fixed and firm per se but as something malleable and its development depends very much on a learning process and the circumstances surrounding the life of the person. Accordingly, the notion of individual subject ceased to be regarded as stable,

universal and degendered, as it was described in Cartesian thought. With the theoretical changes brought about by postmodern and poststructuralist theories the individual subject was viewed as an entity in a continuous process of formation (Grosz, 1992; Mercer, 1992; McDowell, 1999). Consequently, "the individual subject is not, and cannot be, a coherent, unified being, but is always divided and displaced" (Bondi, 1993: 85).

This process of identity formation is reflected in the novel, not only because its structure encompasses and follows Nazneen's life and personal experiences from the moment of her birth to the moment she finds a space of her own, but also because, as this chapter will show, Nazneen is not the same woman at the beginning and at the end of the novel. Her identity and her perception of herself and of her possibilities change. This developing process on the part of the protagonist would be impossible to account for if identity was considered as stable and invariable.

In the same way that there was a change in the mode of understanding identities, the approach towards space also varied from the 1970s onwards. Previously, space was thought of as being a mere surface or stage on which people interacted. Space was viewed as dead, pre-given and stable and as something which had no consequence on the social organization. An increasing interest in the study of space dominated the last decades of the 20th century but, as Michel Foucault pointed out, although the concern about space surpassed that of time, the former was still covered by a halo of sacredness that made it apparently incomprehensible to the human mind:

Now, despite all the techniques for appropriating space, despite the whole network of knowledge that enables us to delimit or to formalize it, contemporary space is perhaps still not entirely desanctified (apparently unlike time, it would seem, which was detached from the sacred in the nineteenth century). To be sure a certain theoretical desanctification of space (the one signaled by Galileo's work) has occurred, but we may still not have reached the point of a practical desanctification of space. And perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred. (Foucault, 1986: 23)

This line of thought and investigation marked only the beginning of a more complete and deeper understanding of space. A new perspective of analysis arose which examined the relation between space and society. The greatest contribution of those studies was the idea that space was a social construct (Lefebvre, 2005; Soja, 1989; Harvey, 1989). The underlying aim behind these first approaches to space was the study of the relation between space and the existence and maintenance of a capitalist system, but they were important because they highlighted that necessity to analyse space as a product of society and not as the

“naturally given”. This implies that space is not arbitrarily and randomly organized but it is a way of maintaining prevailing prerogatives and privileges that match the interest of the social organization that leaves its mark on it:

[W]e must be insistently aware of *how space can be made to hide consequences from us*, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics of ideology. (Soja, 1989: 6; emphasis added)

However, it was not until the 1980s that the analysis of space was broadened and completed by recognizing the reciprocal relations established between the social and the spatial and admitting that the social is also spatially constructed (Massey, 1993: 146), and that space is something fluid and changing. As Doreen Massey maintains, social space and social relations are determined by the spatial dimension:

Social relations always have a spatial form and a spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e., in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space. (1994: 168; emphasis in the original)

In the social organization of space there are a number of hidden implications; space is a tool to exercise, produce, reproduce and maintain power. Thus, in space hierarchical relations are inscribed based on organizing principles

such as class, race and gender. For instance, the distribution of space and the access women and men have had to space through history has been different in both non-industrial societies and in industrial ones (Spain, 1992).

During the last years of the 20th century there was an increasing interest in studying how race and gender are also inscribed in space (Massey, 1994; Alexander and Knowles, 2005). As Massey pointed out:

It is not only capital which moulds and produces changes in our understanding of and access to space and time (...) Nor is our experience and interpretation of all these changes dependent only upon our place within, or without, capitalist class relations. Ethnicity and gender, to mention only the two most obvious other axes, are also deeply implicated in the ways in which we inhabit and experience space and place, and the ways in which we are located in the new relations of time-space compression.
(1994: 164)

Different social groups are placed in different positions in relation to access to spaces that contribute to their social empowerment and this fact defines their possibilities of change and their power of movement. This fact is relevant in the novel because it is a good example of how gender and race issues permeate space. On the one hand, Nazneen suffers confinement at home and she is not allowed to go out without the company of her husband – she is oppressed by her gender identity. On the other, Ali portrays a close community of Bengali immigrants inhabiting an area of London, Brick Lane, characterized by a high level of social problems.

Nazneen's identity possibilities are not only marked out by the fact that she lives in a community environment in a deprived area of London, but also by body appearance. Nazneen recognizes that clothes mark her out from the rest of society and determine her identity and her life to a great extent. There are different instances in the novel in which she tries on her husband's trousers (141) and looks at herself in the mirror. Clothes then, become a symbol of her desire to be a different person and to live a different life:

Suddenly, she was gripped by the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate, and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? (277)

She associates her experience of isolation and subordination and social inferiority with her way of dressing. The body is "mapped" by means of social practices that leave inscriptions on it through diverse elements such as clothes, make-up, shoes, diet, exercise, etc.⁴³. Following this idea, the body as identity becomes what Elizabeth Grosz has called a "sociocultural artefact" (1992: 241); the body is the site of social and cultural inscription; the body is both a product and a reflection of the sociocultural environment in which it is located. One of the ways in which bodies are loaded with meaning is through clothing. Clothes can work as a signifier of one's culture and this is even more evident in the case of

⁴³ Foucault is considered to be the most influential thinker on this topic of corporeal inscription particularly in his books *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1985). In them, he calls into question the idea that the body is a complete entity that pre-exists social relations. For him, the body becomes a means by which regulative and disciplinary practices are exercised; the body is a means of control.

Muslim immigrants, since their clothes make them “visible” in a non-Muslim environment.

3.5 GENDERED AND RACIALISED SPACES: BRICK LANE

The title of the novel names an area of London and this space does not correspond to a locale inhabited by what is considered to be a “traditional British population” (if it can be argued that there is one). Throughout history Brick Lane has been an inner-city area of intense migration; almost a foreign land within the city of London. Brick Lane is, in this respect, a space that is well-known for hosting a significant number of Asian immigrants: “Brick Lane forms part of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets ... The 2001 census revealed that 23 percent of all Bangladeshis in England and Wales lived in Tower Hamlets, comprising one-third of its population” (Mavrommatis, 2006: 500).

The borough of Tower Hamlets is characterised by poor living conditions and social problems such as drugs and a great percentage of unemployment: “in relation to the 1991 deprivation index, Tower Hamlets was ranked as the fifth most deprived borough in London and the seventh within Britain” (London Research Centre, 1996: 180; quoted in Mavrommatis, 2006: 500). Non-surprisingly, areas such as Brick Lane have been known by city planners during the 1960s and 1970s as “twilight zones”, an expression that refers to the fact that they were reaching “the night of slumdom” (Mavrommatis, 2006: 505). Such zones were areas that “although located within the hearts of post-colonial British cities, simulated the feeling of entering into another cultural zone. In other words, former twilight zones were considered as metropolitan windows to otherness” (Mavrommatis, 2006: 505).

Paradoxically, this area is situated at the centre of the metropolis, even though it hosts a population that has been historically located at the periphery, at the margins of British society. Brick Lane is situated in the East End, at the heart of London and close to the financial centre of the city which is the epitome of global interactions. Yet Brick Lane is characterised by a strong local sense of community.

As David Harvey and others have long argued, location in the city has a major impact on the opportunities and life chances of the residents of different areas, redistributing real income and exacerbating inequalities between social classes. In this sense, Brick Lane has to be seen as an example of how difference – in terms of capital – has been inscribed in space: “‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ is produced in space through the simple logic of uneven capital investment and proliferating geographical division of labour” (Harvey, 1993: 6).

Brick Lane has also been constructed as a racialised location. Race and space are also related issues because they are both a social and cultural product. Race is in a constant process of definition; race is performative: “Race is understood as a system of social meanings and cultural classifications, which is created and sustained through relationships of power and hierarchy, but which changes over time and which can be contested and subverted” (Alexander and Knowles, 2005: 11). Moreover, race is made visible and inscribed through materiality, though space. It is mainly in the body and in the distribution of space that race becomes something evident. Nowadays, race is not a question of encountering the “other” in the colonies, but it is within the metropolitan spaces of the “West” that these encounters operate. The existence of racialised

neighbourhoods such as the one described in Ali's novel is an example of this fact.

Ali's depiction of a part of the community that inhabits Brick Lane proves the wrongness of homogenising communities according to their race or their ethnicity. As Iris Marion Young pointed out, nowadays space can no longer be equated with a single and homogenized community, at the same time that the idea of community cannot be associated with a single or homogenous identity:

One of the problems here has been a persistent identification of place with "community". Yet this is a misidentification. On the one hand, communities can exist without being in the same place – from networks of friends with like interests, to major religious, ethnic or political communities. On the other hand, the instances of places housing single "communities" in the sense of coherent social groups are probably – and, I would argue, have for long been – quite rare. Moreover, even where they do exist this in no way implies a single sense of place. For people occupy different positions within any community. (1994: 153)

There are two main ways in which community heterogeneity is addressed throughout the novel. One of them is Chanu's reflections on the Asian community inhabiting Brick Lane. Chanu criticizes the existence of a homogenized view of all Asians in the British collective imaginary. This issue is put into question every time he tries to draw a line between himself and the illiterate members of the community. He considers himself to be an educated man and, therefore, insists on establishing connections with well-off educated members of the Asian community

such as Dr. Azad. He establishes internal divisions within the Asian community living in Brick Lane based on education and by so doing he shows that the assumption of homogeneous communities within the same space is quite unreasonable:

'I am forty years old', said Chanu. He spoke quietly like the doctor, with none of this assurance. 'I have been in this country for sixteen years. Nearly half my life'... I had ambitions. Big dreams And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped of an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. (34)

Chanu acknowledges that some immigrants are on the lowest part of the social scale. They are below the white underclass. The process of becoming aware of this situation defeats him and turns him, at the end of the novel, into a devastated man. His expectations are broken and he is uncertain about his future life. He suffers a crisis when he has to face reality, give up his dreams and recognize that his expectations were wishful thinking. This experience is common to immigrants and one can find similar examples of this in other literary works that deal with immigrants coming from ex-colonies to Britain, for example Gilbert and Hortense in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004). At the end, Chanu decides to go back to Dhaka because he can no longer struggle against discrimination. As he says to his daughter Shahana:

Sometimes I look back and I am shocked. *Every day of my life I have prepared for success, worked for it, waited for it*, and you don't notice how the days pass until nearly a lifetime has finished. Then it hits you – the thing you have been waiting for has already gone by. And it was going in the other direction. It's like I've been waiting on the wrong side of the road for a bus that was already full. ... *You see, the things I had to fight: racism, ignorance, poverty, all of that* – I don't want you to go through it. (320; emphasis added)

The other means by which homogeneity is deconstructed is the fact that the novel presents the reader with a community in which there are not only external conflicts – as the creation of the radical Islamic group shows –, but also a great deal of intra-community problems – in terms of first- and second-generation relations. Intra-community differences are explicit in the novel's depiction of characters that show different levels of assimilation and interaction with the native culture.

This is obvious in the case of Dr Azad's wife, who acknowledges that immigration and adaptation to another country must be a two-way process. One must show respect for the other culture as much as for one's own culture. There is an imperative need to create social relations and bonds rather than cut peoples off from the rest of society on the grounds of a different ethnic background. As Dr Azad's wife says when she replies to Chanu, Bengali culture should adopt some British standards in what refers to women's rights and freedom: ““They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prison, and when someone calls

them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That,' she said, stabbing the air, 'is the tragedy'" (2003: 114).

This issue is also addressed in the family conflicts that arise between Nazneen's teenager daughters, Shahana and Bibi, and Chanu. Shahana and Bibi are quite well integrated in British society. Their identity is constructed according to British cultural norms and a sense of belonging to Bangladesh is not present in the girls. Chanu forces his daughters to maintain a link with his native culture, yet this link seems meaningless to the girls, who are unable to associate themselves with a place and a culture they have never known. In a manner that resembles colonial teaching practices, Chanu insists upon his daughters' learning Bengali and reciting Tagore: "Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her Kazmeez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them" (180). Chanu is frustrated by his daughters' rejection of what he thinks must be their cultural roots.

3.6 NAZNEEN'S SPACES OF INTERACTION: A MOVEMENT FROM THE DOMESTIC TO THE PUBLIC

Nazneen's place once she arrives in London is the domestic realm. I consider her house as a domestic space and not a private space. The private is thought to be that which is opposed to the public; it is the space in which a person can develop her own personal self; it is a place of rest, of self enjoyment, of meditation. Nevertheless, in the case of many women, such as Nazneen, the private space becomes for them a domestic one, since it is equated with housework and confinement. By contrast to men, for those women incarcerated at home and with no other personal developing roles than those of being subservient wives and abnegated mothers, the house does not serve the function of being a place of retirement from the drudgeries of the outside world, but is a place of labour in and of itself (Murillo, 1996).

As an immigrant woman with no knowledge of English: "Nazneen could say two things in English: sorry and thank you" (Ali, 2003), she is completely under the control of her husband. Therefore, during the first six months in London Nazneen is completely isolated, she is confined at home and she is characterized as a passive woman who sees the world through the window of the little apartment she shares with her husband. Although she contemplates the outside world, she does not interact with it. The window becomes a symbol of imprisonment and reclusion, and the walls of the house are the barriers that set her apart from the rest of the world:

What she missed most was people. Not any people in particular (apart, of course, from Hasina) but just people. If she put her ear to the wall she could hear sounds. The television on. Coughing. Sometimes the lavatory flushing. Someone upstairs scraping a chair. A shouting match below. Everyone in their boxes, counting their possessions. In all her eighteen years, she could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone. Until she married. And came to London to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sound of private lives sealed away above, below and around her. (2003: 24)

It is a paradox, then, that despite the fact that she has completed a long journey from her native home in a little village of a “third world country” to the capital city of a “first world one”, this does not bring about any improvement in her. Apparently, her father, who “was the second wealthiest man in the village” (2003: 21), sees his marrying her daughter to a man living in London as a positive act for his daughter’s future. Nevertheless, movement does not entail an opening of opportunities for her. It does not broaden her horizons or better her living circumstances. It is a reversal of expectations for her and it rather means confinement and subservience. This is shown through the narrative by contrasting the description of her present situation and the real space in which she is located to the recollections of her past life in Gouripur. The idea of going back home is a constant presence in the mind of Nazneen at this point in the narrative. This

presence is highlighted through the letters of Hasina⁴⁴, Nazneen's sister. Hasina reminds Nazneen of her lost past life: "Hasina stands for most of the narrative as the main link between Nazneen and her country of origin" (Bastida, 2009: 143).

Homesickness, the drudgeries of domestic work and the loneliness she has to endure during these first years in London are worsened when she is pregnant. At that point, she starts to think more frequently about her native land and her previous life back in Gouripur. In *Brick Lane*, thus, "as in many diasporic texts, dreams and memories of the lost homeland play a positive role in securing identity and survival" (Weedon, 2008: 27). This experience, in fact, is a common-day reality to Asian women, as one of the women interviewed by Amrit Wilson called Zubeida pointed out: "In these lonely hours, sitting in Brick Lane in the East End or Lumb Lane in Bradford, vivid memories come flooding in from the past, from the life before this semi-existence" (1984: 17). Imaginary space becomes for Nazneen more real than reality in London. The narrative at these moments is much more vivid, poetic and positive and her descriptions are full of adjectives that denote brightness, happiness, movement and life:

She looked at her stomach that hid her feet and forced her to lean back to counter its weight. She looked and saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity. They had nothing to do with her. For a couple of beats, she closed her eyes and smelled the jasmine that grew close to the well, heard the

⁴⁴ In this chapter, I do not explore the character of Hasina at length as my main concern is that of analysing the character of Nazneen. For further reading on Hasina and her significance in the narrative see Perfect (2008) and Hiddlestone (2005).

chickens scratching in the hot earth, felt the sunlight that warmed her cheeks and made dancing patterns on her eyelids.

(76)

She does not like Brick Lane, its buildings, the streets, the tattooed lady. They contribute to her feeling of isolation and depression. There is neither physical nor emotional connection between her and the space she inhabits. She cannot identify herself in that space; the connection established between space, identity and self is broken at this moment. She can only understand and negotiate life within the context of her native land: "You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango street, you can feel that earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved" (87).

Nazneen suffers from what Daphne Spain has named "spatial segregation" because she does not have access to all spaces when she arrives in London. For Spain, space has been used and is still used as a way of maintaining a spatial segregation that sanctions an asymmetrical relation between women and space, and men and space: "*spatial arrangements between the sexes are socially created, and when they provide access to valued knowledge for men while reducing access to that knowledge for women, the organization of space may perpetuate status differences*" (Spain, 1992: 3; emphasis added). These differences in status are evident in the novel between Nazneen and her husband. She is in an inferior position in comparison with his; however, he is also subordinated and de-classed. He has a degree from Dhaka University but on arriving in London he is seen as a

mere Asian immigrant and identified with those blue-collar workers. This shows how power depends on the position from which it is exercised.

This spatial segregation in space that is common to social organizations is taken to the limit in the case of women immigrants such as Nazneen, because it leaves them more vulnerable and powerless. They are left totally under the control of their husbands and this decreases their possibilities of independence and freedom (Wilson, 1984). Moreover, ignoring the language of the country in which they live makes them dependent on the community and subjected to their rules and traditions. This isolation which incarcerates Nazneen is more than the mere fact of being forced to stay at home for cultural reasons and not being able to speak English; it is a state of mind that brings about depression and shock.

As a consequence of this fact, the narration at the beginning of the novel describes an oppressive, gloomy and sad environment where references to death and suicide are quite suggestive:

Blood spotted through from the cut. She discarded the kitchen roll and watched the red drops fall on the silver sink. The drops slid together like mercury and rolled down the drain. How long would it take to empty her finger of blood, drop by drop? How long for the arm? And for the body, an entire body? (2003: 24)

This issue is also highlighted in the novel when Mrs Islam and Razia (the only two women who visit Nazneen) tell her about an apparently “terrible accident” that happened to another Asian woman who “fell from her home window”. Nazneen sees committing suicide as an act of escape and empowerment since at least it gives the woman the possibility of deciding about her future:

“suddenly Nazneen was sure that she jumped. A big jump, feet first and arms wide, eyes wide, silent all the way down and her hair wild and loose, and a big smile on her face because with this single everlasting act she defied everything and everyone” (40). This idea of suicide and madness as acts of power for women was common to many pieces of writing produced by women in the 19th century and a recurrent topic from then onwards, for instance: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wall Paper* (1899) or Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" (1978). Fortunately, at the end of the novel, Nazneen will find another way of gaining agency that does not involve putting an end to her own life.

The first time Nazneen leaves the private space, while Chanu is working, and walks down the street into public space, She is completely lost both literally and metaphorically speaking. Urban space becomes like a jungle to her. She feels doubly displaced in urban space. On the one hand, she comes from a society based on a rural environment and she lacks the specific spatial competence and performance that she needs to move about in the city of London. Nazneen's social practice is inadequate for the new environment and she is unable to codify the space that surrounds her, for as Henri Lefebvre pointed out: “the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space” (2005: 38). On the other hand, urban spaces have been traditionally constructed as masculine:

Both the external and internal design and layout of the City symbolize male power and authority and men's legitimate occupations of these spaces. The streets and squares, the spaces between them, the facades of buildings and the internal layout of dealing rooms and trading floors reflect and reinforce the

idealization of a city worker as masculine. In these spaces, feminine bodies are “out of place”. (McDowell, 1999: 145)

An immense space of possibility and interaction is opened up for her in the city space but she is scared and confused. The streets of London become a maze for Nazneen. Urban cities have been described as a labyrinth by Elizabeth Wilson. They are like a labyrinth for they are characterised by a continual flux of people that move on “an endlessly circular journey” (1997: 270). In this sense, cities have been traditionally described as men’s space (Cortés, 2005). The urban environment has been defined as a dangerous place for women (McDowell, 1997, 1999). However, as in the case of Nazneen, cities can become spaces of possibilities for women.

The novel represents with great detail every single step and every single space that separates Nazneen’s little flat and the outside world. The first thing she experiences once she is outside is the mist. She sees some pigeons that are portrayed, like her, as prisoners: “outside, small patches of mist bearded the lamppost and a gang of pigeons turned weary circles on the grass like prisoners in an exercise yard” (54). These two elements lead to a sense of confusion in Nazneen. Nonetheless, this new space she is about to discover is not only magnificent in its excessive materiality – from huge buildings like skyscrapers to the city’s infrastructure such as traffic lights or lampposts – but it is also described by Nazneen as a space of opportunities: “A space opened up before her. God is great, said Nazneen under her breath. She ran” (54).

Nazneen feels invisible among the people in the street. She negotiates the new reality that is in front of her eyes by relating it to the only environment she

knows. She describes the streets full of people rushing from one place to another and compares the traffic to monsoon rains (54). At this moment, the reader witnesses Nazneen's first instance of agency when she manages to interact with another person by using her limited knowledge of the English language. This is a crucial moment that Nazneen sees as a victory. She learns that urban space, public space, offers other possibilities to her:

It rained then. And in spite of the rain, and the wind which whipped it into her face, and in spite of the pain in her ankle and arm, and her bladder, and in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid, she began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something. (61)

Her attendance to the first of the "Bengal Tigers" group with Karim signifies an increase in her level of confidence in the public space. At the end of the meeting, the attendees have to vote to decide the name of the group and this act of voting becomes a symbol of her entering the public world: "She felt it a momentous thing. By raising her hand, or not raising it, she could alter the course of events, of affairs in the world of which she knew nothing" (2003: 242). Having the right to vote was the initial and a crucial issue of the feminist movement. It meant leaving aside the condition of being constantly considered as a minor; it implied being a fully mature person with the right to make choices in life. This is very important in the novel because it contributes to Nazneen's interior change.

3.7 FATE VERSUS AGENCY

The concept of *fate* is highlighted from the very beginning of the novel since the opening quotations make reference to it: “fate guides each of us” (Ivan Turgenev) and “a man’s character is his fate” (Heraclitus). Moreover, a connection is established between this concept and Nazneen’s personality. In the narration of Nazneen’s birth, her mother, Rupban, decides to leave the future of the almost dead baby in the hands of fate:

But Rupban, who could not stop crying, held her daughter to her breast and shook her head. ‘No’, she said, ‘We must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger’. (Ali, 2003: 14)

From this moment onwards, Nazneen will comply with every single situation fate places on her path and she will accept her duties quietly and passively. This attitude derives directly from her belief in fate and is one of the consequences of her upbringing in her home town, Gouripur, in Bangladesh. Accordingly, she submissively accepts her father’s decision to marry her to an apparently well-off Bangladeshi man living in London whom Nazneen describes as: “old. At least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him” (17).

However, she learns that she has to act in order to reach her goals. After she walks alone in the streets for the first time, the instances of agency on her part increase. She starts a domestic rebellion at home in order to make Chanu change

his mind and help her to find her sister Hasina back in Dhaka. She acknowledges that the personal is something political in that she draws a parallel between her actions and those of peasants who seek to prompt a revolution within the state:

Nazneen dropped the promotion from her prayers. The next day she chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer. The razor slipped when she cut his corns. His files got mixed up when she tidied. All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within. (63)

Although throughout the novel she has had the feeling of being locked up in a life she did not want, her assertiveness comes when she attends meetings and learns about Muslim people's situation around the world. Moreover, she discovers that sewing provides her with economic independence and allows her to save money that she can send to her sister. From this moment onwards, she does not resort to the imaginary space of her previous life:

The village was leaving her. Sometimes a picture would come. Vivid; so strong she could smell it. More often, she tried to see and could not. It was as if the village was caught up in a giant fisherman's net and she was pulling at the fine mesh with bleeding fingers, squinting into the sun, vision mottled with netting and eyelashes. As the years passed the layers of netting multiplied and she began to rely on a different kind of memory.

The memory of things she knew but no longer saw. It was longer in her sleep that the village came whole again. (217)

There is an important prolepsis at the beginning of the narration that, in my opinion, accounts for the main point in this chapter and, at the same time, serves as a summary of Nazneen's evolution:

What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge. So that when, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (16)

The main revolution that happens in the novel takes place inside Nazneen and it coincides with the time when she meets Karim, her young lover, and she starts becoming politicized. She faces an interior struggle when Chanu begins to say that the family is going back to Dhaka. Her elder daughter Shahana is totally against this idea and Nazneen does not want to go back either. Nazneen spends time looking through the window again as she had done at the beginning of the novel (364). But she is firm in her decision not to go back and she is strong enough to reject the proposal of her lover to get divorced from her husband and

marry him. She does no longer depend on any other person but herself to make her own choices in life.

The novel ends with Nazneen fulfilling her dream of going ice-skating: “in front of her was a huge white circle, bounded by four-foot-high boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice.... To get on the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there” (492). The ice skating rink is a metaphor of the whole world now opened to Nazneen; her future will only be created by her own will. She can follow many paths, there might be different things for her to do; yet, if she slides on the ice, it is her own responsibility. She has learned that fate depends on one's actions. She has finally become free.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Space and the notion of space that people create is, as Massey maintains, not pre-given and fixed but articulated in context. This explains Nazneen's changing view of space and the fact that she eventually finds a place for herself in England. This becomes evident in Nazneen's case because she gains confidence in herself and power at the same time that she establishes social relations with different people within different spatial contexts. The more she is able to access different spaces the more powerful she feels. Space both disempowers and empowers her. This fact explains the change in Nazneen's personality from the beginning to the end of the novel. This fact has a consequence on her attitude and by the end of the novel Nazneen no longer relies on fate but discovers that she has much to say in the decisions she makes in her life and that by means of her actions she can provoke major changes in her life and determine her future to a great extent.

As I have already pointed out, her self-assertiveness at the end of the novel derives from her access to the spaces that surround her. As a person who undergoes migration and with it a change of space, space and the relation that she establishes with the spatial dimension in which she is located becomes a crucial issue. Nazneen's interaction with space is defined not only by the fact that she is a woman (a gender perspective) but also by a series of other factors, such as race, class, ethnicity, imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy. These are interdependent and determine the situation of Asian women in Great Britain: "‘race’ does not

simply make the experience of women's subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of that subordination" (Afshar and Maynard 1994: 13).

It could be argued then that, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, she has to overcome these constraints and acknowledge her position of subalternity in order to make a change in her life. And as Spivak argues, this is more difficult for women:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. (...) If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.
(Spivak, 1988: 287)

This process of realizing subalternity is always a traumatic one which involves internal conflict and suffering. However, the moment subalternity is acknowledged, the person is endowed with at least the awareness of her/his degree of personal freedom, power and agency.

The novel has a positive and optimistic ending that can be put into question if one compares Nazneen's fictional story to the real lives of many Asian women living in Britain (Wilson, 1997) or short stories written by Asian immigrant women such those included in Safia Siddiqi's *The Golden Cage: Urdu Short Stories by Asian Women in Britain* (2002). Yet, As Ali herself claims the novel should be taken into account as a complete work by itself (Ali, 2003: n.p.). By means of her writing, Ali is able to open up new possibilities for Asian women that may seem unattainable at the present moment. Ali seems to defend that

literature becomes a “weapon” by means of which women can inscribe a more encouraging and constructive future for themselves and their peers.

CHAPTER 4. NEW SPACES OF INTERACTION AND CONTESTATION: ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH* (2000)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Zadie Smith's first novel *White Teeth*⁴⁵. *White Teeth* can be analysed as an example of the diverse, metropolitan and multicultural society of the city of London at the turn of the millennium. The novel portrays a mixture of characters that embody hybridity and cultural diversity. This chapter focuses on the way in which boundaries within this multicultural space are established, negotiated and/or violated.

I shall, therefore, analyse the malleable aspect of space in each of the three main periods of time represented in the novel: the Second World War and the post-war period of the 1940s, the period of social changes of the 1980s, and the late period of the 1990s. The novel deals with a great range of characters and narrates the relations they establish. Accordingly, the chapter takes as its starting point the idea that space is understood as a set of social relations (Massey 1996) and thus, centres each of the above-mentioned periods of time in one of the following relations: the friendship between Archibal Jones and Samad Iqbal in the

⁴⁵ *White Teeth*, published in 2000, was followed by *The Autograph Man* in 2002 and *On Beauty* in 2005.

first period, inter- and intra-family relations in the second period, and group associations in the last one.

White Teeth introduces a myriad of characters adjusting, negotiating and creating a sense of “Britishness” and a sense of belonging within themselves and their families; and their neighbourhood in the city of London and within the United Kingdom. At the same time, these ethnically diverse characters relate to each other in an often funny, sometimes shocking and naïve way. Smith’s treatment of the question of racial differences and the relation established between different racial groups in the city of London differs from the situation depicted by Andrea Levy or Monica Ali in *Small Island* and *Brick Lane* respectively.

Smith describes immigration and its consequences with certain optimism. Smith’s intention is to present a multicultural Britain and this is emphasised in the novel’s “chaotic” plot and structure that combine a medley of characters’ life experiences. For some literary critics like Dominic Head, the novel deals with social problems associated with ethnicity and postcolonialism in a different way from that normally used since they are portrayed as being the shared problems of all British citizens, rather than a specific issue of those who are “non-white”. Moreover, for Head, Smith’s novel is considered to be the epitome of multiculturalism because:

The implication is that Smith has found a way of harnessing the novel’s capacity to embrace heterogeneity, and has used it to give convincing shape to her presentation of an evolving, and genuinely multicultural Britain. (2003: 107)

This idea is emphasised by the fact that the present day ethnic variety of London is constructed in the novel as the result of an “experiment” (one that can be read to be partly as the result of colonial policy and ideology) that unlike the FutureMouse© one, on which the last part of the novel focuses, has had positive and enriching outcomes in British society: “this has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment” (326).

4.2 WHITE TEETH'S CRITICAL REPECTION

White Teeth was a huge literary success; what impressed critics the most was the youth of Zadie Smith and the quality of her novel. In fact, while Smith was still an undergraduate student she was offered a contract by Hamish Hamilton to complete the novel based on the reading of scarcely the first chapter (Merrit, 2000). Smith wrote the rest of the novel “during her senior year at Cambridge University” (Russo, 2000) and the final book was “eagerly anticipated – and extravagantly publicized – this past winter [2000] in London” (O’ Rourke, 2000: 165).

The novel met the expectations and great hype that the reading of the first draft had aroused and *White Teeth* was praised by a majority of literary critics and readers alike. Proof of the former is the fact that with this novel, Zadie Smith won three of the most renown literary prizes in the United Kingdom: the Whitbread First Novel Award, the Guardian First Book Award⁴⁶, the Commonwealth Writers Prizes and two EMMAS⁴⁷ and was shortlisted for a number of other literary prizes and awards such as the Orange Prize for fiction, the Author’s Club First Novel Award and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize.

The media have described Smith as the new sensation of the millennium and her work has been compared to that of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi

⁴⁶ The Guardian First Book Award was established in 1965 by the Guardian newspaper to award a book of fiction by a British or Commonwealth writer.

⁴⁷ The BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Awards were created as a means of recognizing those works that celebrate multiculturalism. As stated in the awards official website, “EMMA seeks to promote diversity within the media industry by publicly recognising the levels of excellence achieved by the multicultural community, and the qualities that each ethnic group brings to the professional and commercial success of United Kingdom as a whole”. Accessed 21 April 2007, <http://www.emmainteractive.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=414&Itemid=163>

(Seltzer, 2000; *The Guardian*, September 15, 2000; Russo, 2000; Merrit, 2000; O'Grady, 2000; O'Hagan, 2002). O'Rourke, for example, defines Zadie Smith as "an impressive versatile prose stylist, at ease with a variety of voices and breeds of urban slang, and in this and in her panoramic approach to multiculturalism she resembles Salman Rushdie, whose influence is obvious" (O'Rourke, 2000: 166).

The overwhelming degree of praise that the novel received is for some critics disproportionate and unjustified. On the one hand, Smith's literary ability has been questioned by the insinuation that she is, or was, a token for the media and its purposes: "She has become so much more famous than her celebrated first novel because she had the fortune, or misfortune, to be the perfect demographic. Young, black, female – and very talented. She is everything the media hankers after" (*The Guardian*, December 11, 2000). On the other hand, the novel has been accused of not giving a very accurate account of reality, of ethnic identities or of ethnic relations in the city of London: "Smith has allowed herself a certain imaginative freedom" (Mullan, 2002: n.p.).

This imaginative freedom goes hand in hand with a narrative composed of a myriad of characters and cultural references and infused with a great deal of optimism. This style of writing has been described as "hysterical realism" by some (Wood, 2001) and as "comic realism" by others (Achenson, J. and S. Ross, 2005). The former term was coined by James Wood, the main literary critic of *The Guardian*, to refer to the style of novel such as *White Teeth*, a "big, ambitious novel", that is, a novel that tries to portray thousands of things at the same time in a similar manner to that found in soap operas and situation comedies:

This is not magical realism. It is hysterical realism. Storytelling has become a kind of grammar in these novels; it is how they structure and drive themselves on. The conventions of realism are not being abolished but, on the contrary, exhausted, and overworked. Appropriately, then, objections are not made at the level of verisimilitude, but at the level of morality: this style of writing is not to be faulted because it lacks reality – the usual charge against botched realism – but because it seems evasive of reality while borrowing from realism itself. (Wood, 2001)

In this respect, Smith herself admits that the novel “could be condemned in certain places for having a sitcom aesthetic” (O’Hagan, 2002). Moreover, in her own review of her novel Smith wrote that the precocity of herself as a writer had produced a novel which is “the literary equivalent of a hyperactive, ginger-haired tap-dancing 10-year-old” (Mason, 2005). The review written by Dan Schneider (2007) is especially sharp in its criticism. He defines the novel as “still an atrocious book [that] should never have seen print. ... How any reviewer could praise the book, or her writing, shows the depths to which Political Correctness has taken a hold” (2007).

I partly agree with the critics that take the novel with a pinch of reserve. Some gaps and inconsistencies arise in the narrative under close analysis. The ending events are abrupt (it is worth considering that a five-hundred-pages novel ends in scarcely three pages) and, as a reader, one has the feeling that the events referring to genetic engineering make the novel appear fairly unrealistic at the end. These facts, however, have not seemed to affect the general readers’

perception of the novel. This fact might be proof of the relevance of what has been described as “the death of the reader” in contemporary British fiction. Tabish Khair’s article (2006), with the same title as the above-mentioned phrase, points out the existence of a number of literary texts in the British literary panorama that suggest the growth of a non-critical reader in the purest sense of the word: “there is some indication that a chunk of contemporary fiction seeks to cast the reader in a rather passive and celebratory role. And it appears that it is often this kind of writing –suave, polished, talented at times– that is celebrated in many well-meaning circles” (2006: 2).

It is precisely this “celebratory” attitude that seems to lie behind the novel under analysis since the comical tone of the novel cannot be denied. Smith deals with issues that have deeper connotations than the events portrayed (for instance race is a factor that pertains all through the novel and it is dealt with in a very light-hearted way as I will comment on later) and it is the role of the reader to notice the hidden connotations, if she/he is able or willing to first recognize them and then acknowledge them. In this respect, Smith does not make an explicit use of literature as a denouncing weapon; rather, and as she admits, she wants to create a space of enjoyment of her mixed-identity:

“It is a kind of fantasy book”, [Zadie] agrees. “There is a lot of pessimism currently about race relations in this country. I think the relationships in the book are something to be wished for, but I think they might exist now, and certainly in the future, with the amount of mixing that has gone on. My generation, and my

younger brother's generation even more, don't carry the same kind of baggage". (Merrit, 2000)

This quotation exemplifies the tone or the way racial issues are treated in the novel since the novel makes few explicit references to racial discrimination and violence. There are only a few explicit references of racism, one an instance of racial discrimination and the other an instance of racial violence. One of them, towards Archie's wife by his company director, Kelvin Hero, who suggests they do not attend the dinner with the Sunderland team on the grounds that Archie's wife Clara is Black, although Mr Hero insists that "I never considered myself a racist, Archie..." (70). Another, accounts for racial violence in the life of Mohammed Hussein-Ishmael (472-473) on which I shall comment later.

Although Smith's concern with race and racism is not stressed so much, she is still "concerned that the book's optimism about race relations not be perceived as some sort of nicey-nice obliviousness to the ugly realities of how prejudice operates" (Russo, 2000). This might be the case considering Smith's own personal experience which she admits was marked by her mixed-race origin but "softened by her academic achievements" (Merrit, 2000):

When you come from a mixed-race family, it makes you think a bit harder about inheritance and what's passed on from generation to generation. But as for racial tensions –I'm sure my parents had the usual trouble getting hotel rooms and so on, but I don't talk to them much about that part of their lives. A lot of it is guesswork or comes from reading accounts of immigrants coming here. I suppose the trick of the novel, if there is one, is

to transpose the kind of friendship we have now to a generation which was less likely to be friends in that way. (Merrit, 2000)

In this sense, Smith's personal accomplishments and the fact that coming from a lower middle-class family⁴⁸ she managed to go to Cambridge to complete her studies, becomes an example of the way in which race and class interact. Smith acknowledges that racism and that it operates in different ways according to the social status of both the person who exercises racial discrimination and the person who suffers that discrimination. Moreover, Smith also clarifies how the gender dimension was even more determinant in her case: "I've had hassles," Smith notes, "but my problems in this country have much more to do with my sex'" ("The Transformation of Zadie Smith", 2001: 65).

⁴⁸ "Her father was a photographer and her mother was a model who later became a psychologist" ("The Transformation of Zadie Smith", 2001: 65).

4.3 THE NOVEL'S PLOT AND STRUCTURE

White Teeth is structured according to time-frame references and spatial locations. Although the main setting of the novel is the area of Willesden Green in London the narration covers a great number of locations outside the territory of the United Kingdom in an attempt to recount the past lives of its characters. The narrative moves back to locations such as Jamaica and Bangladesh (that are British ex-colonial territories and account for the histories of the first-generation immigrants in the novel: Samad and Alsana Iqbal and Hortense Bowden mainly) and Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe (locations where British soldiers found themselves (dis)located when fighting for the Allies during the Second World War), particularly, “a tiny Bulgarian village bordering Greece and Turkey”, a central space in the development of Archibal's and Samad's friendship.

There are four main blocks in the structure of the novel which, as in the case of Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, refer to characters' names and dates. They emphasise the inter/connection between space and time and the idea of individual characters' different understandings of historical facts and life experiences. In each of these first structural divisions there are two time references: the first one is the present date in which the characters' lives develop and the other a past date that accounts for the characters' historical pasts, for their roots and their origins. The existence of these two time frames is not arbitrary. By relating each character's name to a present and a past date Smith acknowledges the notion that identity is permeable and malleable and the direct result of the interaction of one's

present with one's past and genealogy. The novel's structure mixes the lives of characters coming from diverse social, ethnic and religious backgrounds in such a way that the notion of a unique, stable and fixed identity (in this case British identity) is put into question.

The novel moves back in time to account for the origins of its protagonists. It establishes a genealogy for British society which moves back to the British Colonial period and uncovers, especially in the case of the life of Hortense Bowden, the history of British colonial rule and postcolonial policy. In this respect, the characters in the novel resort to a quest about their past in order to understand their present situation and location. Moreover, this formal structural aspect in the novel complements the opening quotation that reads: "What is past is prologue". Although and, as commented on at the beginning of the chapter, Smith does not focus on ethnic and racial *problems*, the characters' lives are undoubtedly marked by their ethnic origin since all the characters come from a mixed and heterogeneous background.

The four main blocks around which the novel is organized are: "Archie 1974, 1945", "Samad 1984, 1987", "Irie 1990, 1907" and "Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999" and each of them is further subdivided into five chapters. The novel deals with three different families of diverse ethnic origin: one Anglo-Jamaican (the Jones), another Bangladeshi (the Iqbals), and a third one White-Jewish (the Chalfens). The three families can be said to account for the main flows of migration groups that came to England from the 1950s onwards: Asian, Afro-Caribbean and European.

The first two groups of immigrants were seen as a threat for Britain and, accordingly, a whole discourse on their alienness was built upon them, encouraging their exclusion from the concept of Britishness. However, the third group, that of Europeans coming mainly from Poland and Ireland, was much more widely accepted in comparison to the former ones and their coming to work was especially encouraged by the British government from 1945 to 1954 (Solomos, 1989: 54-56). In this sense, physical traits became an element of distinction. The body, and more concretely, skin colour became a signifier for inclusion or exclusion, for acceptance or denial, for success or for failure.

Smith pointed out in an interview that: "I didn't want the community in *White Teeth* to be representative of immigrants in England, that's not my job really, I am not a politician" (O'Grady, 2002). Smith shows her anxiety about being located as a writer belonging to the Black literary tradition because she rejects being seen as the spokesperson for her ethnic community as if, her aim as a writer were then different than that of a middle-class white author: "I'm constantly being asked, especially in Europe, about immigrant literature and what it's like to be an immigrant. I'm not an immigrant. I was born in the Royal Free!" (Knight, 2006).

Smith's concern points to the debate in contemporary British fiction of the role of the writer and of the tension of considering representation as solely fictional depiction or as a political act, of the balance between the ethics and aesthetics of any work of art. As James Procter (2000, 2006) points out this is a debate particularly opened up in the case of writers from a non-white ethnic background in 1988 by Stuart Hall's essay "New Ethnicities". In that essay Hall

theorises about two different moments within the representation of “Black identities” by “Black artists” during the 1980s. The first one is characterised by its motivation to create a portrait of “Black identities” (including within this unifying term Caribbean, African and Asian identities) that contested the negative stereotypes of these ethnic groups in the media and the collective imaginary of British society. The second by contrast is characterised by a rejection of a unitary vision of “Black identity” and aimed at acknowledging the existence of differences within this identity.

In this respect, *White Teeth* contributes to this latter notion that ethnic groups are not homogenous despite the fact that Smith rejects being considered a “Black writer”. She challenges any notion of a fixed “Black identity” and even more, any notion of a stable human identity. The characters are far from consistent in their identity in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and religion. The boundaries of self-definition constantly change and move in an ongoing-process of creation and negotiation. The characters do not develop in a linear way but change from one identity to another. For instance, Millat moves from being a rebellious teenager who takes drugs and chases women around to become the most fervent devotee of the Islamic faith; Marcus's initial passion for science is substituted by his concern with animal rights and his militancy in FATE, a group that condemns the use of animals for scientific experiments; and Alsana's niece, Neena, contests “proper” female identity as it is encouraged, for example, in the Islamic religion by being a lesbian and therefore denying her possibilities of motherhood (I am referring here to motherhood understood in “traditional” heterosexual relations and I intentionally omit alternative motherhoods).

Smith appears to want to move away from the binary tendency of thinking about who is considered to be inside or outside the realm of British identity. For John Mullan “the ethnic and cultural identities of the characters are so various that Smith seems to be taking and enjoying new liberties rather than plotting the consequences of empire” (Mullan, 2002). The tendency of portraying a divided British society that is the direct result of a colonial empire underlined the structure of the two previously examined novels.

On the one hand, Andrea Levy's *Small Island* is structured around the experiences of two couples, one white and the other Black in the aftermaths of WWII and their attitudes towards the changing social panorama in terms of racial interaction. On the other hand, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* accounts for the life experiences of a Bangladeshi woman positioned as an outsider of British culture and struggling to find a place within both her own Bangladeshi community in the first instance and within British society as a whole in the second. Unlike Levy's and Ali's novels that portrayed a very much divided society in almost opposite terms, Smith's novel encourages the reader to move away from opposite binaries and to think about British society in a pluralistic way; a “third-space” (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996) of possibility, negotiation and contestation is brought about by Smith's narrative.

The novel does not create the representation of the different ethnic communities in positive or negative terms; Smith does not define any particular community in opposition to another. Her narrative does not respond to a “burden of representation” directly (Hall, 1988) and accordingly, she depicts characters who are neither “bad” nor “good”, neither “outsiders” nor “insiders” but

characters who are both and more than that, who have complex identities and who are struggling to create their own legitimate spaces of action, interaction, presence and (re)presentation in the city of London.

There are different spatial realities in the lives of characters belonging to the same family, neighbourhood and ethnic community. Examples of this are Samad's obsession with his ancestor Mangal Pande and the fact that nobody else in his family cares about that or the relevance that religion has in the life of Hortense (she is a Jehovah's Witness) and the fact that it does not pass on to her daughter, Clara, but to her boyfriend, Ryan Topps. These two examples together with the references to the coming of the end of the world, show how everyday reality is organised following a different understanding of space and spatial reality. They are examples of the co-existence of multiple "Third Space(s)", that are both real and imagined, spaces that have as some of their defining qualities:

[A] knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that [are] existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in *spatial praxis*, the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power. (Soja, [1996] 2007: 31)

These new spaces are characterized by the fact that they contest and disrupt previous binary oppositions but, at the same time incorporate and

comprehend some of the characteristics of the previous parts but are continuously moving on to “expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known” (Soja, [1996] 2007: 61). In this process social lines of division and integration are constantly drawn and removed and space is moulded and contested. This is what happens in the daily spaces of interaction that the novel represents.

4.4 THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND POST-WAR PERIOD: A SPACE OF DISRUPTION AND NEGOTIATION

The plot of the novel develops out of the friendship between Archie and Samad during the Second World War: “It was 1 April 1945” (84). It is precisely within this context of disruption of traditional social conventions and geographical displacement that their friendship is made plausible. Archibal is a “white” British citizen and Samad is a Bangladeshi subject of the British Empire. Differences in status between Archibal and Samad are legally sanctioned and might regulate the latter’s right of abode, for example. This brings about an asymmetrical relationship in terms of rights for the two men and this fact marks a difference in their status that has legal repercussions. These repercussions go beyond the individual’s control and understanding; they are legal boundaries that countries implement in order to embrace their citizens and exclude or prevent “others” to enter into this category with full legal rights.

In fact, every nation develops policies of nationality which contribute to the maintenance of the nation state as a firm, stable physical, ideological and spatial pre-given entity. Nations are constructed imaginary communities and national identities produced and re-produced to bring about a sense of belonging and sameness and, at the same time emphasize the differences from other nations and other national identities (Anderson, 1983). In the case of countries whose political realm extends beyond their geographical boundaries, as in the case of the United Kingdom during its colonial period, the need to create a sense of national

unity and identity is even greater. One example of this can be seen in the colonial education system and the fact that it replicates “western” values, ideas and social models in territories where those teachings clash with their most immediate social practices and spatial realities.

Together with this need to foster a sense of national belonging, there is a need to differentiate between members of the “colonised territory” and members of the “coloniser mother country”. This ideological distinction was analysed by the Palestinian social theorist, Edward Said in, *Orientalism* (1978) in terms of a binary opposition between the western “I” and the eastern “Other”. This was also enforced by the legal apparatus of the nation especially after the collapse of the Empire. Before 1 January 1949 (when the *British Nationality Act 1948*) came into force any person who owned alliance to the British Crown, by virtue of her/his being born in a country belonging to the British Empire, was considered to be a “British subject” in British law.

From 1949 to 1982 any person who was a “British subject” by the circumstances mentioned above became a Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (this is the case of Samad Iqbal). However, this was a distinction that agglutinated a great number of diverse people under the same category and entitled them to almost the same rights. The *British Nationality Act 1981* was created⁴⁹ and enforced on 1 January 1983 in order to regulate this broad category of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies” and to control large numbers of immigration and settlement from the ex-colonies. This act distinguished between “British Citizens”, “British Dependent Territories Citizens” and “British Overseas

⁴⁹ This act was further implemented by the *British Overseas Territories Act 2002* that changes British Dependent Territories citizenship to British Overseas Territories citizenship and gives them the right to be registered as a British citizens and, thus, the right of abode.

Citizens" as the main important categories that account for the different types of status of a British national.

The context depicted in the novel for the meeting of the two main male characters is that of war and, therefore, the war provides the background for an encounter where the hierarchical differences in status in which the dichotomy "citizen" and "subject" of the British Empire positions both characters are overrun by the need to collaborate in the war effort: "[Samad] wished to defend a country that wasn't his and revenge the killing of men who would not have acknowledged him in a civilian street" (95). In this context, they are under another type of hierarchical organisation: the military. Within the army, and as it was portrayed in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), racial and class differences do not operate in the same way as in normal social circumstances. An increased number of men from the colonies came to help and fight for the "Mother Country" and this fact prompted the coexistence of "the colonised" with "the coloniser" in a setting where the former colonial rules did no longer per se apply.

Archie Jones was only 17 years old when he joined the British army in 1945, after fooling the doctors at the medical board, and Samad Iqbal was 19. "Archie Jones [is] the driver of the tank, Samad [is] the wireless operator" (84) and they are "assigned to each other" (83) by military orders and positioned on the same level within this context: they are both under the command of captain Thomas Dickinson-Smith. Within the army the only relevant feature is that of rank and power and any other distinctive traits such as race and gender are

weakened⁵⁰. This is emphasised through the use of military uniforms that homogenise people at the level of superficial body appearance:

[T]he day Archie involuntarily forgot that most fundamental principle of English manners. He stared. They were standing side by side on a stretch of black dirt-track Russian ground, dressed identically in little triangular caps perched on their heads like paper sailing-boats, wearing the same itchy standard uniform, their ice-pinched toes resting in the same black boots scattered with the same dust. But Archie couldn't help but stare.

(83)

Archie Jones' inability to cope with this encounter draws upon the idea of how the relation between "I/Other" is sanctioned by spatial boundaries that are completely removed within the army during the war. Archie is unprepared for this encounter. He has never seen an Asian person and constantly looks at him in fascination and awe. This connects with Said's considerations of the "exotic other" who is located in an ambivalent position in the eyes of the "western I" as he is the object of fear and desire at the same time⁵¹. Archie's continuous staring at Samad is decodified and understood by the latter in a way that indicates

⁵⁰An example of this is the participation of women in the war as nurses. A minority of them were qualified as doctors and some of those female doctors who were given the status of captains in the British Army during the Second World War. This situation empowered women and positioned them in spatial locations of control that clashes with the general tendency of keeping women within the domestic realm in normal circumstances. (As an example of gender segregation in societies see Spain,1992)

⁵¹ This episode connects with Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2005) portrait of the British Empire Exhibition that took place in Wembley in 1924. Both the characters of Queenie and her mother stand in awe at the encounter with the "Other". Queenie's mother is unable to de-codify the significance of a red spot on the forehead of Indian women and Queenie, as a child, experiences with surprise the ability to talk to an African-Caribbean man (1-7).

Samad's oblivion to racial matters. He does not pick up on the fact that his ethnic specificity is the cause of Archie's interest. On the contrary he can only produce two different reasons for Archie's behaviour: "Is it that you are doing some research into wireless operators or are you just in passion over my arse?" (84)

This is a comical instance of cultural misunderstanding; Samad's unawareness of the crucial aspect of race in the whole incident might be explained by the fact that Samad, an educated man – "I am educated. I am trained" (87) – comes from Bangladesh directly to fight in the army; in Bangladesh race is not an issue in his daily life experience since he is located in his own ethnic environment. This experience of feeling the "revelation" of the significance of race foretells a common occurrence in the lives of those educated people from the ex-colonies that came to the United Kingdom during the late 1950s and 1960s to continue their studies in further education or with the prospect of finding a job adequate to their qualifications. The impact of race has been discussed by many authors from the ex-colonies who settled down in the United Kingdom. A clear and short example of this is Wole Soyinka's poem "Telephone Conversation" in which a young, educated African man tries to find accommodation and realises that his colour determines the land-lady's attitude and his failure in finding a place to live. "ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came", (Soyinka, 1962) reads the poem line in which he acknowledges the implications of colour.

Archie and Samad have to negotiate their space in a very suffocating and narrow environment since they are confined together with two other soldiers and the captain in the space of the tank. The moving tank on its route to Sofia becomes the representative space of the British Army and by extension, of the

United Kingdom. Within this limited space racial and sexual boundaries are removed and the narrative explains how the captain “was in passion over Samad’s arse but not only that; also his mind; also two slender muscular arms that could only make sense wrapped around a lover; also those luscious light green/brown eyes” (84).

All the soldiers have to create their sense of space and preserve their identity. And since the group is formed by five soldiers that are described as being abjects in a “normal society”, a homogeneous and united view of “Britishness” is challenged. Their division is described as that of the “losers; with men like Archie, with men like Dickinson-Smith (whose government file included the phrase ‘Risk: Homosexual’), with frontal lobotomy cases like Mackintosh and Johnson. The rejects of war. As Roy affectionately called it: The Bugged Battalion” (89). Archie is uneducated, he never went to Grammar School and Samad’s characteristic is that, apart from being Asian, he has a dead hand; he is a “*cripple*” (112).

Although their racial, sexual, class and physical/mental differences are apparently done away with (by the fact that the army hierarchy unifies all soldiers under rank distinctions, as has been already commented on), they are intrinsically present in the fact that these men were assigned to the same group together. In a way the differences that mark the boundary of their exclusion in a civil society serve as the cementing factor when a disruption of the “normal” social order operates. Samad is aware of this fact and after an argument with his captain he wonders: “is it so complex, is it so impossible, that you and I, stuck in this British machine, could find it in ourselves to fight together as British subjects?” (86)

The fact that, for example, in cases of war, social boundaries can be relocated, indicates how social space and spatial social barriers are socially created and, since society is made up by the relations that individuals establish and these relations are dynamic, then, spatial barriers and space itself are in a constant process of definition:

[W]e recognise *space as the product of interrelations*; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. ... we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporary plurality. ... we recognise *space as always under construction*. (Massey, 2005: 9; emphasis added)

Traditional spatial distributions are not arbitrarily defined but usually serve the purpose of maintaining a particular social order. This social order, at the same time, sanctions asymmetrical access to space for different people within society (Lefebvre, 2005; Soja, 1996; Massey, 1996, 2005). The latter is emphasised in the novel by its depiction of the end of the Second World War. The group is left forgotten in a “tiny Bulgarian village bordering Greece and Turkey” (91) after the tank breaks down. The very location draws on the absurdity of the view of space as something delimited. They find themselves in a space which is a liminal space; a space that marks the end and/or the beginning of a territory, of a nation state. Geographical boundaries are artificially created but these man-made frontiers are contested and reorganised. Ironically, the cause of the war in which Samad and Archie are fighting was the invasion of Poland by Germany; i.e. a violation of the boundaries of a country.

Samad and Archie find themselves alone after the rest of their group has been killed. Despite the fact that they are no longer under the command of a captain, they continue behaving according to military rules. The absurdity of their behaviour and the whole situation in which they find themselves is comically emphasised in the novel by two aspects: first, their ignorance about the end of the war and second, by the simultaneous narration of Samad's and Archie's condition and the act of officially declaring the end of the war by a man for whom Archie and Samad mean nothing:

While Archie and Samad assessed the situation as best they could, Colonel-General Jodl sat in a small red schoolhouse in Reims and shook his fountain pen. Once. Twice. Then led the ink a solemn dance along the dotted line and *wrote history* in his name. The end of war in Europe. ... But it would be a full two weeks before either Archie or Samad were to hear about it. (92; emphasis added)

Smith's narration portrays that history is a constructed narration that draws on past happenings combining time and space references. In so doing history privileges some deeds over others although it is rooted in the assumption of objectivity. The impossibility of history as an objective narration is made explicit in *White Teeth* by two references. On the one hand, Samad's obsession with his ancestor Mangal Pande who according to Samad's "family history" was the rebel that shot the first bullet in the Indian Mutiny in 1857, even though he is not mentioned in official historical accounts. And, on the other hand, by the fact that the novel narrates the tragic events that befall to the "Buggered Battalion" the

same day the war ended and this is deemed to be irrelevant to History: "The Bugged Battalion ... a travelling circus of discontents roaming aimlessly through Eastern Europe; freaks and fools with no audience but each other. Who performed and stared in turns. Until finally the tank rolled into a day that History has not remembered. That Memory has made no effort to retain" (90).

Samad and Archie are left, waiting for someone to come to their rescue. Even in this unusual circumstance there are ideological boundaries and hierarchical rules that impose a specific way of organizing their space. They are both plain soldiers and therefore, neither of them has the right to exercise power over the other: "we have lost our command. A man of war without a commander is a very bad business indeed" (93). In this condition racial hierarchies are again dismantled and subverted due to their need to survive. So when Samad needs Archie's still hands to repair the radio the narrator has to point out the subversiveness of this situation: "It was awkward, an Indian telling an Englishman what to do – but somehow the quietness of it, the manliness of it, got them over it" (93).

Their ignorance about the end of the war entails their continuing reproduction of military conventions until the boundaries between a military and a civilian life begin to melt down with the passing of time. This proves how any particular spatial practice needs a process of continuous reproduction in order to exist and persist (Lefebvre, 2005). This intermediate process of transition, of inbetweenness, between one social order and another, brings about the violation of the old organisational spatial order. Samad and Archie need to appropriate their

colleagues' and commander's uniforms, adopting in this way an identity that is not theirs and by so doing they challenge the military code:

A few days later and still no help had arrived. The strain of having to be continually at war in such a pleasant village began to pull at Archie and Samad, and bit by bit they relaxed more and more into a kind of civilian life. Every evening they ate dinner in the old man Gozan's kitchen-café. Watery soup cost five cigarettes each. Any kind of fish cost a low-ranking bronze medal. As Archie was now wearing one of Dickinson-Smith's uniforms, his own having fallen apart, he had a few of the dead man's medals to spare and with them purchased other niceties and necessities: coffee, soap, chocolate. (96)

Archie and Samad finally discover that the war is over and they have done nothing relevant in it; they will not be part of history. "It is over, Jones. Someone has finished it for us' ... 'like a bus, Jones. We have missed the bloody war'" (105), Samad utters in despair because his purpose is over, his task has come to an end. He finds himself in a position of indeterminacy in which he no longer knows where he belongs or where to go: "What am I going to do, after this war is over, this war that is already over – what am I going to do? Go back to Bengal? Or to Delhi? Who would have such an Englishman there? To England? Who would have such an Indian?" (112). Samad undergoes the problematics of an inbetween identity: his peers will not consider him to belong to Bangladesh anymore after he had fought in the Second World War as an English soldier and he will be displaced in England as well where his alliance to Britain will be questioned.

Samad finally returns to England where he settles down in London and maintains the close friendship that he established with Archie during the war.

Post-war life for Archie and Samad in London between 1945 and 1974 is not portrayed in detail in the novel but the references provided indicate a hard life of work for Archie and Samad. Samad, despite being educated, works as a waiter in his cousin's Indian restaurant and Archie works in a mail company. Samad and Alsana's presence at Archie's and Clara's wedding marks the beginning of a long and "husbandly induced" relation between both couples. A relation that is characterised by the existence of an asymmetrical web of relationship, since Archie and Samad's friendship overcomes the relation they have with their respective wives: "The weight of other possibility rested on the brains of the two girls-wives. That their husbands told each other everything. That it was they themselves who were kept in the dark" (66).

The space in which Archie and Samad's friendship develops from 1975 onwards bears some of the features of the war setting in which they met. Obviously not in the fact that there is a war going on, but by the nature of it being a space characterised by change and modification. It is a hybrid place of interaction and contestation:

If time is to be open to a future of the new, then space cannot be equated with the closures and horizontalities of representation. More generally, if time is to be open then space must be open too. Conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to

be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics. (Massey, 2005: 59)

O'Connell's Pool House becomes Archie and Samad's place of possibility, of daily interaction: "this is Archie's and Samad's home from home; for ten years they have come here between six (the time Archie finishes work) and eight (the time Samad starts) to discuss everything from the meaning of Revelation to the prices of plumbers" (184). Their discovery of such a place is comical but significant: Archie is given luncheon vouchers by his boss as a compensation for not being allowed to attend a meal with members of another company on racial grounds owing to the fact that Clara is "Black". Archie is, thus, "banned" from a space on the grounds of his newly acquired "mixed identity" and he is sent to a space which turns out to be the epitome of hybridity and mixture.

Beginning with the fact that the name of the place is misleading (since it suggests an Irish pub) and continuing with the fact that it is run by Arabs (that is a subversion of the "purest", traditional and essentialist social space of interaction in the United Kingdom) everything in the pub makes it the embodiment of a new space of possibility; a space that is more than the mixture of Irish pub tradition and Arab history; a space where both and neither are accepted and normalised in the daily lives of the patrons:

The stranger who wanders into O'Connell's Pool House at random, hoping for the soft rise and fall of his grandfather's brogue, perhaps, or seeking to rebound a red ball off the side cushion and into the corner pocket, is immediately disappointed to find the place is neither Irish nor a pool house. He will survey

the carpeted walls, the reproductions of George Stubb's racehorse paintings, the framed fragments of some foreign, Eastern script, with no little confusion. He will look for a snooker table and find instead a tall, brown man with terrible acne standing behind a counter, frying up eggs and mushrooms. His eye will land with suspicion upon an Irish flag and a map of the Arab Emirates knotted together and hung from wall to wall. (183)

The paradox in O'Connell's is that its miscellaneous and diverse origin represents a space of possibility in itself and indeed the patrons form a close community; "a different kind of family" (183). Within this community rules of exclusion operate. Membership has to be gained by a process of pub participation and interaction: "it takes years of devoted fucking around, time-wasting, laying-about, shooting the breeze, watching the paint dry – far more dedication than men invest in the careless moment of procreation. You need to *know* the place" (183). This need of "knowing the place" is a direct reference to the fact that any organisation of space requires a competence on the part of the individual who attends this space to conform to the rules determined by that space. As Lefebvre (2005) points out any production of space entails a social practice that reproduces and perpetuates that space.

O'Connell's also sanctions gender segregation because "a woman had never been known to venture inside" (184). However, its being a space of openness and negotiation makes it possible for Magid to challenge Mickey's rule of not serving pork and order a bacon sandwich to his father's disgust (450-51).

As well, it is possible at the end of the novel for Clara and Alsana to venture inside together with their husbands: “And could it be that it is ... the elderly who find themselves wanting to make bets on the winner of a blackjack game, the one played by Alsana and Samad, Archie and Clara, in O’Connell’s, 31st December 1999, that historic night when Abdul-Mickey finally opened his doors to women?” (541). These actions emphasise, once more, the fluid and dynamic aspect of space.

4.5 SPACE IN THE 1980S: INTRA AND INTER FAMILY RELATIONS

During the 1980s, in the United Kingdom, there was a reassertion of the notion of family as an attempt to counter the disruptions that were taking place at a social level (Smith, 1994; Smith, 1998). According to Stuart Hall, a series of events marked the coming to an end of post-war British “stable” society such as the world-wide oil crisis, the numerous strikes by British miners, together with the economic crisis of late capitalism. These factors are portrayed in the novel in the form of three main events: the great hurricane of 15 October 1987, the Bradford riots against Salman Rushdie’s publication of the *Satanic Verses* on 14 January 1989, and the fall of the Berlin Wall on 10 November 1989 (230-243). To counter these disruptions to the “traditional” social order, part of Thatcher’s policy was to appeal to the idea of “common sense” and to put an emphasis on the idea of belonging and the idea of the family:

It is important to note the theme of **organicity** which underlines this populist construction of British identity. This theme of family, of the organic nature of society, made it very easy to point a finger at the homeless, the blacks and the criminals who are then seen as outsiders. (Sharma, 1993: 125; emphasis in the original)

It is not surprising then that Smith’s narrative when it covers this period of time spreads from a close depiction of family life. *White Teeth* depicts the lives of

two main families, that of the Jones and Iqbals. This emphasis on the idea of belonging during the 1980s reinstates the dichotomy “insider”/ “outsider”. That dichotomy is challenged once again by Smith’s narrative when she incorporates a third family, that of the Chalfens, to put an end to this dualistic view.

The Chalfens’ representation suggests that they have to a great extent internalised the idea of “Britishness” and “belonging”. This attitude operates at the beginning, especially with the mother (Joyce), towards Irie and Millat (Archie’s and Clara’s and Samad’s and Alsana’s daughter and son respectively) when immediately after their first encounter she asks them where are they from: “well ... you look very exotic. Where are you from, if you don’t mind me asking?” ‘Willesden’ said Irie and Millat simultaneously. ‘Yes, yes, of course, but where *originally*?’ ... ‘Whitechapel,’ said Millat, pulling out a fag. ‘via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus.’”(319)

The link between the Jones and the Iqbal family develops during the 1980s from the friendship between Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal. The connection of these two families provides them with a sense of home and belonging in the big city of London. From the very moment when Archie and Clara get married, the two families’ fate is linked, at times in a melodramatic way, resembling soap operas. Both Clara, Archie’s wife, and Alsana, Samad’s, are pregnant at the same time and give birth to a girl, Irie, (in the case of the first) and twins, Millat and Magid, (in the second). These new members of the family are the representatives of a mixed British identity. Moreover, at the end of the novel Irie becomes pregnant with one of the twins’ baby, not knowing which the father is. The

paternity of the baby will be forever unknown "Because whichever brother it was, it was the other one too. She would never know". (515)

The Iqbals move to Willesden Road to live near their friends, the Jones. For Samad, Archie is his only family (apart from Alsana) in London. Alsana's relation to Clara is imposed by the circumstances: "I don't know them! You fight in an old, forgotten war with some Englishman.....married to a Black! Whose friends are they? These are the people my child will grow up around? Their children – half blacky-white?" (61). Alsana is prejudiced against Clara's ethnic origin at the beginning but gradually both women adjust to each other and both families create the sense of a big family unit and structure. They need each other in their daily lives. Alsana is described as an educated woman coming from "a respected Bengal family" (62). However, she ends up sewing clothes for a shop in Soho in order to earn a living. She does not establish a relation with any other woman in London, apart from her niece Neena. On her part, Clara is also alone and bound to Alsana. Clara has uprooted herself from her family and her origins by marrying Archie and renounced to her mother's religion, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Both families arise from a relationship characterised by the non-existence of romantic and platonic love and in this respect they challenge western ideals of family creation and family life in the 1980s; London, that is considered to be a liberal, modern city, hosts models of family relations that are based on convenience rather than love. Marriage is portrayed in its basic sense as a contract by which both parties benefit.

Alsana and Samad's marriage follows the Asian traditional form of an arranged marriage. The correctness of this tradition is put into question both by

Archie and Neena. The former utters when Samad tells him during the war that he already has a fiancée: “‘You mean your wife’s not bloody born yet?’ ... ‘where I come from’, said Archie, ‘a bloke likes to get to know a girl before he marries her.’” (98). Samad’s response to this utterance challenges the legitimacy of the British tradition: ‘Where you come from it is customary to boil vegetables until they fall apart. This does not mean’, said Samad tersely, ‘that it is a good idea’” (98).

This legitimacy is further questioned by the fact that Clara and Archie’s union does not differ so much from the “traditional Asian custom”. Clara marries Archie as a way of escaping from her mother’s house: “She did not love Archie, but had made up her mind, from that first moment on the steps, to devote herself to him if he would take her away” (47-48). Archie on his part sees marriage to Clara as a revitalising new beginning after a failed attempt at committing suicide.

Smith relates the lives and experiences of two families that are marked out by race but whose problems are never portrayed or presented as being the direct result of their racial differences. Moreover, if a scale of social privilege is depicted it is not on terms of race but of class and education. The Jones and the Iqbals are deemed inferior to the Chalfens, who are “mixed-raced” as well since they are British and Polish, not by result of their race, but by the fact that they do not belong to the academic world. Maybe this is related to Smith’s own experiences. As she has admitted: “her own experience, she says, was always softened by her academic achievements, though she hints that this might have been through a desire to overcompensate in the face of prejudice.” (Merrit, 2000)

The Chalfen family is presented as being the true incarnation of Britishness: white, middle-class and educated. However, they are no more British than the other two families since the migrant nature of their ancestors is revealed, “the Chalfens were, ... immigrants too (third generation, by way of Germany and Poland, née Chalfenovsky)” (328). Irie, Archie and Clara Jones’ daughter is fascinated by the Chalfens’s way of life and by what she describes as their “Englishness”:

To Irie, the Chalfens were more English than the English. When Irie stepped over the threshold of the Chalfen house, she felt an illicit thrill, ... She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else’s uniform or somebody else’s skin. (328)

The boundaries among the three families begin to fade away when Millat and Irie start to go to the Chalfens’s home on a regular basis. Their encounter with a different family organisation and family relation prompts a collapse of their own family boundaries. This is not a one way process, though, since the Chalfens’s unity also falls down as a consequence of this interaction. The Chalfen family tears the unity of the other two families apart by portraying a different image of what a family can be for Millat and Irie.

Both Millat and Irie see the Chalfen family as the embodiment of what their families lack: success. Each of them, however, focuses on two different aspects of success. Whereas Millat thinks about money (which his parents fight hard to obtain, working as a waiter and a seamstress) as a crucial element, Irie focuses on knowledge and education: “Where Irie saw culture, refinement, class,

intellect, Millat saw money, lazy money, money that was just hanging around this family not doing anything in particular, money in need for a good cause that might just as well be him.” (322)

Irie encounters a reality in the Chalfen family which she does not recognize but which she values as being superior to that of her own. This hierarchy between the families is established in the very nature of their relation; Irie is forced, together with Millat Iqbal, to go twice a week to their house for an after-school study group with the Chalfen's son Joshua: “bringing children of disadvantaged or minority backgrounds into contact with kids who might have something to offer them.” (308).

For the Chalfens, Millat and Irie are the exotic complement in their dull, predictable lives. Joyce overestimates her role in this new school programme and considers herself to be a kind of saviour for these two teenagers who have gone astray. The Chalfen parents are totally convinced that everything that determines a person's nature is partly in the genes (nature) and, partly in “nurture” (324). For them, Millat and Irie are deemed unable to achieve success since their parents are not successful themselves.

Moreover, their family environments are not adequate in Joyce's eyes to allow for the “growth” of anything fructiferous. This idea is emphasised, by Joyce's continuous use of botanic language to refer to human relations in a metaphorical way. This is directly connected to the theme of organicity on which I have commented early on:

Joyce paused and looked at Irie and Millat the way she had looked at her Gartner Knight delphinium. She was a quick and

experienced detector of illness, and there was damage here. There was a quiet pain in the first one (*Irianthus negressium marcusilia*), a lack of a father figure perhaps, an intellect untapped, a low self-esteem; and in the second (*Millaturea brandolidia joyculatus*) there was a deeper sadness, a terrible loss, a gaping wound. (324)

The made-up Latin terms that are used in the narrative to describe Irie and Millat hint towards the further connection that is to be established between each of the two teenagers and the adult Chalfens. Whereas Joyce Chalfen will develop a devout interest in Millat Iqbal, Irie Jones will become involved with Marcus Chalfen scientific experiments.

The Chalfens place themselves in a position of superiority to that of the Iqbals and the Jones. It is not arbitrary that they are introduced in the novel in chapter twelve with the heading: "Canines: The Ripping Teeth". The involvement of Millat and Irie with the Chalfen family constitutes one of the main factors that destabilises the Iqbal and Jones' households. The Chalfens interfere in Millat's and Irie's upbringing. In this respect, it is especially the mother, Joyce Chalfen, who shows a paternalistic attitude towards the teenagers and this approach unchains a jealous reaction in Clara Jones and Alsana Iqbal: "I am saying these people are taking my son away from me! Birds with teeth! They're Englishifying him completely! They're deliberately leading him away from his culture and his family and his religion –" (345)

Millat, Magid and Irie as teenagers are immersed in their quest for identity and are struggling to find a space of their own, both within their families and

within society. Their search for successful referents within their immediate environment does not have positive results. This is furthered by the fact that the Jones and Iqbals' sense of unity is fragile, since their families have already been dismantled in a certain way before their encounter. The Iqbal household is divided the moment that Samad separates the twins. This separation brings about dramatic effects in the whole family.

Samad's wife, Alsana, chooses to carry out a passive action of protest against her son being sent back to Bangladesh against her will. She decides to answer all Samad's queries without precise, specific information: "Alsana had decided to stop speaking directly to her husband. Through the next eight years she would determine never to say *yes* to him, never to say *no* to him, but rather to force him to live like she did – never *knowing*, never being *sure*, holding Samad's sanity to ransom" (213-4).

On the other hand, Millat's identity is split and his quest for his own space in society (as with any teenager) becomes more complicated. From the moment his brother leaves, Millat inhabits an inbetween space of self-definition; he lives in a space of indeterminacy: "Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, English or Bengali; he lived for the in-between, he lived up to his middle name, Zulfikar, the clashing of two swords" (351). Therefore, Millat's identity goes through very different phases. He moves from one space of social interaction and definition characterised by a life of misbehaviour (218) with friends and girls outside the home, to start an existence of religious practice and social seclusion after getting involved with KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation).

There is little information about Magid through the novel as compared to Millat and Irie. Magid is sent back to Bangladesh with the hope of strengthening his roots and as a way of educating him under Bangladeshi religion and traditions in order to become a proper Muslim: “to Samad ... tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles” (193). Paradoxically and since he is a little boy in school, Magid dreams of being a different person living in a different family described in the child's imagination as a stereotypical white, upper middle-class family that on a surface level ironically resembles that of the Chalfens:

Magid really wanted to be *in some other family*. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up one side of the house instead of the ever growing pile of other people's rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed's car: he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day-trips to Blackpool to visit aunties; he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange and green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-hand waiter. (151; emphasis in the original)

It is not surprising, thus, that when Magid returns to London, he turns up to be completely educated in terms of western knowledge, he is steeped in tradition, as his father wished, but a European one: “I pinned all my hopes on

Magid. And now he says he is coming back to study the English law ... He wants to enforce the laws of man rather the laws of God. He has learnt none of the lessons of Muhammad. ... *More English than the English.*" (406; emphasis added).

In the Jones family the importance of family roots is stressed through Irie's quest for identity. Whereas Millat's search for self-definition is marked by a search for external aspects to complete his life, Irie, on her part, desires to change her physical appearance, especially her Afro hair for straight hair (274), to conform to the standards of beauty of "white" British society. Irie is obsessed with beauty and identifies being beautiful with not being Black, especially since she is told by her English teacher, Miss Olive Roody, that her interpretation of Shakespeare's "sonnet 127" as being addressed to a Black woman is wrong and unacceptable since "Afro-Carri-bee-yans [sic] in England at that time, dear. That's more a modern phenomenon, as I'm sure you know...I can't be sure...unless she was a slave of some kind, and he's unlikely to have written a series of sonnets to a lord and then a slave, is he?" (271-2).

Irie lacks Black referents, apart from her mother, to value the significance of her identity; Irie needs a complete family structure, she is looking for a genealogy and a past, roots to support her. Irie sees, in the Chalfen family, the existence of a feeling of belonging that her family requires:

The differences between the Chalfens and the Jones/Bowdens were immediately plain. For starters, in the Chalfen family everybody seemed to have a normal number of children. More to the point, everybody knew whose children were whose. ...

Dates of birth and death were concrete. And the Chalfens actually *knew* who they were in 1675. Archie Jones could give no longer record of his family than his father's own haphazard appearance on the planet ... Clara Bowden knew a little about her grandmother ... The rest was rumour, folk-tale and myth. (337-338).

In the novel Irie's sense of an extended family (beyond that of her parents) is emphasised by the introduction of an incomplete genealogical tree (338) and made impossible due to her mother's neglect of Irie's relationship with her grandmother, Hortense Bowden. Irie feels that her family is characterised by secrets and silences. This idea is highlighted in the narrative by the description of her grandmother's house that becomes the embodiment of the past. Within the house drawers the truth about the past waits for Irie to be disclosed:

So she hurried back to No.28 Lindaker Road, Lambeth, relieved to be back in the darkness, for it was like hibernating or being cocooned, and she was as curious as everyone else to see what kind of Irie would emerge. It wasn't any kind of prison. That house was an adventure. In cupboards and neglected drawers and in grimy frames were the secrets that had been hoarded for so long, as if secrets were going out of fashion. (399)

Irie's decision to leave her family home is prompted by a symbolic turning point in the novel when Irie violates the private space of the conjugal room and discovers that her mother is toothless; her teeth are false. This symbol of the false

teeth and of being toothless connects with the idea of roots and genealogy. In this act of trespassing space, Irie acknowledges that in order to search for answers she will have to leave her toothless mother and move to her grandmother's location for a time.

4.6 THE 1990S: SPACE OF GLOBALISATION AND BORDER-CROSSING VERSUS SPACE OF LIMITATION AND EXCLUSION

As the social setting for the last part of her novel, Zadie Smith centres her narrative in the tension established between two polarised views of the world. Within globalisation in late 20th century (and especially within the 21st) frontiers and boundaries are considered to be unstable⁵². The view of space as the site of multiple interactions occurring at the same time and relating different people and different societies across time-zones (consider the relevance of new means of communication like the internet that was extended as a commodity during the early 1990s).

This perception of a space in which boundaries are flexible and where there is a constant process of movement and negotiation counters the understanding of space through the history of modernity:

Within the history of modernity there was also developed a particular hegemonic understanding of the nature of space itself, and of the relation between space and society. One characteristic of this was an assumption of isomorphism between space/place on the one hand and society/culture on the other. Local communities had their localities, cultures had their regions and of course, nations had their nation-states. ... 'Cultures',

⁵² Consider here the significance of historical events such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that is also portrayed in the novel (237).

'societies', and 'nations' were all imagined as having an integral relation to bounded spaces, internally coherent and differentiated from each other by separation (Massey, 2005: 64).

This view of space hosting single, monolithic communities is put into question through Smith's novel. However, the emphasis given in the last part of *White Teeth* to the proliferation of the creation of groups should be read as a counter-movement to the social consequences of globalisation and a progress towards self-assertion of values, morals and closed identities within the present historical moment.

The boundaries between the traditional way of understanding space and present-day reality are entangled in a tense relation in terms of space. Whereas the general view of society is that of a plural, diverse and multicultural one, these groups unite their members under the assumption of binary oppositions of belonging and exclusion that totally counteract the general tendency in society to favour interaction and communication across different social groups.

The novel draws attention to two types of groups or organisations that try to establish or re-establish in a different manner limits in a historical moment when those limits have apparently been annihilated. On the one hand, the novel accounts for groups based on religious teaching: KEVIN (a religious Islamic organisation) and Jehovah's Witnesses. On the other hand, the novel depicts the growth of scientific groups such as FATE and FutureMouse©. Both types of groups draw on the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, reason and faith.

The proliferation of religious groups such as KEVIN can be understood within the context of social unrest arising from the coexistence of various ethnic communities in the same spatial context. This heterogeneity within a limited space enriches but it also generates tensions and conflicts based, mainly, on the “fear of the unknown”. One of the inherent reasons for the increase of politicized Islamic religious groups in the United Kingdom is racism and the feeling of threat that it conveys. There are only explicit references to racism and violence towards immigrants when the novel tells the story of Mohammed Hussein-Ishmael, a middle-aged Bangladeshi butcher. His reasons for becoming a member of KEVIN are another example of the comical, humoristic way in which Smith deals with deep social themes.

The first motive that encourages Mo “sufficiently successful [as] a Muslim businessman” (471) to join the group is a feeling of vulnerability that is comically presented by Smith as the result of his feeling of emasculation since his wife left him. His second reason is violence and theft that, owing to his ethnic origin, “had become a regular part of his existence” (472). This violence is exercised by “white” members of society and result in him being insulted and his shop destroyed and raided: “But they all had one thing in common, these people. They were all white. And this simple fact had done more to politicize Mo over these years than all the party broadcasts, rallies and petitions the world could offer.” (473)

This quotation articulates the existence of a divisive boundary between “us” and “them”, between “white-British” and “non-white British”, between “insiders” and “outsiders”. The interesting thing is that “the call” to join KEVIN

comes like an epiphany for him after a brutal attack. Mo wants payback, he has a desire for revenge in the most primitive sense of the word; he is not looking for equal opportunities in society or for respect, he wants to retaliate for the long history of rejection and despise he has suffered.

When KEVIN gave Mo a leaflet that explained there was a war going on, he thought: no *shit*. At last someone was speaking his language. Mo had been in the frontline of that war for eighteen years. And KEVIN seemed to understand that it wasn't *enough* – his kids doing well, going to a nice school, having tennis lessons, too pale skinned to ever had a hand laid on them in their lives. Good. But not good enough. *He* wanted a little payback. For *himself*. He wanted Brother Ibrahim to stand on that podium and dissect Christian culture and Western morals until it was dust in his hands. (473)

This shows how the idea multicultural society is very complex and affects different people in various ways; there are dimensions such as class, gender and location that determine the experiences of different members of this multicultural London society making it positive or negative. This is a serious topic that is dealt with in a light-hearted tone. However, Mo's motivating factor is an irrational yearning and hunger for revenge that is one of the reasons that might account for the proliferation of fundamentalist groups in the western world. There are other aspects in the nature of organisations such of KEVIN that are omitted in Smith's narrative. It is implicitly pointed out that in KEVIN there is no presence of women.

Although Smith does not focus on the origins of KEVIN, the mere existence of such fundamentalists groups points out the implicit existence of a social reality of rejection, discrimination and, in some cases, violence that brings about feelings of non-belonging, threat, discontent and loss in the lives of people like Millat, Mo or Brother Ibrahim ad-Din Shukrallah, the founder of the organisation who was born a Presbyterian in Barbados but “converted to Islam after a “vision” at the age of fourteen” (469). All the members of KEVIN on whose lives the narrative provides an insight are struggling to find a place of belonging and identification within their social environment. Having failed to achieve it, they turn to the group as a way of obtaining a sense of power and belonging in a peer-community based association that creates an alternative social organisation to that in which they feel oppressed but that, paradoxically, draws on some aspects of society as its foundation principle. For example the hierarchical nature that characterizes these organisations and the fact that KEVIN is organised following a gender-segregation pattern where there is no presence of women.

There is another group depicted in the novel, FutureMouse©, that clashes with those above-mentioned religious organizations of KEVIN and Jehovah's Witnesses through the fact that they have opposite concerns. The former group, FutureMouse©, has science and reason as its fundamental principles as a means to sustain human knowledge development; the latter, however, rely on religion to make sense of the world. The “bearer” of scientific knowledge in FutureMouse© is Professor Marcus Chalfen, a “research geneticist from St. Judes College” (431) who is developing an experiment with a mouse to account for the ageing of cells and the progression of carcinomas.

The experiments carried out by Marcus and his group of followers is seen by a great number of religious and animal right groups as a way of trespassing the boundaries between the human and the divine, between human intervention and natural selection, between the right to carry out investigations in order to find cures for diseases and the right to decide over life and death. It is precisely this aspect of the experiment that is the focus of all the critics.

On the one hand, FATE protests for the test animals' rights to life and denounces Futuremouse©'s use of guinea pigs in genetic experiments. On the other, KEVIN and Jehovah's Witnesses denounce the immoral right of taking a god-like position by establishing a fixed date for the mouse death:

No other work he had been involved with seemed to catch the public imagination like his mice. To determine a mouse's future stirred people up. Precisely because people saw it that way: it wasn't determining the future of cancer, or a reproductive cycle, or the capacity of age. It was determining the future of a mouse. People focused on the mouse in a manner that never failed to surprise him. They seemed unable to think of the mouse as a site, a biological site for experimentation into heredity, into disease, into mortality. (419)

Marcus is crossing spaces with his experiments that had long ago been established as fixed and unchangeable. The "newness" that his experiment brings about is the possibility of manipulation of the body and its progress; it means control of body space and of body ageing, of time. The idea of modifying life brings about feelings of fear and insecurity, since power and control over the

genetic changes Marcus is developing will only be in the hands of a few. The debate then opens about who will be given the right to access that knowledge, with what purposes will that knowledge be used, where are the limits to the expansion of human knowledge and who has the right to decide where the limits are.

The conceptual triad: space, knowledge and power lies behind the above-mentioned dilemmas. For Marcus, it is the role of science to advance knowledge. For him, the acceptance of the right of science to advance knowledge is a question of education and education is restrictive:

On the flip of the coin, the simplest biological facts, the structures of animal cells, for instance were a mystery to all but fourteen-year-old children and scientists like himself; the former spending their time drawing them in class and the latter injecting them with foreign DNA. In between, or so it appeared to Marcus, flowed a great ocean of idiots, conspiracists, religious lunatics, presumptuous novelists, animal rights activists, students of politics, and all the other breeds of fundamentalists who professed strange objections to his life's work. (418)

The belonging to one group or another is portrayed in *White Teeth* as arising from the dichotomy of educated people versus uneducated ones and associated with a particular class status. There are uneducated characters like Hortense Bowden and Ryan Topps, who belong to the Jehovah's Witnesses; there are other characters such as Millat and Mo, who, not being totally uneducated

show alliance to KEVIN out of social discontent and unrest, and finally there are educated characters such as Marcus and Magid.

Magid is an example of how access to education is not fully determined by class status. Both Millat and Magid come from the same family and Magid is sent back home to Bangladesh where, apparently, and according to western views of the world, his opportunities of progress are inferior to the ones in London. However, he returns, as I have previously commented, with a high level of education and knowledge of science: “‘my brother shuns me’, said Magid. ... ‘He marks me like Cain because I am a non-believer. At least not in his god or any others with a name. ... I have converted to Life. I see his god in the millionth position of *pi*, in the arguments of Phaedrus, in a perfect paradox.” (429)

One characteristic shared by all the groups is that they are very narrow in the way they organise their internal space. They all establish a gender segregation that is characterised by the total absence of women as is the case in KEVIN or by the fact that the women involved in the groups are not given positions of power within the organisation. Hortense Bowden's expression of the situation of women in her religious organisation can be extrapolated to the majority of them: “‘I've waited fifty years to do something else in de [sic] Kingdom Hall except clean’, said Hortense sadly, ‘but dey [sic] don' wan' women interfering with real church bizness [sic]’”(387). Apart from cleaning, Hortense carries out a thorough process of recruiting members and, paradoxically, she is responsible for the conversion of Ryan Topps who is now one of the leading members in Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the case of the scientific group, the internal division of tasks and space is not that different. Irie is the only woman involved in the FutureMouse© project

and her role is that of organising files and documents in Marcus's office. She starts in the project with the idea of becoming Marcus' close supporter but she is relegated to a secondary position with the arrival of Magid in the country. Marcus describes Irie in a letter to Magid: "she's sharp in a way, but it's the menial work the hard grafting, that she's good at – she'd make a lab assistant maybe, but she hasn't any head for the concepts, no head at all." (386)

The only exception to this situation of finding women in lower positions within the group organisation is the case of FATE (Fight Animal Torture and Exploitation), the animal rights group described in the novel. In it Joely's presence is apparently central. Both Joely and her husband Crispin created the group in 1985. Crispin is the leader and Joely's role is devalued from the moment when her body is over-sexualised and her sexual attraction is described as the reason why some members, such as Joshua Chalfen, join the group: "Everyone begins wanting to shag Joely", Kenny had explained, sympathetically, 'but you get over it. You realize that the best thing you can do for her is dedicate yourself to the struggle". (478)

Every group has its own characteristics and diverse and, at some points, opposite origins. However, Smith unites all the groups in a common, singular space at the end of the novel in a chapter purposely titled "The Final Space" (491-519):

And all these people are heading for the same room. The final space. A big room, one of many in the Perret Institute; ... people can finally give the answers required when a space is being designated, or when something is being rebranded, a

room/furniture/Britain (that was the brief: anew British room, a space for Britain, Britishness, space of Britain, British industrial space cultural space space). (517-18)

This final cathartic space when all the characters are brought together to witness the FutureMouse© experiment is the room in the Perret Institute in London where the mouse injected with carcinomas is going to be on display from the 31st of December 1992 to the 31st of December 1999. The diversity of groups and people presented at this point in the novel metaphorically accounts, once more, for the heterogeneous and pluralistic London society that the novel tries to convey.

4.7 CONCLUSION

W*hite Teeth* provides the reader with interesting examples of how spatial configurations in society are changed and changing. The years of the aftermath of the Second World War – from 1945 to late 1950s – are considered to be the starting point of a new British society characterised by the presence of different ethnicities within up until that moment an almost completely white social environment (Solomos, 1993; Ward, 2004).

Identities are presented in *White Teeth* as extremely malleable. This is particularly visible in the case of second-generation characters. They are continuously negotiating their past family origins, their present circumstances and the prospects for the future. In such situations, everything is possible. They are adjusting to their social environment and Smith playfully takes these adjustments to comical extremes: the difficult teenager who turns into a religious fundamentalist while living in London while his twin brother, brought up in Bangladesh, becomes a fervent opponent of religion and a science-lover, a responsible and studious son of a respectable scientist who at the end of the novel becomes an animal rights activist, etc....

They exemplify the new society that emerges in the 1990s. A society that is complexly diverse but full of possibilities. *White Teeth* focuses on this multicultural society by presenting a variety of characters with their own story to tell. In this respect *White Teeth* favours the idea that

Multiculturalism is not a homogeneous concept but a discourse on multiethnicity that accommodates conflicting voices. ...

Multicultural discourse offers no 'solutions' to the 'problems' resulting from multi-ethnicity, but allows different voices to be heard, different opinions to be expressed. (Sommer, 2003: 178)

As Smith chaotically describes at the end of *White Teeth* this is a society that is characterised by apparently irreconcilable oppositions but that shares a common social space of identification and interaction. The fact that, at the end of the novel, all the characters – the older and the younger ones, the first generation immigrants and the second generation ones, the religious fanatics and the science advocates, etc... – head to the same point, the FutureMouse© exhibition, indicates that despite differences, plurality and diversity, there is a common goal, a common place for British society to go: the new millennium. As Smith writes in her novel: "the end is simply the beginning of an even longer story" (540-41). The end of a century will see the beginning of a new era.

CHAPTER 5. NEGOTIATING THE SPACE OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY: DIANA EVANS' *26a* (2006)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines Diana Evans' debut novel *26a*, first published in 2005 by Chatto and Windus. *26a* is an autobiographical novel that accounts for the initial joys and later difficulties of being a twin. The novel is dedicated to Paula, Evans' twin sister who, like Georgia (one of the twins in the novel), committed suicide in 1998 when she was 26 years old. Paula's death marked a turning point in the life of Evans, who decided to devote her time to writing: "my twin passed away and that was like a thunderbolt which threw me into the writing ... I felt that I had to live for the two of us, and my twin sister had been really interested in writing as well" (Evaristo, 2005: 33). Evans created *26a* as a way of acknowledging what had happened to her sister and herself. In this respect, the novel deals with death, grief, depression and sorrow, topics that for Evans are "still a taboo in literature" (Wajid, 2005: 18) and in everyday life, since depression and suicide are issues that society is reluctant to talk about and accept:

What is important for me is the idea that a lot of people are unhappy and dying and that depression and suicide are very real problems, ones that continue to grow. Britain has the highest suicide rate in Europe, there are around 5,000 suicides a year

and it's increasing. ... So I wanted people to come away with more sensitivity about the unhappiness in some people's lives.

(Evaristo, 2005: 33)

Evans addresses the troubles of being in a relation of identical twinship and the pain and the sorrow of recognizing that one is still a twin even when one of the members of the twinhood disappears: "being a twin does not stop when there is only one of you, because there is never really only one of you. Once a twin, always a twin" (Evans, 2005). The novel is a *bildungsroman* that focuses on Georgia and Bessi's growing process. As such, it is about childhood and the process of finding one's place, and in this respect, family relations are at the core of the novel. This chapter examines the struggle the twins undergo in order to find their individual space within a relation of twins as well as within their own family. The novel accounts for twin identity through the private extra-dimensional world that twins Georgia and Bessi create in order to set themselves apart from the rest of the people that surround them. This world of their own is materialised in the physical space of the loft and the imaginary space of the twins' minds.

Therefore, space is an important aspect of the novel in two levels: individual space (body and mind) and family space. On the one hand, the novel draws on the topic of individuals' physical space and the negotiation of identity body boundaries. In this case, the novel exemplifies the difficult quest for identity space by accounting for the childhood and later dissimilar adult development of a set of identical twins. On the other hand, the novel constructs a sense of space as a set of social relations in which primarily twinhood and secondarily family connections are presented to influence, as well as to be

influenced in turn, by the process of individual identity formation. Moreover, the actual space of the family house is the backdrop where individual and family relations are conducted. In this respect, the very loft the twins inhabit becomes the spatial embodiment of their twin identity. As Diana Evans explains:

The twins Georgia and Bessi live in a loft at the top of their house which they called 26a and they've called it that because they see their room as separate from the rest of the house where the family live and it represents the childhood fantasy in paradise and it is also a place of real eccentricity which is what the two twins are like. (Evans, 2008: n.p.)

Unlike Andrea Levy in *Small Island* and Zadie Smith in *White Teeth*, Evans' novel does not develop her narrative around social space in a general sense, but its centre of attention is in the two levels of space above-mentioned. I shall therefore investigate the space of individual identity focusing on the body as the primary space of interaction. By accounting for the connection established between Georgia and Bessi I shall problematise the struggle of finding one's own space in relation to others.

Moreover, I shall focus on family space as the background setting that counters the twins' own world of magic and fantasy; family life is disrupted in *26a* by a broken marriage and the lack of communication between the parents which in turn greatly affects their daughters' development. Accordingly, the twins create their own protective space of twinship and their parents, Ida and Aubrey, resort to regression, to a past space in the case of the former and alcohol abuse that unleashes a split of personality in the case of the latter. In this sense, the

chapter examines double identities and split personalities and the spaces associated with them in the case of the twins, Georgia and Bessi, and in the case of the twins' mother, Ida, and their father, Aubrey.

5.2 *26a*'s CRITICAL RECEPTION

Diana Evans' *26a* won the inaugural Orange Prize for New Writers⁵³ in 2005 as well as the Arts Council England's Decibel Writer Of The Year Award on the 29th of March 2006⁵⁴. Both awards were created in 2005 but with a substantial difference in their aims. The former, as is stated on the prize's official website, rewards new writers regardless of their ethnic origins: "judges [look] for emerging talent and the evidence of future potential and [they seek] to identify writers of excellence, originality and accessibility"⁵⁵. The latter, however, was specifically created as an initiative from the Arts Council "to increase cultural diversity in the arts" (Arts Council England, 2006).

The award is given to the Asian, African or Caribbean writer who has made the greatest contribution towards literature during the year before the prize is awarded. The Arts Council's aim is to promote the work of artists that account for the diverse, plural and rich British cultural identity. In this sense, the prize website defines the concept of "cultural diversity" as the multicultural social space in Britain that has its greatest starting point and results mainly from post-war immigration⁵⁶. The Arts Council states the following about the prize that:

⁵³ Diana Evans was the first author to win The Orange Prize for New Writers since the prize was launched in 2005 as a part of the Orange Prize for Fiction and to coincide with the Orange Prize for Fiction's 10th birthday celebrations. In 2006 the winner was Naomi Alderman's *Disobedience*, in 2007 it was Karen Connelly's *The Lizard Cage* and in 2008 was Joanna Kavenna for *Inglorious*.

⁵⁴ It is worth mentioning that for this award Evans had to compete with Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, Helen Oyeyemi's *Icarus Girl* and Nadeen Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

⁵⁵ The official website of the Arts Council England is <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?rid=10&id=610> (accessed 10/01/2008).

⁵⁶ The repercussions of post-war immigration on society are portrait in Levy's novel, *Small Island* (2004) and analysed in chapter 2 of this Dissertation.

In the context of decibel, the term “culturally diverse” means ethnic diversity resulting from post-war immigration, with an increased focus on artists of African, Caribbean, and Asian origin based in England. Asian refers to the continent from Turkey to Japan. (Arts Council England, 2006)

The mere existence of this prize points towards the persistence of barriers within the literary panorama for the publication of the work of ethnic minorities. Regarding the Decibel Award, Evans states that “it helps get ethnic minority writers in the limelight. Eventually in an ideal world you won't have a need” (Arts Council England, 2006). Diana Evans's opinion about this prize suggests that this type of award tries to narrow the existing differences in publishing opportunities for “white” and “ethnic minority” writers in the publishing sector and in the British literary scene. Evans has considerable experience in the field of publishing since she writes regularly for *The Independent* and *Stage* and has worked as a journalist and arts critic for several magazines such as *Marie Claire* and *The Evening Standard* (Evaristo, 2005: 31). Among the magazines Evans worked for is *Pride*, a magazine targeted at the “aspirational woman of colour” and “the lifestyle bible of the woman of colour for nearly two decades”⁵⁷.

As in the case of the other novelists analysed in the previous chapters, Evans' recognition by literary critics went hand in hand with the novel's success in the eyes of the readers. As Ali, Levy and Smith, Evans has been said to be “the latest literary sensation” (Wajid, 2005: 18) and her first novel has been described

⁵⁷ This is one of the opening sentences on the official website of the *Pride* magazine. More information about the magazine can be found at <http://www.pridemagazine.com/95>.

as a “lush, delightful, heartbreaking novel about a rough-and-tumble family living in tatty Neasden in the 80s and 90s” (Steffens, 2006: n.p.). Inevitably, comparisons between Evans' *26a* and Smith's *White Teeth* were soon drawn (Koning, 2005; Pearson, 2005) based on the fact that both authors portray north London mixed-race family life.

Nevertheless, there are many differences between the two novels. As has been commented on in the previous chapter, Smith focuses her novel on the ways in which the spatial boundaries are established or removed between individuals, according to differences of class, gender and ethnicity in a multicultural London society. She puts particular emphasis on how these boundaries work in the context of social space. Evans' novel, however, centres its narrative on the space of individual identity and emphasises the process of self-definition and growth. As in Smith's *White Teeth*, boundaries of self space are in a constant status of definition and movement but, unlike it, the struggle lies in the ways of establishing the primary boundary of self-being; on finding the balance between self and other. This quest is taken to an extreme in *26a* since the novel deals with the complexities of finding one's self-space in relation to twinship.

Both Smith and Evans reject the categorisation of their novels under the label of novels that depict a multicultural, mixed-race London society. Neither Smith (as I have already commented on in the previous chapter) nor Evans consider themselves as “Black writers” for whom race and ethnicity have to be at the core of their writing. Evans wants her writing to be regarded as dealing with human experiences in a universal way, “rather than ... about what it means to be black or mixed-race” (Evaristo, 2005: 33). However, she points out once again the

existence of a series of expectations, a burden of representation, in the work of Black writers: “in black writing in particular, there’s been a real thematic limitation in terms of race and urban life. Often, as black writers, we’re published because we’re talking about race, and that creates a burden of responsibility to cover racial issues” (Wajid, 2005: 19).

5.3 THE NOVEL'S PLOT AND STRUCTURE

2^{*6a*} covers the period of time from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. The novel opens with the twins' birth, which must have taken place around the year 1973 since the first time reference given in the novel is that of the year 1980: "late in the summer of 1980" (6), when the twins are said to be "only seven" (5), and it closes with the account of Georgia's death and her funeral, in 1997, at the age of 25. The structure of the novel can be considered as cyclical since it opens with the description of a birth and closes with a death; a death that becomes a symbolic rebirth for both twins. On the one hand, Georgia's death brings about her "spiritual" coming back into the world of the living to inhabit the body of her sister and on the other hand, Georgia's final departure (not after the actual death but after her abandonment of her sister's body) means Bessi's "new beginning"; Bessi has to negotiate, from now on, her new identity as a singleton.

On a local level, the novel is set in the city of London and more concretely in Neasden, with the exception of the three years, from 1981 to 1984, the Hunters family spends in, Sekon, Nigeria Georgia and Bessi's mother's country of origin. Georgia and Bessi's family can be considered to be an "ex-centric" family, since it is a mixed family formed by a Nigerian mother and a British father, and they live in the, literally, ex-centric district of Neasden in the London Borough of Brent.

Neasden is on the outskirts of London and its development is connected to the railway system. It was urbanised at the beginning of the 20th century, around 1891, to provide houses for the railway workers. The building of the North

Circular Road, a main arterial route around London, meant another wave of urbanisation. The transformation of Neasden as a residential area was accompanied by an influx of industries and commercial shops that had their main exponent in the Neasden Shopping Parade, opened in 1936. Soon after the end of the Second World War, in 1949, Neasden's population was over 13,000 people. The post-war history of Neasden, by contrast, has been characterised by decline and deterioration caused in part by the economic recession of the 1970s (Cross, 1991).

From that moment onwards, Neasden's economy was maintained through the arrival of immigrants, mainly Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Irish, East European and South American who found Neasden a cheap residential area compared to other parts of London. Their setting up small restaurants and shops helped the continuance and maintenance of a moderate economy in the area. By 1981 the borough had the highest proportion of New Commonwealth and Pakistani population of any council in the country with the third largest concentration of Afro-Caribbean people in London. From that moment onwards, the multi-ethnic origin of the borough's inhabitants brought about the definition of the area as one of the centres of multiculturalism in London:

Brent⁵⁸ is a borough that defies easy categorisation. It is more "inner city" than some boroughs in the heart of London; it is more divided socio-economically than most and displays a richness of cultural heritage that makes the rest of cosmopolitan London pale by comparison. ... the borough is divided by the

⁵⁸ Neasden belongs to the borough of Brent.

sclerotic artery of the North Circular and more prosperous north and west, and a poorer, more deprived south and east. This divide, which is in part the heritage of an unlikely marriage between suburban 1930s Wembley and Victorian Willesden, is far removed from a conventional ethnic separation into black and white. (Cross, 1991: 11).

The novel focuses on the also “ex-centric” space of the family house. The space of the family house is very important in *26a*, and the loft where the twins sleep becomes the symbol of their twin identity, as I shall comment on later on. The twins live in this loft, an “ex-centric” space full of childhood fantasy. The loft physically separates them from the rest of the family at the same time that it represents the twins’ mental detachment from the real outside world. Georgia and Bessi are also “ex-centric” because they are twins and throughout history twins have been seen as different. Moreover, they are identical twins and this is even less common⁵⁹.

Georgia and Bessi’s ideas, views and perceptions are central to the novel’s aim to account for the ins and outs of the relation of twinhood and, accordingly, the novel is structured by almost a lack of external historical events and few temporal references. The novel has three major parts and fourteen chapters which are unevenly distributed in the three major parts. These parts are “The First Bit” (divided into four chapters), “The Second Bit” (divided into five chapters), “The Third Bit” (divided into four chapters) and “The Best Bit” (containing only one chapter).

⁵⁹ Identical twins or monozygotic twins occur in less than four per one thousand births (Schwartz, 1996: 22).

As many other persons at that age, Georgia and Bessi, live their childhood unaware of the extra-familiar events that are taking place in the world. The concepts of time and space are understood by children in a different way from that of adults and thus the novel is divided in "bits" rather than in concrete frameworks of time. This way of structuring highlights the irrelevance of the surrounding spaces in the eyes of the twins and the "parallel" world the twins inhabit. However, there are three significant moments in which events in the novel are framed by means of external historical references: Prince Charles' first wedding (1981), Michael Jackson's Bad Tour at Wembley Stadium (1988), and finally, Princess Diana's death (1997). These events are included in the narrative at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the novel respectively.

The first and the last historical references are particularly symbolic. The first events of the novel develop around Prince Charles and Diana Spencer's wedding on the 29th July 1981 and the closing ones take place around the Princess of Wales' death and funeral on the 6th September 1997. These two major events in the recent history of the British Royal Family are significant in the novel because they can be read as general symbols that emphasise the particular events happening in the lives of the twins. Besides, they also signify romance and disillusionment, two emotions which influence the twins' lives too.

On the one hand, the royal wedding coincides in time with the sweetest moment in Georgia and Bessi's lives; they are little girls, full of innocence and they see the wedding on TV as a confirmation of true love and the possibility of fairy tales coming true. For them Diana is like Cinderella: "Diana Spenser steps from the glass carriage, holding her skirts ... Her veil is silk taffeta ... Her tiara is

leaping with diamonds. Into the cathedral she walks ... Her prince is waiting” (15). The wedding helps the twins to believe in the world of fantasy and easiness that they need to create in order to escape from their real family space of disillusion, disrespect, non-parental love and alcohol abuse. This is highlighted by the narrative device of countering the royal wedding’s account with the down-to-earth realities of the people in Neasden: “the folk of Neasden stayed at home. That year there were other things to think about. The Brent depression and the increase in muggings down the alley that led to the shops, ...” (15).

On the other hand, it is not arbitrary that the novel closes with references to Diana’s tragic death on 31st August 1997 and her funeral five days later. The significance of this reference is straightforward: the twins’ belief in a life of fairy tales and fantasy is over. The twins have confronted the drudgeries of adult life and Georgia, unable to find a place of her own outside the world of her childhood, commits suicide. Georgia’s end is as tragic as Diana’s and the cruelty of real life is revealed; the narrative unites the fate of both women since while watching the funeral on TV Bessi realises her sister has abandoned this world and her body for good:

In September, ..., Diana was carried in a box to Westminster Abbey. ... She was buried at the family estate in Althorp, on an island. While two and a half billion people watched. The country was thrown into an unusual state of mourning. ... Bessi began to panic. She said to Kemy, ‘I’ve not seen her since February, Kemy, I have not seen her properly in eight months’.

Bessi's body was eight months older. Georgia's body had stopped. (225)

Finally, the historical reference included in the middle of the novel is that of Michael Jackson's concert. Michael Jackson's coming to London on tour serves as the background reference that contextualises the twins' symbolic loss of innocence. The twins have their first sexual experience with the brothers Dean and Errol the day they go to the boys' house, next to Wembley, to listen to Jackson's concert: "When they arrived at the front door Georgia and Bessi felt dirty. Was two weeks long enough to know a guy before going to his house, indeed, his mother's house? Is that what slags did? Were *they* slags? They touched eyes (121; emphasis in the original).

This external event marks a turning point in the life of the twins since it coincides with their first experience of love, boyfriends and adult relations, and menaces to break the twins' imperturbable childhood space by the mere fact that, as separate individuals, the twins experience their sexual relation in a different way. For Georgia it is a negative situation, one that brings about recollections of her sexual abuse in Nigeria, symbolically represented in the novel by the reference to cockroaches⁶⁰: "What's up? said Errol. What d' you mean? said Georgia, staring at the cockroach crawling up the wall. Didn't you like it? he

⁶⁰ The first reference to cockroaches takes place when one big one landed on Bessi's chest during the years they lived in Aruwa. The twins are described by Evans as being dead scared about this insect that they consider to be a monster: "Bessi could think of two worst things that could happen. The first was Georgia dying without her. The second was monsters. This was a monster and it was on her chest." (53). The incident is resolved when Sedrick comes and removes the cockroach from Bessi's body. In so doing, Sedrick is revealed in the eyes of the twins as having a connection with the cockroach: "There was a sense that Sedrick and the cockroach were brothers." (53). From this moment onwards the twins, and especially Georgia after her sexual assault in the hands of Sedrick, will relate cockroaches to monsters and to this man.

said.” (123) Bessi, on the contrary, accepts the situation and is unable to understand Georgia’s negative reaction to sexual relations.

5.4 SPACE AND IDENTITY: THE PROBLEMATICS OF TWIN IDENTITY

In 26a the need to find one's own space of identity is at the centre of the narrative since the novel accounts for the implications of the dis/location of the self inside and outside a relation of twinhood and the importance that dissimilar experiential spaces have for the twins. The evolution in the definition of the self as a twin from childhood to an independent individual, in adulthood, brings about identity problems and, eventually, death for one of the twins. This identity problem arises from the paradox of being an identical twin which means that one's body is simultaneously a signifier of both individuality and twoness or duality.

The individual body and the context where it is located have a direct effect on the building up of our sense of identity and, therefore, Georgia's personal negative experiences "outside" the relation of twinhood during childhood mark her inability to negotiate her life as an adult, as I shall comment on in this section. Through the second half of the 20th century theorists have pointed out the existence of a relation between space and identity⁶¹. The social context with which bodies interact is burdened with practices and ideologies that permeate the body and provide constructed meanings (Soja, 1989). Bodies' sexual or racial differences are marked, for example, with deeper social meanings; meanings that are not arbitrary and in most cases provide the background for what Iris Marion Young has denominated "scaling bodies" (1990). The effect of this is the creation

⁶¹ This idea has already been developed in more depth in the analysis of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* in the third chapter of this Dissertation.

within society of dominant groups and dominated ones based on corporeal differences: “dominant discourse defines them [the others] in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs their bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick” (Young 1990: 123).

The body is not only placed within a context, i.e. a space, but it is a space in itself. It is the primary space we inhabit and it is the means by which we socialise, relate to other bodies. Through the body's senses we comprehend the world and our surroundings. Authors such as Donna Haraway (1988) or Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (1995) have pointed out how, in this respect, our understanding of the world is “situated” and variable since bodies are not still but in an ongoing process of dis/location and change. The inner-body's self interaction with the outside world is clearly delimited by concrete spatial and time frameworks:

The body is in constant motion. Even at rest, the body is never still. As bodies move they trace out a path from one location to another. These paths constantly intersect with those of others in a complex web of biographies. These others are not just human bodies but also all other objects that can be described as trajectories in time-space: animals, machines, trees, dwellings and so on. (Pile and Thrift, 1995: 26)

Bodies are understood to be in constant movement, and therefore, in a permanent process of transformation. Moreover, as much as bodies are regarded as malleable (consider Foucault's reflection of the body as a site of inscription [1977, 1985]), identity is thought to be a fluid category as well (Bondi, 1993; Butler, 1990). To the external world, the body is the primary space that represents

“the self” and confronts it to “the other”. Therefore, individuality is equated with “one body in space”. The coexistence of multiple personalities within one single body space or the existence of two individuals with the same body appearance troubles the above categorisation and brings about diverse rituals in different societies in an attempt to negotiate this uncommon phenomenon.

Twins have always been present in the western collective imaginary (Schwartz, 1996) and they have been continuously surrounded by a great deal of mysticism. Accordingly, there is a whole literary tradition on the theme of twins⁶² and doubles and on their extraordinary nature. As early as in apocalyptic texts, twins were considered as symbols of evil: “women giving birth to monsters [that is, twins], quoth 4 Esdras 5.8, would be a sign of the End” (Schwartz, 1996: 49). Twins have also been a recurrent theme in mythology (consider the Roman legend of Romulus and Remus, for example) literature and psychology; twins have been used to raise and explain questions of self-consciousness, identity, good and evil personality split, and the role and influence of nature and nurture. An example of the use of twins in literature can be seen in the case of Millat and Magid in *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith’s novel studied in the previous chapter. Smith makes use of twins as an exotic literary resource to offer a parody of the nature/nurture debate and to prove its irrelevance.

⁶² There are studies in English literature on this field such as the one by Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (1985) and most recently Juliana De Nooy, *Twins in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Look Twice* (2005).

There is, as well, a whole tradition of the topic of doppelgangers in gothic literature such as in the case of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1840), “The Mask of the Red Death” (1842) and “The Tell-Tale Heart”(1843). Among the various novels that deal with the topic of twins are Angela Carter’s novel *Wise Children* (1991), Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1959) and Buchi Emecheta’s *Kehinde* (1994). These last two novels are particularly important since Nigeria, as in 26a, is at the core of their plot.

The belief in the extra/ordinary nature of twins was taken to the extreme in the case of Siamese twins: “Inseparable twins – *terata didyma*, *Doppelmissgeburten* – have a long history as monsters, from the Latin *monstrum*, divine portent” (Schwartz, 1996: 49; emphasis in the original). Part of this extraordinary status given to twins comes from the idea that they come from a single soul that is embodied in two different human beings at the same time. There is no one-to-one relation between soul and body and, thus, the idea of the embodiment of one soul in each corporeal manifestation, is broken. It is interesting to take into account how the novel also draws on this common belief: “It takes a soul to make a body come true” (208). The existence of twins posed a problem to the connection of body and soul, since it was believed that one single soul dwells at the same time in two separate but, paradoxically, very similar or identical bodies. This, in turn, was related to ideas of superfluity, as one of the twins was considered to be unnecessary. Their presence challenged the “normal” social order of a body as one complete space and, therefore, in many societies one of the twins was murdered.

Evans engages with these past ideas surrounding twins in the case of Nigeria by bringing to life old stories related to twins, such as the story of Ode in Onia, and incorporating them into the novel after Georgia's death. Evans unites modern and traditional ways of storytelling by making use of this legend to account for the fate of the twins after Georgia's death. The legend Evans uses is told by Georgia and Bessi's grandfather, Baba, when they were living in Nigeria and at the end of the novel it becomes real.

In the last pages of the novel, the narrative incorporates elements of the supernatural and Evans fictionalises about the entering of Georgia's body into Bessi's one. Magic takes over the real: Georgia talks through Bessi's body, and the "ghost" of Nne Nne and Georgia become as real as the rest of the characters in the novel. Baba tells the sisters the story of the twins Ode and Onia and how after Ode was burnt alive, her ghost entered her sister's body and lived there for a year, the period of time the soul needs in order to be ready to leave the earth:

He told them of a woman who once had two girl twins who were best friends from the very beginning, even before they were inside their mother's womb, when they were spirits. Their names were Onia and Ode. Onia was first. Ode was second – they set her on fire. When Ode was burnt ... Onia got sick and wouldn't eat at all until Ode's ghost entered her body. The ghost came in, and Onia began to eat again from her cursed mother's breast. But Ode could only stay for one year, because that was how long it took for the soul to be ready to leave the earth. (63)

Like Ode, Georgia enters Bessi's body after committing suicide and inhabits it for three months (I shall comment on this later on), embodying their twoness in one single body space. The narrative gives voice to Georgia's spirit as she explains to Bessi that dying was "like flying, just like that" (211) and how she was carried through a forest "in the body of a child and her dress had turned to rags and her name is Ode in Onia. There were birds crying in the trees above my head and the howls of witches in feathered skirts. There was fire in the distance. I remember that story" (212). By referring to this story, Evans unearths past

Nigerian practices that attempted to “make right” the superfluity in a relation of twins.

There seems to be a need to reiterate individuality in the case of twins and this arises from and is a reflection, in my opinion, of the way in which society understands individuals' identity. As the twins grow up, they realise how twin identity does not fit into the idea, the image society has of what constitutes self-uniqueness or how one's identity should be, in order to comply with the “norms” of society. The image that society has of identity and individuals could be summarised in the equation “one body hosts one identity”. Identical twins, in this respect, cannot at first glance be incorporated into this definition of identity and individuality. This creates uneasiness both for the twins and for the people surrounding them.

One of the first reactions that people have towards twins is an interest in (it could almost be referred to as an anxiety about) being able to tell them apart. Evans accounts for this shocking experience in the novel when it dawns on the twins that their individual traits, so evident to their eyes, are opaque to others: “Georgia and Bessi didn't believe in looking absolutely the same because that was there in their faces [sic] ... But these differences were almost invisible to outsiders. They were the same, like dolls. They were twoness in oneness” (42). This inability of others to appreciate their individualities is significant for the twins, to the extent that it forces them to “question” their identity status and, in an attempt to discover their individual traits, the twins stand still in front of a friend, Reena, while she creates a list of their body differences:

1. Georgia's mouth is biggest [sic].

2. Georgia has big ears, Bessie don't. [sic]
3. Bessie's eyes are smallest. [sic]
4. Georgia is half an inch tallest and a bit fatter.
5. Georgia has a beauty spot by her mouth – she is prettiest.

(42)

I will argue that this inconsistency of trying to account for their individuality is influenced by space in a bidirectional relation. Georgia and Bessi's attempt to find a space of self-definition is made problematic by the fact that they have to accept that there is always going to be another human being who is constantly around and is their mirror image. In this respect, Hillel Schwartz has pointed out that: "twins themselves have ever struggled to define themselves both as two and as one" (Schwartz, 1996: 44). Joan Woodward also defines this paradox that exists in every twin relationship:

Their [the twins'] "sense of self" is built on the concept of being a "pair". They are defined as "the twins", a part of a twosome, yet this definition challenges a concept of a single identity. To have this means, in a sense, being without their twin, but this in turn requires a denial or loss of their sense of twinship. (1998: 5)

This is a paradoxical situation that marks the growing process of twins in a distinct way. This paradox that lies at the core of Georgia and Bessi's growing up process. It stresses, at the same time that it explains, their struggles in adolescence and their later unparalleled and uneven development.

5.5 SPACE AND IDENTITY: GEORGIA AND BESSI'S UNPARALLELED EXPERIENTIAL SPACES

The twins' mirror identity and parallel growth is embodied in the physical space of the loft. The connection between the loft and the twins is such that when they have to move to Nigeria and the house is rented out, Georgia and Bessi see the possibility of having lodgers in their loft as a direct physical violation: "The thought of strangers sleeping in 26a and treating it like home was like imagining someone moving into your stomach, into your head, into your dreams" (44). This relation between space and the development of identity is continuously highlighted in the novel especially, and as I will analyse later on, by showing how physical dislocation of both or one of the twin brings about identity crises. The loft, which gives the title to the novel, is a joint space, a space of twoness. This is the safe haven the twins resort to. This is a space the twins have appropriated and named "G+B" and, as the novel unfolds, it also becomes the symbolic space of their childhood and innocence:

On the outside of their front door Georgia and Bessi had written in chalk '26a', and on the inside, 'G+B', at eye level, just above the handle. This was the extra dimension. The one after sight, sound, smell, touch and taste where the world multiplied and exploded because it was the sum of two people. Bright was twice as bright. All the colours were extra. Girls with umbrellas skipped across the wall paper and Georgia and Bessi could hear them laughing. (5)

The twins appropriate this space to distinguish themselves from the rest of the family. They have a series of rituals, such as sitting on the beanbags next to the window to make important decisions. These rituals serve the purpose of enhancing a sense of belonging at the same time as they mark barriers of exclusion for the rest of their sisters, especially for the youngest one, Kemy, who pleads to be allowed to enter the space of the twins and their twinship. Kemy dreams about being part of a relationship of triplets with her sisters and constantly seeks entrance into the loft, the symbol of their twin relation; authorization that is only granted on a few special occasions such as the day before the family's departure to Nigeria: "The night before they left, Georgia and Bessi – and Kemy was allowed too because it was a big goodbye – stood at the window in the loft and looked out at the evergreen tree" (45).

The evergreen tree is another important symbol in the novel for, as the loft, the tree represents the twins' special connection and union. It is the place that personifies their innocence, their childhood and their space of dreams and fantasy. An evergreen tree is a tree whose leaves stay green all winter, and so throughout the novel the twins, and especially Georgia, desire that their lives, like the evergreen tree, stay stable, unchangeable and pure. It is not surprising then, that the novel's last sentence is a reference to the tree: "I'll meet you by the evergreen tree, said Georgia" (230).

Physical dislocation marks the loss not only of the real space of the loft but also of their symbolic space of fantasy. The family moves to Nigeria for three years (from 1981 to 1984) and this change of location has significant consequences for the twins. They have to re-learn how to negotiate both their

individual and their twin identity in relation to the new environment. The deep implications that the surrounding environment has for the building up of one's identity and the complexities of identifying ourselves in connection with one nation are naïvely presented in the twin's uncertainty of their identity status in Nigeria and their concern with the possibility of becoming fully Nigerians if they leave England:

'Will we be Nigerians?' Bessi asked her mother, sitting next to Kemy on a suitcase that Ida was trying to zip closed. ... 'What do you mean? You are Nigerian now', she said. 'But only half,' Bessi pointed out. 'If we live there, will we be *all* Nigerian?' (44; emphasis in the original)

This change of location not only affects the twins' individual selves but their connection as twins. Their leaving of the safe space of the loft marks the beginning of the disintegration of the space of twinship. This change of location due to their moving to Nigeria will be followed by different spatial experiences throughout the twins' adolescence that will force them to interact with different spaces (both social and other bodies: i.e., people) and as an outcome of this interaction they will create a baggage of different experiential spaces. In Nigeria, spatial dislocation means that the twins have to resort to their dreams as a way of uniting with each other and recovering a shared space of interaction. In these imaginary journeys Georgia and Bessi come back to the safe space of the loft:

At night, in the first weeks, the twins met each other in the middle of homesick dreams and went back together to check.

They navigated the indigo skies hand-in-hand cloud-stepping over the Mediterranean towards Neasden, and slipped through the front door, up the two flights of stairs and into their room.
(54)

Nevertheless, as time goes by, Georgia and Bessi adapt themselves to the new environment and build up a new twinship space in their new “G+B triangular room” (50). This ability to create new spaces of familiarity accompanies the twins wherever they go provided that they are together. In a way, their capacity to find safe spaces derives from their twin relation in such a way that their understanding of space can be encapsulated in Doreen Massey’s view of space as a set of social relations (1994, 2006). Therefore, the twins’ imaginary journeys back home cease to take place when they find their space in Sekon, Nigeria: “For home had a way of shifting, of changing shape and temperature. Home was homeless. It could exist anywhere, because its only substance was familiarity” (54).

However, it is in Nigeria that the twins have to learn, in a distressing way, that despite being twins, they are individual entities. Up until now, the narrative had united the fate of both Georgia and Bessi and they shared every life experience. At 10, however, Georgia undergoes the traumatic experience of a sexual assault that only happens to her. After this incident Georgia loses interest in the games she previously shared with Bessi, especially in cartwheels that she associates with the sexual assault:

Sedrick put his hand over Georgia’s mouth. It took a lot of coordination. To hold the legs in cartwheel, to cover the mouth, to undo his belt. She was wriggling in all directions. Yes, this is

definitely it, thought Georgia. A wild thought. She saw the headlights. She heard the engine. Oh Bessi, be there when I get there, be there when I die!" (68)

Georgia's later mental deterioration might have had its origin in this sexual assault that she suffers at the age of ten. That experience brings about a mental breakdown for Georgia who begins to struggle to find her place inside the world of twinship. Communication with Bessi is lost after Sedrick's assault: "it was the first time ever, in this land of twoness in oneness, that something had seemed unsayable" (69). From that moment on, the twin relation is altered. Georgia adopts the position of the "bad" twin, not in the sense of evil one, but in the sense of the one who has been corrupted, brought into the shadows by means of her unique negative experience.

This feeling develops as Georgia grows older. She views herself as the dark side of their twin relation, while Bessi is the bearer of all the good and positive qualities Sedrick has taken away. Georgia believes that for Bessi to be protected she has to absorb all the negative events in their life. Thus the twin relation develops from being the embodiment of "two in one" (superfluity) to becoming the incarnation of the dichotomous qualities of the self (i.e. good and bad) into two identical bodies (incompleteness). In this sense, it is just before Georgia takes her life that she reveals the situation to Bessi:

"I needed somewhere that wasn't bad. I wanted to be light and happy like you, and I wanted never for you to see the dark. I was scared I would infect you with terrible feelings and pictures in my head of walking out in front of the traffic and – No. That's

not for you, see? Not for you to hear. I needed you to be my sunlight, Bessi," and here Georgia paused and her words became very small, "I lost mine, I lost it." (181)

Georgia is able to cope with the traumatic episode she has lived through in Nigeria as long as she has the space of their twinship. This fact is made explicit in the novel when Bel, suspecting what has happened in Nigeria, by resorting to the game of hand-reading, tries to convince Georgia of the importance of wording her experience and sharing it with someone else: "'This line here means there's something in your heart, and you should say what it is because if you don't you'll always be sad. Like Mum, except at least she's got somewhere to go and get happy.' 'I've got somewhere,' said Georgia stiffly. *'I've got a place to go.'* 'Where?' *'Bessi. Bessi and me'*" (101; emphasis added).

Although after their journey to Nigeria the twins return to the space of the loft, this is soon challenged by the twins' individual desire for self-growth. The peaceful space of childhood is threatened by the passing of time and the coming of puberty. The novel portrays this growing process and literally refers to it as a new individual that interferes with the twins and influences their, up until that moment, stable twin identity: "a new figure entered the loft: Puberty, growling and scowling in a musty corner not far from the beanbags with claws outstretched, dripping bacteria" (77). With puberty comes the separation of twins at high school: "the world outside is a world of separation, they must be prepared" (85). This entails the need to establish new individual connections with other teenagers, especially Reena and Anna, with whom Georgia and Bessi independently create new relationships, thus their sense of identity being once more challenged:

It was foreign, living like this, coming across each other in the playground the way others did, as if they were the same as them, *the twinless ones*. It felt to them like being halved and doubled at the same time. Anna became Georgia's best friend. ... Reena and Bessi were already a pair. (86-87; emphasis added)

From this moment on, the breach formed during their stay in Nigeria becomes wider and wider and gives way to the spatial separation of the twins when they reach adulthood. This spatial separation of the twins is prompted by Bessi's journey to St Lucia. Bessi's eagerness to experience oneness takes place for the first time when they travel to central London, Trafalgar Square and Picadilly Circus, to hand out cards advertising their newly created business, "The Famous Flapjack Twins", and she decides to stay on her own in the middle of the street instead of going back home with Georgia. Her desire to go away contrasts with Georgia's need to hold on tight to her sister everywhere at any time.

As her identity develops, the space of the loft has become small and suffocating for Bessi: "one morning while Georgia was downstairs Bessi took out the world and spread it on the floor once more" (131). Bessi dreams of a new life in a different place where the twin relation does not operate, where she is able to find out "who we are when we're on our own" (133). Bessi needs to escape:

Bessi was getting restless. The beginning of eighteen and all there was to look forward to was exams and failing flapjacks. What would it be like, she wondered, to be lost entirely? To awake in another place, not home, to be stripped of everything

until all that was left was your mind and body and the future?

(131)

Bessi departs for St. Lucia in August 1991 and has to come back in January 1992 after a letter from Bel warning her about Georgia's mental state. It is in this moment that Georgia mental problems begin to be more evident for the rest of the family. Georgia feels incomplete and lost without Bessi: "At Christmas she [Georgia] practically locked herself away in the loft and hardly ate anything. She drifted out into the garden on Boxing Day and just stared at her allotment, and when I went out to see if she was all right she said, 'we're nineteen soon, I'm going to be nineteen without her' (144). Georgia's feelings of emptiness seem to vanish once Bessi comes back: "The world was the right way up. *Holes were filled*. There was nothing anymore to dread" (151; emphasis added).

The twins' uneven experiences in life force them into polarised positions. Whereas Bessi returns home as a stronger woman who seeks to pursue her career dreams and wants to claim her independence: "Bessi had new eyes. They were tougher. They had seen volcanoes and they wanted more" (152). Georgia is incapable of carrying out the simplest task in her everyday life existence: "It was not easy, buying milk. Before the milk (or the tomato purée, or the newspaper) could be bought, there were decisions to be made and questions to be answered" (149).

Bessi decides that she does not want to continue her studies and enrol at university but wishes for a position in the music industry. Georgia, nevertheless, continues her studies and moves out of the family house to a shared flat in Tottenham. In my view, Georgia's departure from the space of the loft in the

family house marks the beginning of her finally mental disintegration. In saying goodbye to the loft, the space of her childhood comes back to her mind. However, she discovers that she does no longer fit into it:

Oh but it's full of goodbyes, Georgia wrote, packed and ready, sitting alone on her bed – it would always be her bed, it had taken her to Gladstone, the moon, St Lucia and the evergreen, it was a boundless bed. She stood up and looked out. They were down by the apple trees in their anoraks and Bessi was waiting for thumps. I think Ham's d'stressed [sic] said Georgia. Is he in the bathroom? said Bessi. ... They came into the loft and sat down in the strawberry corners. Georgia watched them and wanted to decide with them, but here was nowhere for her to sit. (157; emphasis in the original)

From this moment onwards, her health deteriorates significantly and the signs of depression become more and more unmistakable. Georgia's depression worsens as the twins follow different, separate lives and they share less spaces of common and private interaction. There is no way back to the innocent space of their childhood, and Georgia and Bessi face the coming of an adult life that is bound to separate their destinies. Georgia tries to maintain herself in a stable frame of mind and struggles to recover the connection she used to have with Bessi. A remarkable episode in this respect takes place on the day the twins celebrate their 21st birthday. Being twenty-one years old implies legal entrance into the realm of adulthood: "we are women" (168), Bessi says to Georgia, and on

this occasion the twins resort to drugs, in particular to acid, as a way of evading reality and experiencing a return to a world of fantasy that only they can see:

'Can you see it?' The music was loud but Bessi was only whispering. Georgia could hear her clearly. 'The grass?' said Georgia. 'Yes. Over there.' 'It is pink!' Bessi laughed. 'A pink field, and butterflies, hundreds of them!' Can you see it? I *knew* it would be wild together. We can see the same things! (171; emphasis in the original)

At this moment, Georgia sees two little girls that appear, the images of the twins in childhood: "she saw two little girls moving towards her. They were doing cartwheels down the hill. ... Georgia could see clearly now, their white dresses and the same face, holding hands. *One of the hands was burnt*" (171; emphasis added). This two girls remind the reader of Ode in Onia. The burnt hand would be a direct reference to Ode, who was burnt alive according to Baba and it would also represent Georgia's state of mind. She has a breakdown just after this moment in which she sees the two little girls and burst out crying. She understands that the girls are dead as much as Bessi's and her childhood are dead. She wants to go back to the place where the little girls come from and the idea of committing suicide as a means of regression to a space which is unattainable since it is of another time rather than another place underlines this episode of the novel. Georgia is interested in asking the little girl about death: "'Does it hurt?' said Georgia. 'Yes,' she said. 'But we forget.' 'If I ever wanted to,' she said slowly. 'Could I learn it too?' ... They looked back once, and whispered [to Georgia]: 'You already know' (172).

All throughout the novel the bond between Georgia and Bessi is emphasised. But the idea of the double, despite the fact that is not an evil double, is taken to its extreme condition at the end of the novel when Georgia dies and inhabits Bessi's body. She uses it not only as a space of dwelling but also as a means of expressing herself and communicating with others:

Bessi looks in the mirror. Her eyes flicker. She almost sees me and she shrinks back from the glass. Is it you? She thinks again, and crawls back towards the face. ... There is more to climb. The aching in her ribs gets stronger. The heat is filling her head and throbbing inside her fingertips which begin to dance of their own accord. I move up towards her shoulders where it is tight and I cannot quite enter. I push and clamber around the bones. Inhabitation is not an easy thing. (209)

At this moment the twins fusion into one single corporeality that, paradoxically, and because they are identical twins, represents their individuality as much as their "twoness". The body in this respect ceases to be the primary identitary space of the individual and signifies duality; a duality that is emphasised in the narrative by mixing the thoughts and utterances of the two twins arbitrarily in a single paragraph. Evans is fictionalising and accounting for the literal embodiment of the dead twin in the body of the living one. This sensory perception has its explanation in the fact that "the loss of a twin is such a devastating one that the surviving one takes on the characteristics of the dead twin in an endeavour to lessen the sense of loss" (Woodward, 1998: 12).

5.6 SPACE AND IDENTITY: DOPPELGÄNGERS

The term doppelgänger describes the ghostly counterpart of a living person and, in this respect, it draws on the distinction between the conscious and the subconscious. In his essay “The Uncanny” (1919)⁶³, Sigmund Freud theorises that appearances of doubles signify the loss of the familiar space of the self and are deemed to be disturbing. The double is the stranger, “the uncanny” within the self. This idea of two personalities within one body is been also believed to be related to extreme cases of unhappiness or derived from cases of abuse, especially during childhood. Doubling of the personality has been understood in some psychological studies as a mechanism of coping with a traumatic event that has happened, though there are different variables to take into account:

One piece of knowledge about child abuse, especially child sexual abuse, would be particularly relevant to multiple personality. Most multiples are adult women. Their illness, it is claimed, is due to childhood abuse commonly involving sexual abuse. Is this a special case? Does child abuse produce psychiatric illnesses later in life? Many clinicians are certain that it does. Can epidemiology and statistics produce confirmation of this? Anyone who reviews the literature will be extremely cautious. (Hacking 1998: 65)

⁶³ Robin Lydenberg's article “Freud's Uncanny Narratives” (1997) examines Freud's original essay to draw on the connection between psychoanalysis and literature. Lydenberg points out how according to Freud “the double as an immortal part of the self that transcends death evolves into the double as ghost, a threatening harbinger of death” (1997: 1079).

According to Schwartz, the figure of the doppelgänger originated as a transformation from the old Scandinavian and Slavic Double which was portrayed as a figure of divine protection that adopted different shapes, a “spectral presentiment of disaster” (1996: 64). Therefore, the term has come to refer (as in German) to any double or look-alike of a person, commonly an “evil twin”. The word is also used to describe the sensation of having glimpsed oneself in peripheral vision, in a position where there is no chance that it could have been a reflection. Moreover, doppelgängers are generally regarded as harbingers of bad luck. Schwartz analysis Siamese twinship as a case of doppelgängers in the real world and goes on to track the origin of the term in gothic literature and its recurrent use since then: “Doppelgängers were christened at the end of the eighteenth century in the novels of Jean Paul Richter. They are “double-goers,” mirror-twisted twins without whom the other has neither past nor future, yet in whose present and presence tragedy must ensue” (1996: 64).

Schwartz points out a metaphorical use of the doppelgänger that can explain the case of doppelgänger that the novel portrays in the characters of Ida and Aubrey. For him, there is a type of doppelgänger characterized by the willing doubling of the personality as a mechanism of defense rather than as a negative appearance. He explains that cases of doppelgängers can be motivated by the existence of an imbalance in power relations. In such cases a mechanism of defense is unchained on the part of the subjugated that entails a split in her/his personality, a “double agency”. In a way, following his explanation, this kind of double can be understood as a case where the individual subject alters her/his

identity as a way of negotiating and adapting herself/himself to the environment or the circumstances; the individual subject adopts a kind of chameleonic persona.

In my opinion, this is precisely what Ida and Aubrey do: they resort to a doppelgänger as a mechanism of defence. They live double lives in double spaces at the same time. Aubrey tries to get over a complicated childhood when, it can be argued, he was “effeminated” by his possessive mother’s upbringing. Therefore, he experiences trouble in coming to terms with his “male role” in society and finds it impossible to relate to his daughters and his wife: “*Mr Hyde and Ida* did not get on well. In fact, *Dr Jekyll and Ida* did not get on” (97; emphasis added). Ida, on her part brings her mother continuously to her presence as a way of escaping from a present space and life of unhappiness. Ida regrets having left her hometown as much as she regrets her marriage to Aubrey. Thus, when she discovers that her elder daughter is pregnant, she says: “‘You see,’ she was saying. ‘You throw your life away, like me’” (98).

The coexistence of these doubles in the characters of Ida and Aubrey is, as mentioned in the above quotation (with the reference to Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 97), recurrent throughout the novel. Aubrey is literally referred to by the twins and their other sisters as Mr Hyde. His drunkenness brings out the darkest side in him. He becomes violent and verbally aggressive:

Mr Hyde staggers up the alley where the moon has leaked in to the cracks in the ground. ... Is the dinner ready, Mrs? It’s cold out here. He wanders past Waifer Avenue because sometimes *Mr Hyde forgets the man he came from. He is made up of the*

worst parts of that man – they often forget each other. (103;
emphasis added)

However, after Georgia's death, the novel contributes even more to this idea of the existence of a space parallel to the real space, a new dimension inhabited by Georgia's and Nne-Nne's spirit. At this stage, the novel creates a parallel dimension of existence in which "the ghosts" (as they are referred to at some points) are visible to each other; they interact: "Nne-Nne says to me, How did you come? I try to tell her, about the forest and the running and how it was just as Baba said, but I am weak still, and my words will not reach her" (209). Nne-Nne helps Georgia in her last journey from the realm of the living to that of death. In this moment Georgia recalls the stories about twins that Baba, their grandfather, told Bessi and her. Nigerian past myths of twinship relations are brought into reality by Evans at this moment of the narrative and Nigerian oral tradition and British post/modern literary conventions blend together.

The novel unites Ida and Georgia by describing the former in direct relation to the latter and by hinting that Georgia's gloomy side and unhappiness later in the novel is similar in nature to her mother's feelings. Ida runs off from her home town, Aruwa. Ida, like Georgia, is described as a woman who fears the outside world of her family house, a woman surrounded by the ghosts of the past:

Like Georgia, Ida gave the impression – the quietness, the sideways look – of someone who was always leaving and had never fully arrived, only hers was a different place altogether. It was on the map in the hallway, ... Nigeria and Ida, parted now for sixteen years, with one two-week visit with baby Bel and a

new British passport in 1969, had never let each other go. There was red dust still in her eyes. It got in her way when she ventured further than Neasden Lane without Aubrey... She didn't go out much ... mostly she stayed in, wrapped up, shaded, talking to Nne-Nne who often made her laugh. (18)

This is the first description that the novel provides of Ida and in it Evans already makes reference to Ida's double, Nne-Nne. Nne-Nne is always present in Ida's daily existence as a doppelgänger, a positive ghost rather a harbinger of death in this case. It might be argued that this is not an example of a pure doppelgänger since the figure of Nne-Nne is not a double representation of Ida herself. However, in my opinion, Nne-Nne is symbolically the image of what Ida could have become had she followed her father's will, agreed to an arranged marriage and stayed in Aruwa. Nne-Nne has to be understood as the embodiment of Ida's "other life" as much as the referent Ida has in order to be able to negotiate her existence in the United Kingdom, an existence from which her husband is excluded. Ida is unable to come to terms with her marriage in the first place, and the space and culture where she is re/located. Ida resorts then to self-withdrawal:

Ida had retreated back into her dressing gown as the Sekon sun had faded. For her home was not homeless; it was one place, one heat, one tree. She made herself a bubble and it was called Nigeria-without-Aubrey. Her children were allowed inside, Bel on her right, Kemy always on her lap were the lastborn never left, and the twins a little way off, in a bubble of their own. (97)

Ida has been displaced thorough a diasporic journey and in this sense she undergoes the same process as other female characters in the novels previously commented on, but, more especially, Evans' description brings her near Monica Ali's character of Nazneen. Like the latter, she starts to find her place in England at the end of the novel when her daughters have already grown up and become independent. She goes to adult education classes and she begins to leave the house and interact with the spaces that surround her and gets in touch with other women from the community: "Ida went out more too, occasionally to church, sometimes to see Bel and Jay in Kilburn, and regularly to her classes in Willesden, to which she had added maths and pottery" (166). After Georgia commits suicide she becomes deeply involved in the congregation activities at the Church for the Salvation of the Spirit (226).

The connection between Georgia and Ida becomes stronger at the end of the novel when Georgia pays a visit to her mother and asks her whether it was difficult for her to elope from home and leave Nigeria. Georgia understands her mother's need of elopement in the same terms that she comprehends her necessity to leave this world and commit suicide. The action of both mother and daughter are joined together:

Mum, [Georgia] said, tell me the story about when you left the village. ... Where you scared? Yes. I [Ida] was very afraid. I was leaving my family and my home. Georgia lifted her head. How did you know it was right? Ida stopped her stroking and nodded slowly as the right words came to her. My life is my own, she said. There was no future there for me and I cannot

live for nobody else. She stroked again and added. Only you my children. (189)

In a paradoxical way, the presence of Nne-Nne serves the purpose of keeping Ida's whole and prevents her from having a mental breakdown. Nne-Nne is the element that keeps Ida together and is a reminder of her past life. Ida talks to her mum in the bathroom when she is lying in the bath full of water: "Sometimes, when Ida hadn't got enough sleep, she closed the bathroom door and locked it. She had a bath for five hours, during which time they would put their ears up against the door and hear her talking to someone in Edo (usually Nne-Nne, her mother, whom she missed)" (8). The fact that Ida's conversations with her mother take place in the bath is also symbolic; Ida's immersions in water as a way of soothing herself and being close to her mother can be related to the amniotic liquid and the idea of being in the closed space of the womb.

A clear episode in which Nne-Nne is embodied in Ida's body occurs on the night when a terrible fight takes place in the house. Aubrey comes back home drunk and attempts to take out his anger on Bel after learning she is pregnant. Ida gets the strength to confront her husband's violence from her mother and her grandmother, Cecilia⁶⁴; the three women unite in one body:

It could be the sound of the youngest screaming. Or it could be the sight of the oldest hurt, that makes a woman lose completely the order of things, the sense of past and future and what if, what would happen if. *Ida and Nne-Nne and Cecilia's ghost went*

⁶⁴ Ida's grandmother, Cecilia Remi Ogeri Tokhokho, is depicted in the novel as a very strong and self-assertive woman who was the only woman who ever left the village of Aruwa and came back after twenty-three years "rich and self-made, smoking a cigar, wearing scarlet lipgloss and cackling, she would walk" (28).

downstairs to the kitchen. ... Bel looked up, her head dazed, and saw them. 'Mum,' she said. Ida was holding the Sunday mutton carver, the largest blade in the house, and Nne-Nne was behind her all in red. They were going straight for Mr Hyde where his heart was. Cut him, said Nne-Nne. (107; emphasis added)

This incident exemplifies the nature of the marital relation that Aubrey and Ida have. The origin of their relation is not at all positive. Both of them see their engagement and later wedding as a means of escape from an existence they despise: "Aubrey Hunter and Ida Tokhokho met in darkness" (36). This sentence describes the fact that they literally met at a cinema but is also metaphorical since they were both lost in their interior conflicts and considered their marriage as a lifeboat: "If love is a quenching of loneliness, a substitute for a dream or a filling of a void, they fell into one other head first with their eyes closed, touching each other's different chests and different hair in Aubrey's air-conditioned bungalow" (37).

I have already commented on the reasons for Ida's elopement from her hometown. She was only seventeen years old when she met Aubrey and she saw in him the person who could satisfy her need for affection. Aubrey, on his part, is thirty-two years old and for the first time in his life he is able to cut the link with his mother. He sees his journey to Nigeria as a way out from his possessive mother and disturbing childhood: "Aubrey dreamed of another kind of escape, not from a future, but from a past" (31). Aubrey's household is depicted in rather negative terms. His father is a verbally violent man that constantly ridicules Aubrey; his mother, in an attempt to overprotect the weakest of her three male

children, annihilates her son: "if it wasn't for his mother, who never failed to remind him, with unconditional devotion, with a dangerous love, of what he lacked, he might for ever have escaped himself" (32). Aubrey resorts to alcohol as a means of evasion from this tormenting past and from a present he is unable to cope with; alcohol transforms him into a violent person, into Mr Hyde, and reveals "the knots hidden inside waiting for the right amount of time and neglect to unravel them" (37). It can be argued that the novel portrays three main characters who resort to the use of the double as a mechanism of self-defence in unhappy situations. Ida's and Aubrey's doubles are present since the very beginning of the novel. Ida and Aubrey turn to them as a way to counter their daily drudgeries in a failed marriage.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Diana Evans' *26a* focuses on the body as the primary space of identity, yet it depicts the problematics that arises when this boundary is put into question – mainly in the case of identical twins but also in the case of doppelgängers. Whereas the issues arising from the twin relation between Georgia and Bessi are very evident and central to the development of the novel, that of Ida's and Aubrey's doppelgängers are less apparent.

This is reflected in the fact that book reviews of *26a* (Birch, 2005; Jaggi, 2005; Konning, 2005) pick up on the importance of twin relations and focus on analysing the repercussions that they have in the novel but do not mention in such detail Evans' account of the identity problems of the twin's parents. In this respect, Evans herself, when asked to describe the content of her novel, states that:

Twin-ship, and by association, two-ness, is at the heart of *26a*. I wanted to try and encapsulate what it was like, how it felt to be a twin, to have this other person in your life who was also, in a way, your other self existing outside of you, in another body; and the access this gave you to a kind of extra dimension to life that meant you experienced everything with double impact. At the same time, the book is also about the conflicts that arise in such a relationship when the notion of individuality becomes more and more alluring, and necessary, as you grow older. ('10 Questions ...', 2005: n.p.)

The novel focuses, precisely, on the conflicts that arise once the notion of individuality becomes evident for the twins. Georgia is unable to negotiate her individual identity outside the relations of twinship and kills herself. After this act, Bessi will be forced to accept her individuality in a traumatic way. At the end of the novel, Bessi somatizes Georgia's death, in the form of a rash, and retrieves the myth of Ode in Onia and the belief that her sister has entered her body in order to be able to cope with Georgia's loss. Bessi ends up personifying twinship in the sense that she embodies two beings in one. The problematics of twin identity space seems to have been solved in the case of the twins by Georgia's death. Georgia's inability to cope with life on her own was derived from the idea of incompleteness that has surround twins in different cultures.

Georgia was characterised by the fact that she could not find an identity space as an individual outside the relation of twinship. Georgia considered herself to be the "bad" half of Bessi's self in the terms already mentioned and, therefore, an incomplete being. Once she inhabits her sister's body she finds herself whole again. Besides, the superfluity associated with the identity space of twins also comes to an end, since the twins unite in one body after Georgia's death, not only in a magical legendary way, but, paradoxically, in a real one: Bessi will forever embody the presence of her sister in her physical body space.

CHAPTER 6. MALLEABLE IDENTITIES, FLUID BODIES AND CONTESTED SPACE(S) IN JACKIE KAY'S *TRUMPET* (1998)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

T *Trumpet* (1998), Kay's first novel, was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize. It is set in Scotland in 1997 and goes back in time to the 1950s. It fictionalises the story of Joss Moody, a Black Scottish trumpet player found to be biologically female on his death after having lived his whole life as a man. Women who cross-dress always drew Kay's attention, as she revealed in an interview with Maya Jaggi: "I've also always found women who dressed up as men really interesting. I've found them very sexy, the Greta Garbos and the Marlene Dietrichs, Julie Andrews looks great doesn't she and Josephine Baker" (Jaggi, 1999: 53).

Cases of female cross-dressing have not been uncommon in western history. In *Amazons and Military Maids: Women who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (1989) Julie Wheelwright, for example, unearthed the stories of female soldiers cross-dressing as men. As she points out:

The theme of female cross-dressing is not confined to Britain but has been common throughout Europe and North American folk literature. Beginning with the legendary Amazons, a tribe of Syrian women who vowed to defend themselves and to forsake

marriage when their husbands were killed and they were driven from their homeland, female soldiers' stories have persisted for centuries. (1989: 7)

Wheelwright accounts for the lives of a series of cross-dressers, among them Colonel Victor Barker, Mary Anne Arnold (sailor), Maria Bochkareva (soldier) or Dr. James Miranda Barry (surgeon). The life of the latter, a 19th military surgeon in the British Army, arose great interest among critics and has also been traced back in various books such as Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (2000), June Rose's *Perfect Gentleman: Dr. James Miranda Barry* (1977) and Anne and Ivan Kronenfeld's *The Secret Life of Dr. James Miranda Barry* (2000).

In this respect, Kay sought inspiration for her novel in the real story of Billy Tipton, an American pianist who had married four times and was also discovered to have a female physiology after death. Kay read the piece of news about Tipton's death in a newspaper: "I just happened by chance to be reading in a newspaper, some years ago now, about the death of a jazz musician called Billy Tipton." (Jaggi, 1999: 53) and was fascinated by the fact that Tipton was not only a woman who dressed as a man, but one who was "living [his] life like that" (Jaggi, 1999: 53).

Curiously, Billy Tipton's biography, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billie Tipton*, written by Diane Middlebrook, was published in the same year as *Trumpet*. However, Kay denies having read Tipton's biography: "I didn't read it. I didn't want the story of Billy Tipton to get in the way of my character" (Jaggi, 1999: 53). In fact, although *Trumpet* was initially inspired by Tipton's story, it

presents significant differences from the original story. As Kay states: “Joss Moody is black and Scottish, and a *Trumpet* [sic] player, not a piano player. I wasn't interested in trying to research Billy Tipton or in writing a fiction about a real person” (Anon., 1999: n.p.).

Kay draws on that real piece of information: a woman that lived her/his life as a man, to create a fiction that explores and destabilises the dynamics of identity formation, the social and spatial construction of gender identity and the process of life narrative creation. This chapter therefore centres on the significance of space in the process of creating and maintaining an identity across and within the public and the private domains. I shall analyse how the private/public dichotomy offers the possibility of creating subversive identities (as it has positive implications in the construction of Joss [alternative] identity), how this dichotomy is problematised, and how the boundaries between private and public are destabilised by the “revelation” of Joss's secret after death. I shall focus on three aspects of the relation between space and identity that are crucial in the novel.

First, I shall analyse fluidity of identity, taking into consideration Joss's identity formation process by drawing on the dichotomy “bodily reality” versus “embodied performance” and following Judith Butler's views on performativity, I shall argue that Joss's “self-construction of himself” in a heteronormative society is a possibility only available up until the moment of his death. Secondly, I shall pay attention to the public exposure of Joss's body and, by extension, his life after his death, and how life narratives are reported and re/created. To counteract these narratives, I shall finally concentrate on Millie's and Colman's struggle to

maintain their “private” past life and Joss’s memory unharmed. In so doing, they legitimise their “lived life” and its narrative(s) and they place these in opposition to their “reported life”. Nevertheless, before I proceed to comment on the above-mentioned points, in the following sections I shall briefly outline Kay’s literary career and *Trumpet*’s plot and structure.

6.2 KAY'S LITERARY CAREER

Like Ali Smith, Jackie Kay (born in 1961) started writing at an early age after she joined a first writing group in the summer of 1981. She has been continuously writing since her first poem was published at the age of 12 (Kay: 1994: 531). The majority of Kay's works belong to the field of poetry and in her early poems that were overtly political Kay expressed her anger towards social injustices and inequalities: "When I was a kid, I wrote these polemical poems about things that I disagreed with or things that I felt angry about; you know, poverty and apartheid and war and greed and rich people being rich and poor people being poor" (Severin, 2002: n.p.).

Kay's acclaimed first collection of poetry, *The Adoption Papers*⁶⁵ (1991), marked a turning point in Kay's role as a poet for she found a balance between the personal and the imagined in her creative process. In *The Adoption Papers* not only the personal and the real, but also the imaginary and the unreal inform her poetry: "When I started to write the *The Adoption Papers*, I felt as if I'd really become a poet. I felt as if all the other stuff beforehand was just the preparation. I felt, yes, that I could write poetry that was informed by my life but was also imaginary." (Severin, 2002: n.p.)

The Adoption Papers deals with the search for identity and, in this respect, it is inspired by her experience of being an adopted child. Kay denies a reading of *The Adoption Papers* as merely autobiographical: "It's a pain in the neck that people assume it's my story" (In Jaggi, 1998: 10). For Kay, the adopted child of a

⁶⁵ The collection won a Scottish Arts Council Book Award, the Saltire Society Scottish First Book of the Year Award and a commendation by the Forward Poetry Prize judges in 1992.

Glaswegian white couple, adoption obviously had crucial consequences and a direct connection to her being a writer:

When you are adopted you always have this possibility of having been somebody else. Literally, you are born with a different name and with a different set of parents, so really it's about the fact that you would have had a different fate altogether. ... I don't think I would have been a writer if I hadn't been adopted. I think about it quite a lot. I am very positive about being adopted and I'm really glad that I was. (Dyer, 2004: 246)

The Adoption Papers is divided in two parts. The first part of the volume that gives its name to the collection as a whole problematises the difficulties of identity formation and the need to create a sense of belonging and genealogy through the voices of three women: the biological mother, the adoptive mother and the daughter's voice. The second part, entitled "Severe Gale 8", gives voice to a myriad of marginalised characters in society⁶⁶. *The Adoption Papers* was followed by many other works, among them collections of poetry such as *Other Lovers* (1993), *Off Colour* (1998) and *Darling: New and Selected Poems* (2007). Kay has also published a biography, *Bessie Smith* (1997), collections of short stories, *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002) and *Wish I Was Here* (2006), a novella, *Sonata* (2006), and works for children such as *Strawgirl* (2002).

The search for roots and the aim of unearthing silences, central to *The Adoption Papers*, is the *leitmotif* of Kay's writing. As Carla Rodríguez González

⁶⁶ See for example, Gabriele Griffin "In/Corporation? Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*."

points out, the theme of creating and developing a genealogy is a recurrent topic that is present not only in *Trumpet* or *The Adoption Papers*, but permeates other works of hers:

The idea of reconstructing one's genealogy as a psychological strategy developed in an inauspicious context recurs in many of Jackie Kay's texts. It can be traced back to her first popular collection of poems *The Adoption Papers*, ... It adopts a more subversive tone, however, when cultural icons such as Bessie Smith, Angela Carter, or Bette Davis participate in a consciously-artificial genealogy of emotions in *Other Lovers* and *Off Colour*. (Rodríguez González, 2008: 88-89)

Writing, for Kay, becomes a way of understanding as well as creating an image of herself and her experience as a Black woman living in Edinburgh and having been brought up by a white couple. Like Andrea Levy, Kay points out the almost total lack of female Black literary referents in the British literary panorama when she was a teenager and an avid young reader. Kay considered this aspect in British literature especially significant when contrasted with American situation⁶⁷. Therefore, in some interviews (Kay, 1994; Severin, 2002) she stresses the impact of this scarcity of Black women writers in the literary canon on her trying to account for and negotiate her teenager identity and her position firstly as a Black woman and secondly as a writer:

⁶⁷ In this respect, Kay mentions American female writers such as Frances Harper, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde and Gwendolyn Brooks, of whom became important referents for her (Kay, 1994: 532).

Our dreams were never meant to be mapped. White people did not even want us to read or write, didn't want our stories passed down, tried to wipe out our history. ... Nobody seemed to want to even note our existence. I remember just how disappointed I was as I read one book after another without a single mention of a black woman. We just weren't in the picture. All of this – what surrounded me and what I read – made me realize the absolute necessity of writing, of creating definitions, of breaking that dangerous silence. I wanted to read what black British women had to say, so maybe some other woman would get something from what I had to say. (Kay, 1994: 535)

However, unlike Levy, Kay does not consider her writing (except for her “angry” teenage poems) as a political tool by which she is trying to incorporate “Black subjects” and their stories into the British literary scene. Rather, Kay states that she writes as a way of acknowledging her self and her being. This is reflected in her writing: “I do definitely feel that my outlook and my feminism, my socialism, my awareness of my own race and country and age, and my awareness of being adopted – all of that affects practically everything I write, in both subtle and complex ways” (Goodman, 1996: 255).

Kay denounces the burden of representation that is placed on the “Black” writer: “I do think that black writers have it much tougher than white writers in the sense that there are expectations as to what their subject matter should be” (Dyer, 2004: 239), and she disagrees with reviewers and critics that try to put “labels” on her work and her name: “like Scottish, woman, black, lesbian,

socialist, adopted..." (Goodman, 1996: 255). Nevertheless, even if Kay's intention is not to write about herself, by giving voice within her poetry and her fiction to "problematic" personas and characters that are somehow placed outside what is considered to be the "norm" within British society, she is creating a history of a particular Black-Scottish identity that challenges, at the same time that it enlarges, British identity as a whole.

6.3 TRUMPET'S PLOT AND STRUCTURE

In *Trumpet*, Kay concentrates on the implications that the piece of news of Joss being biologically female has on the people surrounding him both on a private, intimate level, and in a more public and general way. Accordingly, on the one hand, the novel accounts for the reactions of both Joss's family and direct friends, who were part of Joss's private life and therefore represent the private dimension in the public/private space conflict that, I shall argue, the novel addresses. On the other hand, the novel gives voice to a series of characters that are "outsiders" to Joss's life but are given an important role after his death: the doctor, the registrar, the funeral director and the journalist are entitled by their professional and thus public function to re-inscribe Joss's identity. Joss is not biologically male and, thus, portraying himself as a man is constructed publicly and to some extent privately as a kind of deception. The doctor, the registrar and the funeral director point out his transgression and make "right" the "wrongness" in Joss's sexed and gendered identity.

The public personae appear in the novel in a gradual order that symbolises the process of "making public" Joss's body; his coming out from the private dimension to the public one is a slow and hierarchical movement that starts at his death and proceeds with the appropriation, construction and display of his/her body/life in a different fashion from what he had wanted to portray during his life. This gradual process of making public Joss's biological identity is highlighted in the structure of the novel and in the order and heading of each of the chapters. The novel is divided into thirty-four chapters, each of which is introduced by a

heading consisting of a small phrase that indicates the nature of the voices that “speak” within it. Some of the thirty-four chapters’ headings recur throughout the novel: these are the ones that incorporate the voices of Joss’s wife, Millie (private), and those of the professionals that are in charge of making Joss’s death official or those who knew him in his public life.

Millie’s voice is included in six chapters, always under the heading “House and Home” (chapters 1, 5, 12, 17, 23 and 31). Millie represents the intimate, the most private space of Joss’s life. This heading explicitly addresses that private dimension. Accordingly, Millie’s recollections of her life with Joss attempt to maintain her lived life with Joss unharmed. In “Share”, the final chapter, Millie re-encounters her son Colman. It is an open ending where Millie’s, Joss’s and Colman’s narratives are symbolically re-united. Unsurprisingly, the novel’s ending draws a comparison between Colman and his father when the former is getting off the bus to meet his mother: “He was walking towards her. He moved so like his father” (278), for Colman is, as his father writes to him in his posthumous letter, the bearer of their history, of their genealogical identity, of their family past and their family future: “I am leaving my self to you. ... all of this is my past, this is the sum of my parts; you are my future. I will be your son now in a strange way. You will be my father telling or not telling my story” (277). Their accounts are brought together so that their common life story can be written and mass media attempts to publicly comment on Joss’s life can be countered.

The voices representing the public treatment of Joss’s death are contained in six chapters under the repeated heading “People”. The characters those headings refer to appear in an order that highlights the process of “making public”

as I commented on above. The novel structures their accounts in the following manner: “People: the Doctor” (chapter 2), “People: the Registrar” (chapter 4), “People: the Funeral Director” (chapter 6), “People: the Drummer” (chapter 11), “People: the Cleaner” (chapter 15) and “People: the Old School Friend” (chapter 24). Contrary to the ideas of intimacy, familiarity and warmth that are denoted by the concepts of “House and Home”, the term “People” signifies an impersonal general category. Moreover, the narratives of the people included in this section are further detached from personal connotations by the fact that their identity is defined in terms of their profession, of the social function that they perform as a doctor, a registrar and a funeral director.

Each of the voices included within this heading with the exception of “the Drummer”, “the Cleaner” and “the Old School Friend” objectivises Joss and confers a distanced approach to the novel’s storyline, i.e. Joss’s life. There are mainly two main ways in which Joss is objectivised in their accounts. Firstly and most obviously, due to the fact that they encounter Joss’s body after his death. As a dead person, Joss ceases to be a subject and becomes an object. As such, he is treated as a “thing” rather than a person by those who never met him in life. Secondly, for all three (the doctor, the funeral director and the registrar) dealing with Joss is part of their everyday professional life, not their personal one. Therefore the nature of the relation they establish with him and his story is not determined by emotional ties but is mediated by practical matters: doing their job to earn a living.

Through the use of these two types of self-explanatory headings – “House and Home” and “People” – and through the establishment of a dramatic contrast

between the nature of the accounts the different chapters offer, Kay differentiates between Joss's private and public dimension. Kay also incorporates a third type of account, the reported story, that is set apart from the above-mentioned narratives. This third element, mass media, represented by the journalist Sophie Stones, seeks to provide coverage of both Joss's private and public life, thus catering to a supposedly public demand for unsavoury stories.

Sophie Stones' position as a mass media pundit is indicated by the fact that her first person narration is included under headings that refer to sections of British newspapers. The chapters titled "Money Pages" (chapter 8), "Style" (chapter 22) and "Interior" (chapter 30) provide Sophie Stones' account. These headings symbolically emphasize the depersonalization that occurs through the incorporation of certain pieces of news into newspapers. These three headings also address some of the most frivolous sections than can be found in newspapers: they all invoke external appearance and money. In so doing, these headings evidence that Sophie Stones represents the crudest media, for she is depicted in the novel as a person with no qualms, moved by an endless desire for money and exclusively focused on the superficial:

Too much of my money goes on designer clothes. If I pull this off, it will be a case of Armani, Givenchy. I can visualize the money columns in these blue books changing rapidly like a wild cash register. "We're talking big money," I say to my bank book. "Big Money." Disgusting, I know. But Sophie deserves it more than anybody. I kiss my blue bank babies and put them back in my drawer. (129)

The public debate resulting from Joss's death is further accounted for in the structure of the novel by the inclusion of a pastiche of newspapers sections whose titles are differently significant: "Letters" (chapter 13), "Obituaries" (chapter 18) and "Editorial" (chapters 25 ad 29). These are spaces for opinion pieces where people can express their reactions to the news regarding Joss. They incorporate seven letters that reflect some aspects of the right/wrong debate that originated from Joss's death. The incorporation of these letters serves to highlight the ambivalent reactions and attitudes to Joss's right to live his life as a man that the novel conveys. The third and the fifth letter touch on people's interest in making profit of Joss's story. The former, written by Sophie Stones, is an appeal to encourage people who knew Joss to contact her and provide data for Joss's biography, and the latter, by a representative of Columbia Records, announces the release of four CDs titled: "*The Best of Moody: The Man and the Woman*, to acknowledge the strange circumstances surrounding the trumpet player's death" (160).

The first and the sixth letter, written by two people who worked with Joss, Big Read McCall and Sean Lafferty, articulate the immediate feelings of surprise and disbelief, and reiterate the point that, for them, Joss was a man: "I never suspect a thing" (159), "I never noticed anything exceptional" (160). The other three letters, written by a fan, by "Transvestites Anonymous Group", and by an ordinary woman, emphasize the irrelevance of the debate surrounding Joss's sex or concentrate on praising his talent as a trumpet player.

The last two chapters within this group, "Obituaries" and "Editorial", take their titles from parts of a newspaper devoted to informing the readers about

recent deaths, to pay tribute to important people in society and to critically comment on current events. These chapters are scattered in between the rest of the characters' accounts collected in the novel. They remind the reader of the public dimension of Joss's profession, of the fact that he was a renowned trumpet player, and are the only chapters that do not address the sex/gender problematics that arises after Joss's death. Consequently, "Obituaries", on the one hand, pays homage to Joss by including a list of his albums and by providing two basic facts about his life: "Joss Moody, trumpet player, born 1927; died 27 July 1997" (208).

"Editorial", on the other hand, opens up the debate on who has the right to write auto/biographies by problematising the position of those who feel entitled to articulate other peoples' lives: "Many ghost writers believe they are the real authority on their subject and not the ghost themselves. They tend to get irritable if their subject disagrees with them." (262) These three chapters serve to break the divide between the private accounts of Joss's life, the extreme public interest shown by journalist Sophie Stones and the present different voices dealing with Joss's story but on whom Joss's death had not a direct impact in terms of their private or professional lives.

There is another voice that together with the above-mentioned ones is crucial in the structure of the novel. It is that of Joss's son, Colman. His version of the story comes under the newspaper sections: "Interview Exclusive" (chapters 7 and 14), "Cover Story" (chapter 3), "Sex" (chapter 10), "Travel: London" (chapter 16), "Interiors" (chapter 21), "Good Hotels" (chapters 19, 26 and 28), "Travel: the Coast Road" (chapter 32) and "Shares" (final chapter). "Interview Exclusive" and "Cover Story" are sections of a newspaper characterised by the immediacy of the

news but also serve as headlines – key narratives designed to draw public interest. Accordingly, they are the first two chapters in which Colman's point of view is included. They are suggestive of the impact that Joss's death and the resulting revelation of his biological sex has had.

They also signify Colman's first reaction of shock and his entering into a whirlpool of counter emotions that lead to his establishing a relation with the mass media, and, in particular, with Sophie Stones. The rest of the headings of the chapters, the ones that refer to travel and hotels, are symbolic of Colman's displacement after the news of his father being a woman is broken. He feels betrayed by his parents since they kept this secret from him. The headings make reference to the action of travelling, which symbolically stands for the interior journey Colman has to experience in order to re-negotiate his father's identity as well as his own.

It can be argued that Colman is forced to undergo a rite of passage after his father's death. In his narrative, he needs to relive and memorize his past life. Colman starts this process of self-analysis motivated by feelings of anger towards his father and by a thirst for revenge. The feeling of anger after a loved person dies is a common reaction in the bereavement process as the literature on this matter shows (Jenkins and Merry, 2005; Humphrey and Zimpfer, 2008; Murray Parkes, 2006). This explains Colman's reaction to his father's death. As Jenkins and Merry point out "the shock of bereavement can lead to people behaving differently, badly, madly, at least in the initial stages" (2005: 15). Colman acts in an unexpected way after his father's death and decides to collaborate with Sophie

Stones. Therefore, Colman's first appearances in the novel are connected with the media, as is his narrative in "Interview Exclusive".

Nevertheless, as the narrative evolves, it dawns on him that if he contributes to the dismantling of his father's life in public opinion, then his identity and his self integrity will also be compromised. His initial childish rage turns into an understanding of his parents' decisions, especially after visiting his paternal grandmother. Colman's change of attitude from the beginning to the end of the novel can also be analysed in the light of bereavement theories as a sign of maturation since, in many cases, as *Trumpet* depicts, together with "the evidence of problematic reactions to parental bereavement there is also evidence that the death of a parent is often followed by personal maturation" (Parkes, 2006: 160).

The novel also incorporates Joss's voice. Joss's own views are included in the chapters "Music" (chapter 9) and "Last Word" (chapter 33). The former is a heading that makes explicit reference to Joss's passion in life. This chapter symbolises Joss's process of re/creation and re/definition through music. For him, playing the trumpet is a liberating experience that allows for self-transformation, as I shall comment on in the following section. "Last Words" is the written legacy that Joss's leaves to his son. In it Joss literally inscribes his life and his genealogy and hands it to his son as a way of transcending death.

The only allusion to Joss's pre-male past life is introduced in the novel by means of the inclusion of Edith Moore, Joss's mother, whose account appears in "Today's Television" (chapter 20) and "The Stars this Week" (chapter 27). The fact that Edith Moore's narration comes under these two headings is not arbitrary. On the contrary, it is revealing of some of the features the woman is endowed

with. She lives alone in a residential complex for the elderly and constantly dwells on the past, for her present is characterised by absences and loneliness. Edith devotes a good part of her time to watching TV programmes, which explains the significance of the headings:

Edith opens her paper to see what's on the telly today. The *telly keeps her better company than anybody now*. It's a good day today because the snooker is on and Edith loves watching the snooker. And at eighty-thirty on BBC 2, there's a big romance with costumes. Edith enjoys seeing them, all dressed up in *the fineries from the past*. (222; emphasis added)

By incorporating a myriad of voices, covering past and present, the private and the public, the novel rejects a polarised view of Joss's life in terms of his "private" "real being" versus his "public performance". Moreover, the fact that the media is incorporated as a third element emphasises the plurality of voices and the multiplicity of readings that characterise the "indeterminacy" of Joss's body. The characters associated with the "public" (with the exception of the drummer, Big Red McCall, and Joss's school friend, May Hart) through their stories try to provide a particular and scandalizing slant to Joss's and his family's life narrative. To counteract this process of de-inscription and re-inscription of Joss's body, Kay includes Millie's, Colman's, Joss's mother and Joss's narration. All these characters struggle to maintain intact her husband's, his father's, her daughter's and his own memories, thus countering the stories circulated through the media.

The multiplicity of characters' voices telling bits and pieces of Joss's story force readers into an active role to construct, to create a whole story. Joss's life

unfolds to the reader as a sort of jigsaw, through the subjective memories of those who have the power to speak after his death. There is no single dominant voice that channels the narrative. In this sense, the structure of *Trumpet* resembles a piece of jazz music because:

[Y]ou have your solo instruments with the different people who have all been affected by this secret. And then you have the same story being improvised and told over and over again in different ways, with different perspectives. And that's the other thing that interests me [Kay] about jazz, how you can take one refrain, one single story and make it play lots of different ways.

(In Jaggi, 1999: 56)

Music is central to Kay's writing process; Kay states that her poetry is imbued with music, more concretely, the jazz and blues traditions: "Without the jazz and the blues traditions, my poetry basically wouldn't be the same. It's consciously and also unconsciously influenced by jazz and blues" (Severin, 2002). For blues and jazz are symbols of freedom and liberation; they open up the possibility of redefinition and subversion (Rodríguez González, 2008; Jaggi, 1998; Jaggi, 1999). Joss's process of reinventing himself is strongly connected with his playing the trumpet and by extension with jazz. Jazz, for Kay, is "very fluid, and identity within jazz is very fluid" (Jaggi, 1999: 55). In this respect, music also permeates the narrative structure of Kay's fiction and is not only present in *Trumpet*; Kay's passion for blues was the driving force for her writing Bessie Smith's biography, *Bessie Smith* (1997), for example, and the theatre play *Every Bit Of It* that also has Bessie Smith as its subject matter (Jaggi, 1998: 10).

In *Trumpet*, Kay is also interested in portraying the dynamics of the 1990s, when there was a rise in the public obsession with the supposedly unsavoury details of everyone's private life. Sophie Stones represents this extreme journalism characterised by "hunting stories down and by those stories being vibrant and vivid and the flavour of the moment for however long they run with them" (Jaggi, 1999: 55). In this sense, and taking into account the eagerness of some characters to dig up Joss's life, the structure of the novel can also be considered that of a chase.

6.4 THE FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY: REALITY VERSUS PERFORMANCE

T *Trumpet* gives voice to a series of characters who have been “affected” by the revelation of Joss’s bodily gender identity. Both the narratives of those close to him during his life and the ones who come into contact with him (his body) after his death bring to the fore the fact that Joss’s death is unusual. What makes Joss’s death different from an “ordinary” one, and thus liable to scrutiny, is the fact that it problematises the sex/gender division and social constructions of identity and sexuality in the public and in the private domain.

Joss trespasses the “normal” boundaries of sex-gender identification since his biological sex does not match the gender he chooses to “perform” throughout his life. By so doing, he breaks and subverts social norms and highlights the divide between sex and gender, between bodily reality and embodied performance. Joss’s exhibition of manliness shows an incongruent association between sex and gender that, in terms of Judith Butler, demonstrates that

“[W]oman” need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and “man” need not interpret male bodies. This radical formulation of the sex/gender distinction suggests that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two. (Butler 1999: 142-143)

Joss's social "act of subversion" becomes a problem only once Joss is dead and his biological sex is publicly established. During the greatest part of his life, apart from his childhood and early adolescence, Joss behaves as a man and repeatedly recreates masculine gender stereotypes: he dresses as a man, is a professional trumpet player, marries a woman, adopts a son, etc... As a consequence, after his death, the rightfulness of Joss's personal connections is contested. The discrepancy between his biological sex and his gender identity threatens to destroy the legitimacy of his relations, precisely due to the fact that it undermines the assumptions of heteronormativity. This is precisely one of the main issues in the novel, how the revelation of Joss's biological sex puts into question and threatens to dismantle and make illegitimate his lifetime inter-personal relations.

In this respect, unlike at first sight what seems to be the trigger of all the conflicts in *Trumpet*, that is, Joss's male body – his sex –, it is, as Jeannette King declares, his gender that is at the heart of Joss's story:

[It] is gender, not sex, that is at issue here: there is no suggestion that either Billy [Tipton] or Joss considered sex-change operations or hormone treatment. If most of us are so resistant to the idea of people changing gender, this is surely because gender plays a central role in determining our inter-personal responses.

(2001: 101)

Joss as an individual who lives within a heteronormative society is (apparently) constrained in the ways in which he can display his gender, which functions as a mechanism of social regulation and control (Foucault, 1985). Sexed

identity is, thus, a public matter. The public control of sexed identity has been addressed both by feminist and queer theory. Although feminism and queer theory are sometimes thought to be in disagreement with each other in the sense that one is said to privilege gender over sex – feminist theory – and the other is thought to reject the primacy of gender since it obliterates the significance of biological sex – queer theory –, there are some authors that consider them to be more related than dissociated (Jackson, 2006; Richardson, 2000, 2006). One of the aspects that both feminist and queer theory have in common is their understanding of sexed identity as a public matter: “Both feminist and queer theory accounts regard sexed identity not as a ‘private matter’ of individual ‘choice’ or ‘fate’ that is somehow divorced from wider social and material contexts, but as a ‘public matter’” (Richardson, 2000: 7). In my opinion, *Trumpet* highlights this fact, since Joss’s sexed and gender identity comes under scrutiny once his biological sex is made public.

The relation between Joss and Millie becomes a social problem when his femaleness is revealed, due to the fact that this challenges social conventions. There are socially acceptable way(s) that are available for Joss to display his sexed identity, which is expected to be congruent with his biological sex. As Stevi Jackson (2006) points out, the definition of gender and gender categories is socially constructed and even if social divisions are not always binary, the division is always in two “discrete categories” (2006: 43). Such categories serve, as the feminist geographer Doreen Massey argues, to maintain social divisions, conventions, messages, etc. that are specific to a particular society at a particular moment in time. As a result, social space is gendered and it is gendered in ways

that reflect and, in turn, have an effect on the socially acceptable modes of displaying the sex-gender correlation:

The only point to make is that space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through. Moreover they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live. (Massey, 1994: 186; emphasis in the original)

The social space in which the novel sets Joss's childhood and teenager years, Scotland in the 1950s, reduced Joss's possibilities of exhibiting his gendered identity in public spaces to two categories: male or female. Heteronormative prescriptions such as the need to correlate biological sex and gender performance in specific ways deny Joss the right to choose a more fluid sexed or gender identity and compel him to adopt an (apparently) stable male identity. Heterosexuality was also the norm in the 1950s and, thus, the relation between Joss and Millie reproduces conservative heterosexual stereotypes.

Joss's death is, however, set in the 1990s, a period of time when heteronormativity has already been put into question. At this time, (unconventional) sexed identities and (alternative) sexualities were publicly displayed. During the 1960s and 1970s there was an emergence of gay and lesbian movements against the "normative" and "restrictive" views of the self. Together with this movement of transgression, there was a plea for citizenship by which

these “marginalised” groups claimed recognition and respect within the law. These movements, according to Jeffrey Weeks (1998) highlighted the need to account for what he called “the sexual citizen”:

The sexual citizen, therefore, is a hybrid being, breaching the public/private divide which Western culture has long held to be essential. Yet this intermingling of the personal and the public is precisely what makes the idea of the sexual citizen so contemporary. Even 30 years or so ago, no one would have said, for example, ‘I am gay/lesbian’, or ‘sodomasochist’, or ‘transgendered’, or ‘queer’, or anything like that as a defining characteristic of personhood and of social involvement and presence. (Weeks, 1998: 36)

The concept “sexual citizen” is, therefore, a phrase that accounts for the claim to be able to make public one’s identity in more pluralistic and sexualised terms, but at the same time to be entitled to protect it within society. The possibility of exhibiting a fluid gendered identity was not available for Joss at the time, which might have been the reason behind the fact that he decides to perform a stable male gendered identity. Likewise, his relation to Millie had to follow heterosexual norms in order to be socially acceptable.

The sexual is constructed in relation to the social and it has been deeply connected with the dichotomy public/private. In this sense, sex, sexuality and gender have been regulated both in the public domain and in the private one, as

laws such as the Sexual Act of 1967 indicate⁶⁸. In this social construction and regulation of sexuality, heterosexuality has been considered to be natural, to be the norm. As Diane Richardson states: "Heterosexuality is institutionalised as a particular form of practice and relationships, of family structure, and identity. It is constructed as a coherent, natural, fixed and stable category; as universal and monolithic" (2000: 20). Heterosexuality has been naturalised to the extent that it is not simply acknowledged as being a type of sexuality, "a sexual category of identification" (2000: 32).

Joss and Millie "display" their relation as heterosexual since Joss chooses to portray his identity as male both in the public domain and in the private sphere of their home. Colman never knew about his father being female because Joss never displayed himself as such. The fact that Colman, although belonging to the private world of family life, is excluded from the "family secret" emphasises once more Doreen Massey's view of space as a set of social relations (1994, 2006). In this sense, Millie and Joss can be said to establish a private dimension, or rather, an intimate space within the private space of the family house.

The novel reinforces at various times Joss's gender performance through the significance of his unusual, and at the same time, perfectly masculine clothes. Maggie, the couple's cleaner, notices on her first encounter with Joss the singularity of his attire; the over-exaggeration of male accessories; the importance of having a flawless appearance: "The man had style. He wore unusual shirts that had five cufflinks, specially ordered. Beautifully stitched. He never looked like he's just got out of bed. His trousers over creased. She never saw him wearing

⁶⁸ This act decriminalised consensual sexual acts between men over the age of twenty-one in private.

anything casual, although plenty of his music friends turned up at the door in jeans and T-shirts" (172).

Millie describes the process by which Joss's clothes become symbols of his embodied masculinity and stresses the relevance of clothes for Joss's sense of self-confidence. Moreover, Millie explains her participation in Joss's daily dressing performance and acknowledges the relevant role she carried out in legitimising his masculinity via her diverting her gaze from his act of creating his masculine sexual organ:

I wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning, early. I wrapped them round and round, tight. I didn't think about anything except doing it well. Doing it well meant wrapping tight. The tighter I wrapped, the flatter his breasts. That was all he was concerned about. ... I did it without thinking about it. He put a white T-shirt over the top. Over that another T-shirt. Over that, a buttoned shirt. He put on his boxer shorts and *I turned whilst he stuffed them with a pair of socks*. He pulled on his trousers, constantly adjusting his shirts and the stuffing. He was always more comfortable once he was dressed. More secure somehow. (238; emphasis added)

Whilst Joss displays his identity as a man and his real sex is a secret concealed by clothes, movements and dispositions, there is no apparent breach of social conventions and his classification in terms of "male" or "female" remains straightforward. However, Joss's identity categorisation after his death becomes problematic: "Kay's conceptions of identity in her work aspire to an inclusive

inbetweenness, and 'either/and' formation that exceeds traditional categorisation" (Jones, 2004: 191-192).

Every character's narration, especially that of the doctor and the registrar, attempts to reinforce or re/categorise Joss's identity in binary terms as either male or female. As Millie claims, her life and her identity are being pigeonholed by others in an attempt to rationalise Joss's "eccentricity": "No doubt they will call me a lesbian. They will find words to put on to me. Words that don't fit me. Words that don't fit Joss. They will call him names. Terrible vertigo names" (154).

Joss Moody cannot be judged to be a female subject who cross-dresses as a male for different (social) purposes but stills believes herself to be female. As portrayed in the novel, for some of Joss's acquaintances and some newspapers the driving force for Joss's cross-dressing is her eagerness to be able to be accepted as a jazz trumpet player (127). However, as the character Sophie Stones argues, Joss cannot be and should not be considered as a "normal" transvestite:

What I want Colman Moody to find out is this: what made Joss Moody into a transvestite? What was the real reason for pretending she was a man? She is different, I'm quite sure, from other transvestites. Joss Moody only returned to being a woman in death. The rest of the time she dressed like a man, lived her life as a man, her own son believed her to be a man. No, this isn't a straight-forward tranny. (128)

Joss can be seen as an example of what is defined as a transgendered subject. Transgendered subjects open up the possibilities of subversion (in

Butler's terms) in that they "pass or cross-dress or simply refuse normative gender categories" (Halberstam, 2000: 62). By so doing, they question the "natural" connection of sex and gender and reveal its constructedness. In terms of Judith Halberstam: "The term transgender can be used as a marker for all kinds of people who challenge, deliberately or accidentally, gender normativity" (2000: 68). For, as a transgendered subject does, Joss makes the split between sex and gender explicit and non-congruent, and this in turn reveals the fact that they are constructed categories rather than natural ones.

Transgender is for the most part a vernacular term developed within gender communities to account for the cross-identification experiences of people who may not accept all the protocols and strictures of transsexuality. Such people understand cross-identification as a crucial part of their gendered self but they may pick and choose among the options of body modification, social presentation, and legal recognition available to them. ... The term "transgender" in this context refuses the stability that the term "transsexual" may offer to some folks and embraces more hybrid possibilities for embodiment and identification. (Halberstam, 2000: 67)

Nevertheless, other critiques of *Trumpet* have viewed Joss's masculinity as a case of female masculinity, a term also theorised by Judith Halberstam (1998). Joss is seen as a male-identified lesbian and, thus, *Trumpet* is understood as a celebration of female masculinity, as "a reassertion of the validity of female masculinity as a gendered and sexual identification independent of both

lesbianism and male masculinity” (Rose, 2003: 143), a view with which I do not quite agree. In fact, Kay's connection of Joss's identity with jazz music indicates the less reductionist nature of Joss's self. He is neither a man nor a woman; his physiology – reality – and his corporeal display – performance – embody not only a signifier of femaleness or maleness, but also both and neither at the same time.

Accordingly, *Trumpet* is a means of sabotaging the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, 1990) that governs social life and has been analysed in Butler's work on gender and identity as a fluid category. Social circumstances at that time, the 1950s, when Millie's early relationship with Joss is situated, might have compelled Joss to cross-dress and apparently perpetuate heterosexual values. Subversion in Joss's case is restricted by the social norms operating at that time and means adopting a stable male gendered identity and complying both at a public superficial level and at a private one with the norms of society. As Butler explains in an interview:

Subversion meant: working within the norms that existed in order to defeat the aims by which they are originally mobilized. I was interested in accepting the norms of compulsory heterosexuality as the inevitable field of political agency, for instance, so in my insistence that one could not, by fiat, move outside those norms, I chose “subversion” as a way of insisting on working within them. (In Rosenberg, 2008: 380)

This idea of subversion that Butler expressed in her early works has given way to another view of subversion as leading to transformation since “it opens up new possibilities” (In Rosenberg: 380). This is precisely what a contemporary

reading of *Trumpet* conveys, the possibility of creating and recreating one's identity, not only sexed, but social as well. The novel reinforces the idea that identity is not coherent and stable. Joss creates his own self, by cross-dressing, by changing his name, by performing a different role in society than that which was originally assigned to him/her on the grounds of his/her biological sex. For Joss veers between consistently portraying himself as a man but losing his sense of a sexed identity in his musical performances.

Joss's passion for music becomes the subversive element by which he mediates his shifting identity status. Joss symbolically changes through music as much as he has transformed his gender performance. Music is for Joss the ultimate challenging force; music opens up the possibility of multiple impersonations for him: he is a man and a woman, he is his past and his future, he is everything and nothing at the same time:

So when he takes off he is the whole century galloping to its close. The wide moors. The big mouth. Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. ... He holds on. He just keeps blowing. He is blowing his story. His story is blowing in the wind. He lets it rip. He tears himself apart. He explodes. Then he brings himself back. Slowly, slowly, piecing himself together. (136)

Jazz is the conducting element that allows for Joss's gender subversion. Jazz is a type of music that advocates the breaking of music rules and conventions. It has been described as music that "by definition demands

improvisation, the abandoning of scripts and precedents, the ability to construct variations on given melodies, rather than being trampled to agreed roles and forms” (King, 2001: 107). Therefore, it provides him with skills to build and rebuild his identity, in his musical performance, over and over again.

Joss is not the only one that re-creates his identity. The novel emphasises the process by which Millie also alters her identity, thus constructing her own image. She becomes the wife and then widow of Joss and in so doing her self is modified in accordance with her life experiences. Time references are accurate for these two moments as if there was a need to stress with precision the process by which her self is transformed into something different from what it used to be. This evolution is deeply related to the act of naming and renaming that appears in *Trumpet* and that Kay also explores in her first theatre play, *Chiaroscuro*⁶⁹:

One of the themes that runs through the play is naming and namelessness. The play opens up with each woman – Aisha, Beth, Opal and Yomi – telling the audience how she came to get her name. It is also about how you can invent names if you have no tales of generation after generation. How you can make your own definitions, invent you [*sic*] own past. How to name the nameless. (Kay, 1994: 538)

In *Trumpet* the process of naming is made clearly explicit through the character of Joss Moody and through his past genealogy of diasporic Black immigration: “My own country is lost to me now, more or less all of it, drowned at sea in the dark, dark night” (273). This genealogy is tracked back in Joss’s

⁶⁹ *Chiaroscuro* was first produced by Theatre of Black Women in 1986 (Goodman, 1996: 251).

“Last Word[s]” (which is the title of the penultimate chapter that accounts for the letter Joss writes to his son Colman for him to read after his death) and it is embodied in the figure of Joss’s father, “ a man who came from Africa to Scotland.” (271) In this letter Joss reconstructs the possible story of his father and emphasises the fact that his name, John Moore, “was not his original name.” (276) Joss also changes his name (and identity) from that of Josephine Moore to Joss Moody and in connection with this identity transformation he states that: “We’ve all changed names, you, me, my father. All for different reasons” (276).

Millie and Colman also undergo a re-naming process. On marrying Joss, Millie states: “28th October 1955. I have become Millicent Moody. Mrs Moody. Mrs Joss Moody” (28). With Joss’s death her identity status is put into question once again: “He died recently. *Now what am I? Can I remember? Joss Moody’s widow*” (8; emphasis added). Colman, for his part, explains how: “Before I became Colman Moody, I was William Dunsmore.” (56). Moreover, after discovering that his father was biologically female, Colman is unable to negotiate his identity. He suffers an identity crisis that renders him nameless and unreal: “If I saw a photograph of her, I could convince myself that I’m not living some weird Freudian dream, some fucked-up dream where I don’t know my father, my mother or myself. I don’t know any of us any more. He has made us all unreal” (60). Colman feels his identitary status has been destroyed by the fact that he can no longer apply social conventions, based on heterosexual normativity, to his particular family.

Colman is wrong when he states that his father’s “real self”, discovered after his death, has made them unreal. Their private life experiences remain

unaltered by the “secret”. On the contrary, it is the attempt to bring into the public Joss’s biological reality that makes their lives unreal. If Joss is a woman then the narrative of their lives has to be re/inscribed in a different shade. The social logic does not account for narratives of the self that transgress sex and gender identifications since sex/gender incongruity does not conform to heteronormativity. However, as Carla Rodríguez González states:

If the body is always ‘fantasized’, if it is but a construction, Joss’s transgression of gender can only be understood as one of many possible interpretations attached to a plural self. By adopting an alternative means of expression, Kay’s character manages to manipulate the social and redefine his existence in the jazz. (2007: 91)

This is possible if we accept that bodies are fluid and identities are malleable. Joss, like Billy Tipton, is thus proof that social norms of how to create narratives of the self can be challenged.

6.5 PRIVATE/PUBLIC DIVIDE: “LIVED LIFE” VERSUS “REPORTED LIFE”

In *Trumpet*, Joss's secret – the fact that he has a female physiology – revealed at his death, triggers a whole range of reactions among both the people who were closely related to him and with whom he developed an intimate relation (private) and those who were part of the external socio-spatial dimension in which Joss interacted (public). What is validated by Millie's and Joss's relation in the private domain and in the public one until Joss's death – the fact that he is a man – is contested after Joss is dead by the authoritative voices of the doctor, the registrar and the journalist as a deviation from the norm and, thus, an aberration. These voices ground their claim of the “wrongness” behind Joss's and Millie's actions on the fact that Joss and Millie have deceived society by performing and appearing in public as something they are not.

Joss's and Millie's initial “disregard” for social morals and conventions seems to entitle those other powerful voices within society to construct a new narrative of Joss's life that invalidates his “lived life” and aims at creating a “reported life”. This is connected with the question of visibility, of bringing to the public sphere a part of Joss's life that up to that point remained only known in the private, intimate domain. This act of visibilization causes suffering, emotional stress and an identity crisis in those directly involved in Joss's life.

(In)visibility is precisely a common theme in Kay's collection of poetry *The Adoption Papers* according to Gabriele Griffin: “Many of the domestic scenarios and intimate relationships Kay portrays in her poetry focus precisely on

the question of visibility – what you see – and semantics – what it means –. *To be visible as different from the norm invites violence and violation*: this is one of the conclusions of her poetry” (Griffin, 1997: 175-176; emphasis added).

In this sense, the book that journalist Sophie Stanes plans to write about Joss's life symbolises the violent eagerness of re-inscribing his/story. Halberstam also describes transgender biography “as a sometimes violent, often imprecise project which seeks to brutally erase the carefully managed details of the life of a passing person and which recasts the act of passing as deception, dishonesty and fraud” (62). Halberstam comments on the process of introducing to the public the lives of two women who decided to live their lives as men in her article “Telling Tales: Brandon Teena, Billy Tipton, and Transgender Biography” (2000).

Halberstam analyses the process by which the media created a biographical account of the lives of Teena and Tipton. The former was a young man who was murdered when he was discovered to be a woman and the latter was the piano player in whose story Kay found inspiration. Halberstam points out how the lives of Teena and Tipton were “dismantled and reassembled through a series of biographical inquiries” (62). This is precisely what Kay's narrative suggests in *Trumpet*; Joss's life has not only to be assembled by the reader through the information given by other characters, but there is an attempt to re-create it in an illicit biographical account: to make his life a public matter, to pursue Millie and Colman and to violate Joss's memory.

The process by which Joss's life is made public is, as already stated, slow and hierarchical and, as I have previously commented, it is reflected in the structure of the novel. *Trumpet's* opening could be considered the description of a

struggle between the private and the public. Millie tries to preserve her private domain from the eyes of the public. She is secluded within their house and she is looking through the window at a bunch of photographers that are waiting, like predators, to tear her life apart: "I know now why they call reporters hounds. I feel hounded, hunted. Pity the fox" (5). The photographers stand at the border of the private/public divide and threaten to violate and dismantle Millie's privacy:

I pull back the curtain an inch and see their heads bent together.

I have no idea how long they have been there. ... But they are still there, wearing real clothes, looking as conspicuous as they please. Each time I look at the photographs in the papers, I look unreal. I look unlike the memory of myself. ... I have to get back to our den, and hide myself away from it all. Animals are luckier; they can bury their heads in sand, hide their heads under their coats, pretend they have no head at all. (1)

Sophie Stones represents the crudest public dimension. She intends to write a biography of Joss's life because she is aware of the public taste for this type of story: "They should have no problems selling this book. People are interested in weirdos, sex-changes, all that stuff" (125). She is trying to accomplish her aim through Colman's collaboration, mainly, and Joss's friends' and acquaintances' accounts: "I am Colman Moody's ghost writer. His psyche. I like the idea of finding his voice. His subconscious" (170). Sophie's crude approach to Joss's and Millie's relation and her eagerness to put the legitimacy of their lives into question derives from an unquestionable assumption of heteronormativity.

Although Sophie Stones represents the public dimension, she meets Colman in enclosed bounded spaces, mainly impersonal hotel halls and cafés. These are bounded temporal spaces of social interaction which are not imbued with personal connotations. Airports, hotels and public venues are liminal spaces; places of transition; they lie on the verge of the public and the private; they are thresholds to other spaces. In this sense, these in-between spaces where Sophie Stones and Colman interact are symbolically relevant for both characters. On the one hand, Sophie Stones is located in a liminal position. She is an outsider to Joss's private life and space but metaphorically and literally aims at entering into his privacy through her interviews with Colman and through information gathered from Joss's friends and acquaintances.

Colman, on the other hand, finds himself displaced from his familiar spaces of interaction after his father's death; he is unable to visit his parents' house and feels uncomfortable in his own apartment in London. Everyday spaces for Colman cease to signify familiarity and comfort since the social relations Colman established in those spaces and associated with them are threatened to have been unreal by the revelation of his parents' secret. This points towards, once more, the malleability of places and the fact that space(s) are not fixed categories but are an ongoing process of signification and change. Colman feels trapped in the spaces surrounding him and has a need to escape:

Thinking, thinking all the time now about doing this book. He has been offered a sixty grand advance which would allow him to dump this heap of a flat and get the fuck out of the country.

The need to escape, to go to a place where no one has ever heard of Joss Moody, where no one knows him, grows daily. (181)

Sophie Stones stands for what she describes as the common trend in the 1990s: “The nineties are obsessed with sex, infidelity, scandal, sleaze, perverts. The nineties love the private life. The private life that turns suddenly and horrifically public. The sly life that hides pure filth and sin. The life of respectability that shakes with hypocrisy” (169). This quotation is, in turn, revealing of the process by which Joss's life becomes a public matter. Sophie Stones is merely interested in scandals, gossips and unsavoury details:

The question of Mill Moody's attraction to Joss Moody intrigues me. She married a woman who pretended she was a man. Why? A woman who stuffed wet cotton into a condom and tied on a couple of walnuts to fake the balls and penis. (Well, I don't know if Joss had a so-called 'three piece suit' or not; but I've read about that somewhere.) (126-127)

Stones tries to reassemble Joss's and Millie's life in a way that conforms to the public need for sleazy accounts of famous people's private lives. There is a difference between what is “reality” for Joss, for Millie and for Colman and what reality is for “the public”. Recurrently in the novel both Millie and Colman are said to have been living a lie. However, Millie insists that her life was not a lie, as I shall comment on later on.

In opposition to Sophie Stones, Millie symbolises the private sphere and, accordingly in the novel, she is always depicted in intimate closed spaces. The

first of these spaces is the family house that, as the previous quotation shows, is besieged by intruders. Millie feels menaced in the house she shared with Joss in London and decides to abandon this space in order to find refuge in Torr, the other space in which the novel locates her: "I crept out of my house in the middle of the night with a thief's racing heart. Nobody watching. I drove into dawn. Relief as I crossed the border into Scotland" (2). From this moment onwards, Millie remains in Torr, a small town in the north of Scotland where she has a small family cottage, a place that is, in essence, a reduced space.

Millie finds protection in the cottage since it is a place imbued with the remnants of her past "real life". These contribute to validating her life, and make it real in opposition to the "reports" that she has to read about her life that emphasise its spuriousness and its illegitimacy:

One of the newspaper articles had the headline *Living a lie*.
They found people who claimed to be Joss's friends who said things like, 'He fooled us completely.' But I didn't feel like that.
I didn't feel like I was living a lie. I felt I was living a life.
Hindsight is a lie. (95)

Torr is a timeless space where Joss's and Millie's memories of their lived life is preserved: "Joss's holiday clothes are all here. Colman's model aeroplanes, fishing rods, old green bottles dug up from the sea. Colman's little antique collection. His coins. Joss's records. A box of his mild cigars. Everything that mattered to us, we celebrated here" (5).

However, this space is soon harmed by letters from the public, and from journalist Sophie Stones, who stands for the most ferocious aspect of the mass

media. The space of the cottage thus changes in Millie's eyes. Her connection with this space is broken by the presence of an external menace, a new social relation that, dishonestly (Sophie takes advantage of Colman's vulnerability after his father's death), is trying to force its way into Millie's family, into her private space, thus turning it into a hostile environment:

Torr is not the same Torr any more. *Since the letters came. It is a new place*, with a new chubb and yale. It is familiar the way a memory is familiar, and changed each time like a memory too. Utterly changed, the size of the rooms are different today. Much smaller. The kitchen shelves are higher. The kettle's whistle is much shriller. The flush in the bathroom is so loud it makes me jump every time I flush it. *The mirrors in the cottage make me look different too. I barely recognize myself.* (92: emphasis added)

It is interesting to see that among all the things Millie lists that she encounters in the cottage there are barely any references to any particular thing that belonged to her: they are all Joss's and Colman's possessions. As Millie states: "Loss isn't an absence after all. It is a presence" (12). Hence, everything that surrounds her in Torr reminds her of her losses and Joss's absence, as well as of the fact that Colman has also "disappeared" from her net of social relations. This fact might also be representative of Millie's frame of mind after Joss's death. As I have previously argued, her status is destabilised and she struggles to articulate her identity as an independent person, as something other than Joss's

widow or Colman's mum, as much as she strives to preserve her lived life's memories intact:

I stare at myself in the mirror as if I am somebody else. I don't know what feeling like myself is anymore. Who is Millicent Moody? Joss Moody is dead. Joss Moody is not Joss Moody. Joss Moody was really somebody else. Am I somebody else too. But who else was Joss? Who was this somebody else? I don't understand it. Have I been a good mother, a good wife, or have I not been anything at all? Did I dream up my own life? (98)

There are no open spaces represented in detail in the novel. The only public references are related to music; in particular, to jazz clubs which are enclosed spaces in that they are properly delimited but belong to the realm of the public – in the most generally accepted way of dividing space in a private/public dichotomy –, since they are spaces of leisure. The characters that are associated with the public domain and in charge of “revealing” Joss's secret are all depicted in closed spaces: the registrar's office, the funeral parlour, the doctor that visits Joss's and Millie's private room. The latter is the first “outsider” that enters the space that embodies the couple's relation and “reveals” Joss's secret. This is accomplished by unwrapping Joss's bandages. The body becomes the signifier of Joss's gender transgression and produces a shock in those to whom the truth is uncovered. As pointed out by Patrick Williams,

[G]ender only matters (is significant), and has meaning (signifies), in so far as it is “corporeal” or “embodied”. It is as

body (female, and later dead) that Joss constitutes the greatest disturbance to the meaning of gender – or at least of people's ordinary understandings of it. (2005: 43)

In the novel, Joss's body is unwrapped three times: by the doctor, the funeral director and Joss himself, though with an obvious contrast in the Foucaultian relation of power and knowledge that each of these actions of unwrapping Joss's body establishes. The doctor and the funeral director exercise their power to unravel Joss's mystery in a fashion that is rooted in the position of control bestowed by the nature of their profession and, therefore in their search for knowledge – Joss's biological real self – they seek to invalidate Joss's lived identity. By contrast, Joss undresses himself in front of Millie as a conscious act through which he shares the “knowledge” of his body with her. Willingly, Joss disempowers himself in front of Millie and empowers her by revealing the truth of his identity status.

The doctor and the funeral director un-layer Joss's bandages to “discover” his secret and his/her “real self”. They display their authoritative power over Joss's dead body and violate his privacy. Joss's body becomes a powerless object of scrutiny. The former, Doctor Krishnamurty, describes the episode of certifying Joss's death as a common procedure: “Doctor Krishnamurty got out her medical certificate and started filling in the obvious, prior to her examination. Time of death: 1.12. Date: 21 July 1997. Sex: Male” (43).

Doctor Krishnamurty is deceived by the external “look” of Joss's body. However, entitled as she is by her profession to examine his body, she discovers the bandages: “there were many bandages wrapped around the chest of the

deceased which she had to undo. ... Doctor Krishnamurty felt as if she was removing skin, each wrapping of bandage that she peeled off felt unmistakably like a layer of skin” (43). As the narration describes, Doctor Krishnamurty is symbolically skinning Joss's body. She is the first person who makes “right” the “wrongness” of Joss's identity by crossing out the description of “male” and inscribing with a symbolic red pen⁷⁰ his identity as “female”, a pen that is extracted from her “doctor's bag” and, therefore, is a tool of legitimate power inscription: “She got her red pen out from her doctor's bag. What she thought of as her emergency red pen. She crossed ‘male’ out and wrote ‘female’ in her rather bad doctor's handwriting” (44).

Not convinced enough by the clarity of her writing statement, Doctor Krishnamurty goes over it and re-writes the word “female” in what she considers to be unambiguous letters. Through this action, she re-thinks and re-states her previous conclusion: “She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed ‘female’ in large childish letters” (44). Her professional authority is questioned since her personal identity (self) takes over her professional one and, accordingly, she loses the power bestowed by her occupation and reacts, in that unusual and unexpected situation, as one of the most defenceless human beings, a child. Her handwriting is no longer that of a doctor, but that of a small girl.

The second person that uses his position of power to inscribe Joss's body with the social meaning that social norms and conventions state it should have – that of a female corporality – is Albert Holding, the funeral director. He considers his role very important: he deals with death and the dead and helps them through

⁷⁰ Some critiques of *Trumpet* have analysed the doctor's “red pen” in Lacanian and Cixousian terms, as a symbolic phallus. For a detailed analysis of this aspect see Irene Rose (2003).

the process of transition. Mr Holding asserts the significance of his profession and equals it to that of a doctor: "They might have been pronounced dead by a doctor but, as far as he is concerned, it's a slow business. It is a process. People don't suddenly die. Death is not an event" (105).

Albert Holding approaches Joss's body to prepare it for embalming and, as well as Doctor Krishnamurty, is perplexed by his "discovery". In the process of undressing Joss he uncovers his biological identity and again, as in the case of the doctor, the narrative renders Albert Holding in a rather comical situation in which his professional skills are the target of debate:

The first thing he noticed was that the man's legs were not hairy.

Then Holding noticed that he had rather a lot of pubic hair. A bush. The absence of the penis did not strike him straight away.

... When he did notice after a few moments that there was no visible penis, he actually found himself rummaging in the pubic hair just to check that there wasn't a very, very small one hiding somewhere. The whole absence made Albert Holding feel terribly anxious, as if he had done something wrong. *As if he was not doing his job properly.* (108-9; emphasis added)

Finally, there is a third authoritative figure, Mohammad Nassar Sharif, the registrar, who, although not directly in charge of examining Joss's body, has the social power to pass judgment on his status: he issues certificates that officially declare the dead condition of individuals. Unlike the doctor and the funeral director, Mohammad Nassar Sharif agrees to respect Joss's identity to some extent. For that reason, he is depicted in Kay's narrative in a more humane way.

He cares for the lives of those who are deceased, as much as for the living relatives that have to go through the bureaucratic process of regularising someone's death: "There was nothing Mohammad Nassar Sharif could do to reverse the terrible finality of a death certificate. ... The certificates were not simply pieces of paper with names and numbers on them. There were people there" (73).

Mr Sharif refuses to register Joss as male due to his inability, in terms of power, to change what has been issued in the doctor's certificate, but maintains his male name in the death certificate instead of using the name Josephine Moore under which the deceased's medical card was issued:

Knowing what he knew, comparing the certificates of the life before him, Mr Sharif had a problem with names. He asked the woman if Joss Moody ever formally changed her name to Joss Moody. The woman told him she didn't think so. ... He had a problem, he confessed, in deciding what name to put on the death certificate, given the name Joss Moody was never officially sanctioned anywhere. ... He dipped his marble fountain pen in the black Indian ink and wrote the name Joss Moody on the death certificate. He wrote the date. He paused before he ticked 'female' on the death certificate (80-81).

Finally, to contrast these three narratives by which Joss is (re)inscribed, the novel incorporates first Millie's account of the time Joss showed his body to her and, therefore, "revealed his own self":

He is undoing the buttons of his shirt. He slows down now. Each button is undone so terribly slowly. Underneath the shirt is a T-shirt. ... He pulls the next T-shirt over his head and throws that away too. He has another layer on underneath, a vest. His clothes are spreadeagled on my floor like the outline of a corpse in a movie. ... Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped round and round his chest. ... He keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandage. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm. (21)

Joss, at that moment, feels empowered to display his body to Millie and the latter accepts freely his identity. From this moment onwards, both Millie and Joss will partake of Joss's "truth" and what the majority of society views as a "secret". They will construct their own identities and their own lives around this issue and they will validate Joss's gender transgression through their lived life experiences

6.6 CONCLUSION

The idea of Joss inventing his own life and his success in achieving it until the moment of his death can be related to the process of spatial creation and recreation in society. As Henri Lefebvre (2005) suggested with his conceptual triad, there are three dimensions that have to be taken into account in the study of space: the physical (real space), the mental (conceived space) and the social space. There is a need to re-create a certain distribution of space, to reproduce certain practices in order to establish and maintain concepts, ideas and norms of space in society.

Joss “lives” his life as a man. He performs, recreates and reproduces his identity as a man through his daily practices. His physical space (female body) does not match his conceived space (masculine identity) but through the rituals already commented on in chapter 6 of clothing, marrying, “acting male” he complies with masculine social norms within and through space. Joss Moody inhabits both public and private spaces as a male being.

There is a crucial element of performativity in the social production of space. The spatial mirrors the social and vice versa, for as Doreen Massey argues:

Social relations always have a spatial form and a spatial content.

They exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e., in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space. (1994: 168; emphasis in the original)

Through the spaces he inhabits, such as the male toilets he uses, through the fact that he goes to gigs with male jazz colleagues, through him representing the male parental role in his son's upbringing, he enhances a sense of "maleness" that, as Millie in the novel mentions, has aspects of being fake: "He has a slow deliberate walk, like he's practised it" (15). In relation to this Kay stated in an interview that: "Joss is in some ways an exaggerated man. You know, he wants Millie to wear a white dress at the wedding, though she says that she's not a virgin" (Jaggi, 1999: 54). Joss and Millie construct an everyday life narrative that challenges the social order and creates spaces of resistance but simultaneously also perpetuates gender stereotypes. In terms of Lefebvre, they manage to build a *counter space* with their own "lived" life narrative.

CONCLUSION

The novels of the contemporary Black and Asian British writers discussed in this Dissertation are characterised by a vision of contemporary British society that draws on fluid notions of identity and space. In Levy's *Small Island*, Ali's *Brick Lane*, Smith's *White Teeth*, Evans' *26a* and Kay's *Trumpet* space and identity are considered to be malleable categories that, as I have pointed out in the analyses of these novels, are presented to be in constant processes of re/vision, re/definition and change.

The fact that the authors of the novels that form the literary corpus of this Dissertation are of ethnically diverse origins is deeply related to the dynamic view of space and identity that the novels hold. Identity is presented as being on the "making". The novels under analysis portray British society as a hybrid location where traditional conceptions of what constitutes a national identity are continuously challenged by the heterogeneity that is to be found in the myriad of characters depicted in the novels.

The characters in the above-mentioned novels are examples of diasporic identities. Levy's, Ali's, Smith's, Evans' and Kay's novels not only depict characters who have suffered a direct diasporic experience related to British colonial history –Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, Hortense and Gilbert in *Small Island*, Samad in *White Teeth* or Ida in *26a* are examples of this –, but also characters that are subjected to a more subtle diasporic experience. The latter includes the white British population that is forced by new social circumstances to meet Black and Asian immigrants for the first time in their national territory, and those British-

born, second-generation immigrants to whom their ethnically diverse origins render them in an in-between position. Feelings of spatial dislocation, dis/encounters with their most immediate community or their family, and the need to negotiate a different sense of identity within their own spatial location are common to all of them to different degrees.

Moreover, these ethnically diverse characters are compelled to find their own spaces in a geographical and national frame that has for a long time been only constructed in “white” terms. In this sense, the British-born Shahana, Bibi, Irie, Millat, Magid, Georgia, Bessi and Colman are forced to re-define their identity status within an imaginary community (Anderson, 1983) that, in many cases, fails to provide positive referents for them.

In such circumstances, some of them need to turn their gaze to other geographical locations and other cultures in order to “root” themselves in contemporary British society. Irie and Millat and Magid (*White Teeth*) look back to Jamaica and Bangladesh respectively. Colman (*Trumpet*) acknowledges, with the death of his father, the history of slavery and the importance of the Black Atlantic in his identity status. Travels to Nigeria and St Lucia mark a turning point in the lives of twins Georgia and Bessi (26a). For the former, Nigeria becomes the location where her individuality is traumatically forced upon her. The latter, by contrast discovers in St Lucia a positive experience.

Therefore, it can be argued that the conception of space that is portrayed in Levy’s *Small Island*, Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Smith’s *White Teeth*, Evans’ 26a and Kay’s *Trumpet* is larger than the geographical territory of Great Britain. The novels, though mainly set in Britain, either devote a part of the narrative to depict

first-generation characters that migrate to Britain from ex-colonial territories: Jamaica in *Small Island*, Bangladesh in *Brick Lane*, Nigeria in *26a*; or show characters forced to imaginarily cross continents in an attempt to trace their roots back and negotiate their present identity status in Britain (such is the case of Irie and Millat in *White Teeth* or Colman in *Trumpet*). Therefore, following John McLeod, it could be stated that the vision of British society that these five novels address “occupies a space between ‘massive floating continents’, looking both within and beyond national borders to a transnational consciousness of how the world turns” (McLeod, 2002: 56).

The spatial locations where the characters re-negotiate a sense of identity range from the society where they were born (as in the case of Queenie and Bernard during post-Second World War years), to the community where they migrate (as in Nazneen’s case), the family in which they live (as in the case of Shahana, Bibi, Irie, Marcus, Millat and Magid), and their own bodies (as happens to Joss and the twins Georgia and Bessi). Accordingly, different levels of understanding space have been the focus of the analyses in each novel. The structure of this Dissertation, as I have explained in the introduction, aimed to cover a conception of space that goes from the general to the specific, that is: from society to community, from there to the space of the family and, finally, to the body as a space.

The first novel that I included in the literary corpus, Levy’s *Small Island*, is set against the backdrop of the years following the Second World War. There was a considerable migration of Black populations who, having collaborated in the war effort or having been brought up under the auspices of British colonial

education, decided to come and stay in the United Kingdom. The idea underlying the logic of the new comers was that of coming to the “Mother Country”; a country that was waiting for them; a country portrayed in the colonial imaginary as a place of opportunities; a country immigrants from the British ex-colonies thought they were entitled to reside in.

Small Island shows, however, a description of a mother country that is not welcoming to immigrants during the first stages of the interaction between white and Black populations. *Small Island* portrays a crucial moment in British history which is considered to mark the beginning of present-day multicultural British society. This is a moment of social disruption and change. The horrors of the war, poverty, famine, racism, discrimination and dehumanization are the problems all the characters have to cope with in one way or another. Hortense and Gilbert have to negotiate a new reality after migration; Queenie has to go through the war on her own and is forced by social circumstances to give away her Black baby; Bernard is obliged to dismantle his whole system of beliefs. These highly intense moments mark a turning point in their lives. As Queenie movingly describes:

There are some words that once spoken will split the world in two. There would be the life before you breathed them and then the altered life after they'd been said. They take a long time to find, words like that. They make you hesitate. Choose with care. Hold on to them unspoken for as long as you can just so your world will stay intact. (491)

These are not simply words but a new social order that affects the characters to the extent that they feel suffocated. All of them are greatly displaced.

Levy does not give an answer to this displacement. It could be argued that the novel has an open ending because the topics it deals with are either particular in their universality or are issues that are in the process of being configured. Topics such as love and maternity are universal and, therefore, Levy can only present the particular and singular way each character has to approach them. Social relations among different ethnic groups are questions that are still being negotiated and reconfigured in present-day Britain.

The second novel explored in this Dissertation, Ali's *Brick Lane* illustrates community life and racial relations in an area of London 50 years later than that of Levy. In this case, the non-white ethnic group depicted is not Black but Asian. The novel focuses on the Bangladeshi population that started migrating in considerable numbers to Britain in the second half of the 20th century. *Brick Lane* concentrates on community life and highlights different degrees of cohesion and fragmentation within the Bangladeshi community inhabiting the area of London the novel takes its title from.

The narrative evolves around Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who migrates to London after an arranged marriage. Nazneen's contact with the society in which she finds herself located after this migratory experience is non-existent during the first decade of her life in London. Nazneen is bound to her husband by her lack of competences to socialise in the new environment and her inability to speak English. Her spatial location is limited to the apartment where she lives and the Bangladeshi community that surrounds her.

This community is not homogenous since there are members that show different levels of integration and interaction with the hosting society. In the case

of first generation characters the degree of contact with non-Bangladeshi people and the networks of social relations they establish very much follow a gender pattern. Men create relations with other people outside their community and women are presented as socialising only within their family network since they are dependant on the will of their husbands.

The novel depicts women with different levels of emancipation. Razia, for example, has a higher level of emancipation than other women within this community. Yet, this emancipation is related to the absence of a husband. Razia starts sewing at home as a way of earning a living once her husband dies (139). Chanu frowns upon Nazneen establishing connections with her (184) for women such as Razia are not considered to be respectable. Economic independence goes hand in hand with an increase in social independence. Through different networks of social relations and thanks to sewing Nazneen obtains emancipation at the end of the novel.

Second generation characters, such as Nazneen's teenage daughters, Shahana and Bibi, or Razia's children, Tariq and Shefali, present different levels of assimilation to the British culture. Their identity struggles are different from the struggles of their parents. They are not trying to fit into a culture but rather they are trying to find their own space drawing on the culture they have been brought up in and, to some extent, rejecting the culture of their parents. Conflicts between first- and second-generation immigrants characterise the novel.

After the attacks of September 11th 2001 feelings of non-belonging, racist attitudes towards Muslims and tension between a part of the white British population and the Muslim population generate both external conflicts and

internal debates in the Muslim community. These events particularly affect second-generation characters such as Karim and the other members of the group The Bengal Tigers. These characters have been born in London, therefore, this is the only social environment they know, yet, they are viewed as outsiders. *Brick Lane* fictionalises some of the consequences that the attacks of September 11th 2001 had on ethnic relations in Britain and the “urban unrest” that followed them.

Small Island and *Brick Lane* suggest that social policies dealing with ethnic diversity in Britain are always being negotiated. There is no unique, right and definite movement and as some social critics have pointed out the policies addressing the social integration of migrants in the United Kingdom are complex and could be said to have followed a pendulum movement; from assimilation, to integration, from integration to multiculturalism and after the attacks of September 11th 2001 back to assimilation again: “we have seen more of a critical stance towards multiculturalism and at least a partial return to an assimilationist perspective, particularly in the context of the ‘war of terror’ and outbreaks of urban unrest” (Cheong et al, 2007: 26).

White Teeth also draws upon the changes in social space in terms of the evolution of a multiethnic society. The novel exemplifies the dynamic and fluid nature of social space by depicting social spaces as constantly being negotiated and, accordingly, inscribed with variable meanings. Smith’s narrative covers a large period of time in British contemporary history: since the aftermaths of the Second World War until the year 1999. During these years, Britain underwent crucial social changes that affected and were reflected in the organisation of social spaces.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that, by contrast to the first two novels, *White Teeth* does not make explicit reference to the difficulties that arise with the presence of the new comers in both the immigrant communities and the native one. Elements of racial discrimination are present in the text but are “veiled” with humour and irony. Smith chooses not to write a novel that denounces the drudgeries endured by Blacks and Asians at the onset of a multicultural British society but attempts to celebrate the outcome of such events.

In this sense, social spaces of interaction are depicted in *White Teeth* as offering people the possibility of constant self redefinition and this possibility is presented as the direct result of a society that, due to its multicultural nature, is in itself continuously open to adjustments. Non-arbitrarily, the novel opens with the failed suicide attempt of Archie Jones, a white-British subject. Such an event signifies a rebirth opportunity that, paradoxically, is given to him by the (un)timely presence of Mo Hussein-Ishmael, an Asian Muslim immigrant who owns a halal butchers and represents a social reality – the acknowledgement in the public spatial distribution, in the form of a halal shop, of the existence of the “other” – that would have been unheard of in the first three decades of the 20th century:

Once in the street, Mo advanced upon Archie’s car, pulled out the towels that were sealing the gap in the driver’s window, and pushed it down five inches with brute, bullish force. “Do you hear that, mister? We’re not licensed for suicides around here. This place is halal. Kosher, understand? If you’re to going to die

round here, my friend, I'm afraid you've got to be thoroughly
bled first". (7)

The tone in which the whole episode is narrated marks the tone of the novel. Archie's personal life becomes a parallel example of the changes undergone by British society after the Second World War. During his fighting in the war he encounters "the other" for the first time and establishes a long-lasting friendship relation with Samad Iqbal. Coming from a fixed identity position in which at first there is no scope for the acceptance of "the other", both characters learn to negotiate a space of interaction that develops into a relation of mutual respect.

The relations between Archie and Samad strengthen during the second period of time represented in the novel, the late 1970s and 1980s. During this period of time immigrants are consolidated presences in British society, a society that is facing major economic changes. As the novel narrates, both Archie and Samad marry and establish a family life that is a reflection of the social policies of the New Right and its advocating of conservative policies, such as reassertion of the importance of the family (Smith, 1994; Smith, 1998). *White Teeth*, at this point, concentrates on how a multiethnic society affected and was reflected in the space of the family.

The irony behind Smith's portrayal of the reassertion of the family as the cornerstone of British society lies behind the fact that this family notion ceases to be stable and white by "norm", but encompasses a variety of ways of forming and being a family. The insertion in the novel of a triad of families symbolises a break with the notion of the good "normal family" – nuclear, middle-class, white family

– versus the “faulty”, “deteriorated” other kinds of family – lone-parent, un-educated parent, disadvantaged families –.

The Chalfen family, white, educated and upper-middle class, is initially presented as the proper family whereas Irie’s and Millat’s family units, being working class, un-educated and mixed-race parental households, are deemed as malfunctioning. Therefore, Irie and Millat are entrusted to the Chalfen family through a school reformation programme to be re-orientated following the dictates of an exemplary family.

As the narrative evolves these stereotypes are put into question. None of the three families can be regarded simplistically in dualistic terms of good and bad or normal and deviant. The narrative at this point focuses on the teenager problems of the three families’ offspring. Irie Jones, Millat and Magid Iqbal and Marcus Chalfen defy expectations based on social origin. All of them, regardless of the apparent stability of their households are displaced and are trying to find their own spaces within their families and within society.

The last two novels studied in this Dissertation, Evans’ *26a* and Kay’s *Trumpet* draw on the body as the primary space where identity is located. This location is deemed to be problematic and, as the other spaces discussed in this Dissertation, is subjected to a process of re/inscription: subversive in the case of *Trumpet* and tragic in *26a*. Josephine recreates her identity as male, becoming Joss Moody, and Georgia, unable to define her own identity outside the space of twinship, resorts to suicide sadly removing herself from the oppressive space of her incomplete body.

Diana Evans' *26a* focuses, like *White Teeth*, on family life and teenagers' search for identity in an ethnically diverse family. This quest is complicated by the fact that these teenagers, Georgia and Bessi, happen to be identical twins. In such a circumstance, their bodies are not signifiers of individual identity since both Georgia and Bessi and people surrounding them perceive them as twins rather than complete individuals.

During their childhood Georgia and Bessi emphasize their twinship through the creation of a space of their own, parallel to the space of the family. They are physically separated from the rest of the family by living in the loft of the house that constitutes a space of twoness. Different experiential spaces and physical dislocation mark the disintegration of the innocent space of twinship. Moreover, Georgia's sexual assault and Bessi's urge in adolescence to negotiate an individual sense of identity locates the twins in polarised positions.

From this moment on, Georgia's body is depicted as oppressive and incomplete, she doesn't like her body and she doesn't like the position she occupies in the relation of twinship. She is the bad twin, the one that has been corrupted. Disappearing, by committing suicide, is her way of putting an end to her feelings of incompleteness.

The final novel studied in this Dissertation, *Trumpet*, also focuses on the body as the primary space of inscription and this space is depicted as flexible and malleable. The space of the body offers the ultimate possibility of change to Josephine who through a process of self re/definition becomes Joss Moody. In this respect, the novel presents the space of the body as the space where contestation is feasible. The narrative puts into question the way sexed and gendered identities

are inscribed in the body. Moreover, *Trumpet* is poignant of the significance that the body has in the construction of social life narratives. At the moment of his death Joss Moody's true sex is revealed and this piece of news threatens to dismantle his life narrative.

By accounting for the life of a character that is the epitome of hyphenation and indeterminacy – Joss is a Black-Scottish-female/male-trumpet player – *Trumpet* is poignant about the fluidity of identity and the role that the public/private dichotomous divisions of space have in the process of articulating and re-inventing one's identity. Therefore, Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* not only brings to the foreground the problematics of fluid identities but also shows how identity is constructed in space.

The fact that Joss is able to choose and perform his gendered identity, the fact that he is capable of disguising his biological sexed identity and the fact that he establishes an apparently normal heterosexual relation with Millie become clear examples of social and spatial subversion. *Trumpet* provides alternative ways of constructing a sense of identity in an apparently rigid social space.

Levy's *Small Island*, Ali's *Brick Lane*, Smith's *White Teeth*, Evans' *26a* and Kay's *Trumpet* reveal different ways of dealing with being a first- or second-generation immigrant in Great Britain. They show how this experience is connected to social, racial and gender relations at different historical periods of time. The novels provide a diversity of ways of inscribing such experiences in space. The novels exemplify different strategies by which first- and second-generation immigrants in Britain negotiate their identity status and portray their daily lives.

The novels included in this Dissertation should be seen, in this light, as a depiction of the plurality and the diversity of the ways in which ethnically diverse people live, narrate and make sense of their multicultural experiences. The characters approach their ethnically diverse origins (in the case of second-generation characters) or to the multiethnic location they inhabit (in the case of first-generation ones) as part of their ordinary and daily life. Therefore, the authors studied in this Dissertation contribute to creating cultural representations that challenge the view of a homogeneous British society. Characters in the novels under analysis are heterogeneous and diverse; they are “those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 1990: 235).

Race and ethnicity are present in all the novels but they are not portrayed as the only major issue. Race and ethnicity come alongside problems of diasporic identity (*Brick Lane*), national identity (*Small Island*), multicultural identity (*White Teeth*), gendered identity (*Trumpet*) and individual identity (*26a*). Ali, Smith, Evans and Kay, as I have mentioned in each of the chapters devoted to the analysis of their novels, reject critiques of their work that focus on race. They refuse to stress race and ethnicity as their prime signification for difference, dislocation or exclusion in the novels and this is a political act.

It is true that the racial divide between the white and the Black population is central to Levy’s *Small Island* and that Ali’s *Brick Lane* also engages with racial problems between a part of the Muslim and the white communities in London. Nonetheless, the ethnic origins of the characters is not an issue that is highlighted as negative. In the case of second-generation characters, being from a

different ethnic background is not in itself the only problematic matter. There are other crucial aspects that intervene in their processes of identity negotiation. For example, Georgia's and Bessi's main concern is their twin identity rather than being Black. Colman's inner struggle derives from the fact that he is adopted and from his feelings of insecurity following the disclosure of his father's real sex. What the characters in the novels are trying to do is to inscribe their different experiences as natural.

This entails the assertion of hybridity as ordinary and positive rather than as extraordinary and negative. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is, perhaps, the clearer instance of this fact. James Procter (2006) mentions Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* as an example of this fact as well. Procter explains his point by arguing that:

Their [these novels'] everyday indifference to difference, perhaps also registers what Paul Gilroy has recently termed "aspects of Britain's spontaneous convivial culture", the "ability to live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful, or violent" (Gilroy 2004: xi). The refusal to worry about "race" in these novels, or to invest in insurrectionary forms of violence as progressive alternatives, is not necessarily a retreat from politics, a sign of margins' incorporation into a commodified mainstream. (2006: 119)

The attitude that such novels adopt responds, thus, to a moment in British history in which the initial reaction towards alterity – rejection and fear are the most universal ones (consider Levy's *Small Island*) – had been overcome to give way

to what James Procter had referred to as “the-taken-for-grantedness of multiculturalism”.

If “the metaphoric and the real do not belong in separate worlds; [if] the symbolic and the literal are in part constitutive of one another” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 23), then, through their literary productions, Levy, Ali, Smith, Evans and Kay can be said to offer alternative “representational spaces”, following Henri Lefebvre’s thesis on *The Production of Space* (2005). Such alternative spaces might, in turn, contribute to modifying social spaces and the social meanings attached to them. For meanings are not immanent but are always constituted and affected by the representational spaces that articulated them. Even if this could be a too optimistic reading, what cannot be denied is that the novels analysed in this Dissertation provide, inscribe and validate different ways of being British and different strategies of inhabiting a hybrid location.

- ANON. "Literary Life", *Telegraph* 3 June (2006): n.p. 2 Nov 2008
<<http://telegraph.co.uk/core/Content/displayPrintable.jhtml>>
- ANON. "10 Questions with Diana Evans", *Fiction Attic*, 7 Jun 2005: n.p. 10 Oct 2008 <<http://www.fictionattic.com/>>
- ANON. "The Transformation of Zadie Smith", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 31 (2001): 65.
- ANON. "White Knuckle Ride: It has been an Extraordinary Year for Zadie Smith. Last Christmas she was an Unknown 24-Year-Old Living in Willesden. Then her Novel, White Teeth, was Published to Great Acclaim, and the Spotlight has Been on her", *The Guardian*, 11 Dec (2000): n.p. 12 Oct. 2007<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iwsearch/we/InfoWeb/?p_action=print...>
- ANTHIAS, Floya and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- _____. "Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions", *Feminist Review*, 15 (1983): 62-75.
- ARANA, Victoria R. "The 1980s: Rethorising and Refashioning British Identity". In Kadjia Sesay (ed.) *Write Black Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 230-240.
- BASTIAN, Misty L. "'The Demon Superstition': Abominable Twins and Mission Culture in Onitsha History", *Ethnology*, 40/1 (2001): 13-27.

- BAUMAN, Zigmunt. *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. London: Polity Press, 2004.
- BHABHA, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- _____. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha". In Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.
- _____. (ed.) *Nation and Narration*. London; New York: Routledge, 1990.
- BHABHA, Homi and Susheila Nasta. "La Reinención de Gran Bretaña". Trad. Fernando Galván, *Nerter, Especial: Estudios Postcoloniales*, 2 (2000-2001): 29-35.
- BIRCH, Carol. "26a by Diana Evans: Love and Death in Neasden", *The Independent*, 25 Mar 2005. 10 Jan 2008
<<http://arts.independent.co.uk/books/reviews/article7805.ece>>
- BIRD, Jon et al (eds.) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- BONDI, Liz. "Locating Identity Politics". In Michael, Keith and Steve, Pile (eds.) *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1993, 84-101.
- BOOKSELLER. "Wake up to a New Britain: How the Book Trade Can Reach out to Britain's Black and Ethnic Minority Consumers", *Books For All*, May (2006): 3-14.

- BRACE, Marianne: "The Sunday Profile: Andrea Levy: Notes from a Small Island." *The Independent*, June 12, (2004): n.p.
- BRAH, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- BURFORD, Barbara Jackie Kay et al (eds.) *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets*. London: The Women's Press, 1985.
- BURGESS, Jacqueline and John Gold (eds.) *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture*. London: Croom Helm, 1985.
- BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- CARRERA SUÁREZ, Isabel. "Absent Mother(land)s: Joan Riley's Fiction". In Susheila Nasta (ed.). *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. London: Women's Press, 1991, 290-309.
- _____. "Hyphens, Hybridities and Mixed-Race Identities: Gendered Readings in Contemporary Canadian Women's Text". In Elizabeth Russell (ed.) *Caught Between Cultures: Women, Writing and Subjectivities*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002, 15-34.
- CENTREPRISE Trust (eds.) *Breaking the Silence*. London: Centreprise, 1984.
- CHEONG, Pauline Hope, Edwards, Rosalind, Goulbourne, Harry and John Solomos. "Immigration, Social Cohesion and Social Capital: A Critical Review", *Critical Social Policy*, 27 (2007): 24-49.

- COBHAM, Rhonda and Merle Collins (eds.) *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*. London: The Women's Press, 1987.
- COHEN, David. "The Battle of Brick Lane", *Evening Standard* (London), July 25, (2006): n.p.
- COLLINS, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York, London: Routledge, 1991.
- CORTÉS, José Miguel. "¿Tienen Género los Espacios Urbanos?", *Artecontexto: arte cultura nuevos medios*, 8 (2005):22-29.
- CROSS, Malcolm. *Racial Equality and the Local State: an Evolution of Policy Implementation in the London Borough of Brent*. University of Warwick: The Centre for Research and Ethnic Relations, 1991.
- D'AGUIAR, Fred. "Against Black British Literature". In Maggie Butcher (ed.) *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics*. Coventry: Dangaroo, 1989, 106-114.
- DARWIN, John. *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-war World*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988.
- DAWES, Kwame. "Negotiating the Ship on The Head: Black British Fiction", *Wasafiri*, 29 (1999): 18-24.
- DONALD, James and Ali Rattansi (eds.) *'Race', Culture and Difference*. London: Sage, 1992.

- DONNELL, Alison. "Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing", *Wasafiri*, 36 (2002): 11-17.
- DUNCKER, Patricia. *James Miranda Barry*. London: Picador, 2000.
- DYER, Richard. "Jackie Kay with Richard Dyer". In Susheila Nasta (ed.) *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*. London: Routledge, 2004: 237-249.
- EMECHETA, Buchi. *Kehinde*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1994.
- ENGLISH, James F. (ed.) *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- EVANS, Diana. *26a*. London: Vintage, 2006.
- _____. *Meet the Author*, (2008): n.p. 10 Jan 2008
<www.meettheauthor.com/bookbites/590.html. 10 January 2008>
- _____. "My Other Half", *The Observer*, 6 Feb (2005): n.p. 10 Jan 2008
<<http://books.guardian.co.uk./departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1406651,00.html#top>>
- EVARISTO, Bernardine. "Diana Evans in Conversation", *Wasafiri*, 45 (summer 2005): 31-35.
- EZARD, John and David Ward. "Whitbread Novel Prize is Double for Levy", *The Guardian*, January 6, (2005): n.p.

- FANON, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. London: Penguin, 1967.
- FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Carolina. "The Thematic Tradition in Black British Literature and its Poetic Representation", *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, 16 (2003): 55-71.
- FISCHER, Susan Alice. "Andrea Levy in Conversation with Susan Alice Fischer", *Changing English*, 13/3 (2005): 361-371.
- FLUDERNIK, Monika (ed.) *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- _____. "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, 16:1 Spring (1986): 22-27.
- _____. *The History of Sexuality*. 1985. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- FRANKENBERG, Ruth (ed.) *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- FREIXAS, Laura. *Literatura y Mujeres*. Barcelona: Destino, 2000.
- GALVÁN, Fernando (ed.) *Márgenes y Centros en la Literatura Británica Actual*. Servicio de Publicaciones: Universidad de Alcalá, 2000.

GAVRON, Sarah. "Brick Lane: The Journey from Page to Screen." *Gravepine* (Spring 2008): 14-15.

GEE, Maggie. 'Writing about Difference: Girl Writes Boy, White Writes Black'. 32nd AEDEAN Conference. Unpublished plenary lecture, Gee, Maggie 2008. 'Writing about Difference: Girl Writes Boy, White Writes Black'. 32nd AEDEAN Conference. Unpublished plenary lecture.

GHOSH, Bobby. "Flavour of the Week", *Time*, 8 Jun (2003): n.p. 12 Mar 2007 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,457346,00.html>>

GILROY, Paul. "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson, 1987.

_____. "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism". In Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.). *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992, 187-198.

_____. *After the Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.

GOODMAN, Lizbeth and Jane De Gay (eds.) *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

GREER, Bonnie: "Empire's Child: Andrea Levy Started Writing to Unravel her Family's Story: Her Parents Coming from Jamaica to the UK, their Shock

on Arrival and her Own Experiences Growing up Here". *The Guardian*,
January 31, (2004): n.p.

GREWAL, Shabnam, Jackie Kay, et al. (eds.) *Charting the Journey: Writings by
Black and Third World Women*. London: Sheba, 1988.

GRIFFIN, Gabriele. "In/Corporation? Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*". In Vicki
Bertram (ed.) *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

_____. *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003a.

_____. "Constitutive Subjectivities: Contemporary Black and Asian
Women Playwrights in Britain", *European Journal of Women's Studies*,
10 (2003): 377- 394.

GRISWOLD, Wendy. *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

GROSSBERG, Lawrence, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*.
London: Routledge, 1992.

GROSZ, Elizabeth. "Bodies-Cities". In Beatriz Colomina (ed.) *Sexuality and
Space*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, 241-253.

GUNEW, Sneja. *Displacements: Migrant Storytellers*. Victoria: Deakin University
Press, 1982.

- _____. *Displacements II: Multicultural Storyteller*. Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1987.
- GUNNING, Dave. "Anti-Racism, the Nation-State and Contemporary Black British Literature", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 39 (2004): 29-43.
- HACKING, Ian. *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personalities and the Sciences of Memory*. Ewing, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1998. 5 Feb 2008 <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/york/Doc?id=10035764&ppg=71>>
- HALBERSTAM, Judith. "Telling Tales: Brandon Teena, Billy Tipton, and Transgender Biography", *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies*, 15/1 (2000): 62-81.
- HALL, Stuart. "New Ethnicities".1998. In James Procter (ed.) *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998. An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, 265-275.
- _____. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, 223-237.
- _____. "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms", *Media, Culture and Society*, 2 (1980): 57-72.
- HARAWAY, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective".1988. In Linda McDowell and Joanne

- P. Sharp. *Space, Gender and Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: Arnold, 1997, 53-73.
- HARRISON, Nicholas. *Postcolonial Criticism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003.
- HARVEY, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- _____. "From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity". In Jon Bird, et al (eds.) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London: Routledge, 1993, 3-29.
- HEAD, Dominic. "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium". In Richard Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (eds.) *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- HIDDLESTON, Jane. "Shapes and Shadows: (Un)veiling the Immigrant in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 40 (2005): 57-72.
- HOOKS bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- HUMPHREY, Geraldine M. and David G. Zimpfer. *Counselling for Grief and Bereavement*. 1986. London: Sage, 2008.
- HUSSAIN, Yasmin. *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot : Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005.
- JACKSON, Peter. *Maps of Meaning*. London: Routledge, 1993.

- JAGGI, Maya. "Jackie Kay in Conversation", *Wasafiri*, 29 Spring (1999): 53-56.
- _____. "Two into One", *The Guardian*. 28 May (2004): n.p. 10 Jan 2008.
<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,,1494039,00.html>>
- JONES, Carole. "'An Imaginary Black Family': Jazz, Diaspora, and the Construction of Scottish Blackness in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*", *Symbiosis*, 8.2 (2004): 191-202.
- JUNE, Rose. *Perfect Gentleman: Dr. James Miranda Barry*. London: Hutchinson, 1977.
- KATZ, Dan. "Defend Monica Ali!", *Solidarity* 3/97 (2006): n.p. 10 August 2006
<<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/6762>>
- KAY, Jackie. "Let it Be Told", *Kunapipi*. XVI, 1 (1994): 531-544.
- _____. "Race and all that Jazz", *The Guardian*, Saturday Review, 5 Dec. 1998: 10.
- _____. *Trumpet*. London: Picador, 1998.
- KEITH, Michael & Pile, Steve, *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- KHAIR, Tabish. "The Death of the Reader", *Wasafiri* 21, 3 (2006): 1-5.
- KING, Jeannette. "'A Woman's a Man, for a' That': Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*", *Scottish Studies Review*, 2 (2001): 101-109.

- KNIGHT, India. "Please don't Call me Multicultural", *The Sunday Times*. 11 June (2006): n.p. 12 Oct. 2007 <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/InfoWeb/?p_action=print...>
- KONING, Christina. "Secrets from the Upper Room", *The Times*. 9 April (2005): n.p. Accessed 10/01/08 <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,923-1559232,00.html>>
- KRONENFELD, Anne and Ivan. *The Secret Life of Dr. Miranda James Barry*. ebooksonthe.net, 2000.
- KUMAR, Krishan. "'Englishness' and English National Identity". In David Morley and Kevin Robins (eds.). *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 41-55.
- LANE, Harriet. "Ali's in Wonderland", *The Observer*, 1 June (2003): n.p.
- LANE, Richard J., Mengham Rod and Philip Tew (eds.) *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- LEA, Richard and Paul Lewis. "'Insulted' Residents and Traders Threaten to Halt Filming of Bestselling Novel *Brick Lane*", *The Guardian*, 18 July (2006): n.p.
- LEA, Richard. "Novelist hit back at Brick Lane Protesters", *Guardian Unlimited*, Monday July 31 (2006): n.p.
- LEFEVRE, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2005.

- LEVY, Andrea. *Small Island*. London: Review, 2004.
- LIMA, María Helena. “‘Pivoting the Centre’: The Fiction of Andrea Levy”. In Kadja Sesay (ed.) *Write Black Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 56-85.
- LYDENBERG, Robin. “Freud’s Uncanny Narratives”, *PMLA*, 112 (1997): 102-108
- MASON, Wyatt. “White Knees: Zadie Smith’s Novel Problem”, *Harper’s Magazine* Oct (2005): 83-88.
- MASSEY, Doreen. “Politics and space/time”. In Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.) *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1993, 141-161.
- _____. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994
- _____. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005.
- MAVROMMATIS, George. “The New ‘Creative’ Brick Lane: A Narrative Study of Local Multicultural Encounters”, *Ethnicities*, 6 (2006): 498-517.
- MAYNARD, Mary. “‘Race’, Gender and the Concept of ‘Difference’ in Feminist Thought”. In Haleh Afshar and Mary Maynard (eds.) *The Dynamics of “Race” and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions*. Bristol: Taylor and Francis, 1994, 9-26.
- MCDOWELL, Linda and Joanne P. Sharp. *Space, Gender and Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: Arnold, 1997.

- MCDOWELL, Linda. *Gender, Identity and Place*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1999.
- MCLEOD, John. *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- _____. "Some Problems with 'British'; In a 'Black British' Canon". *Wasafiri*, 17 (2002): 56-59.
- MERCER, Kobena. "'1968': Periodizing Politics and Identity". In Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992, 424-449.
- _____. "Black Art and the Burden of Representation", *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Art and Culture*, 10 (1990): 61-78.
- MERRIT, Stephanie. "She's Young, Black, British – and the First Publishing Sensation of the Millennium", *The Observer* 16 Jan. (2000): n.p. 11 Oct 2007 <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,12281>>.
- MIRZA, Heide Safa (ed.) *Black British Feminism*. London Routledge, 1997.
- MODOOD, Tariq et al (eds.) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain. Diversity and Disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997.
- MOHANRAM, Radhika, *BlackBody: Woman, Colonialism, and Space*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

- MORLEY, David and Kevin Robins (eds.) *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- MULLAN, John. "After post-colonialism", *The Guardian* 12 Oct (2002): n.p. 11 Oct 2007 <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,4521793-110738,00.html>>.
- MURILLO de la Vega, Soledad. *El Mito de la Vida Privada: De la Entrega al Tiempo Propio*. México y España: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, S.A, 1996.
- MURRAY PARKES, Colin. *Love and Loss: The Roots of Grief and its Complications*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- MURRAY, Stuart (ed.) *Not On Any Map: Essays of Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*. Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1997.
- NASTA, Susheila. "Beyond the Millennium: Black Women's Writing". *Women: A Cultural Review*, 1/2 (2000): 71-76.
- _____ (ed.) *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. London: Women's Press, 1991
- _____. *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- NEWLAND, Courttia and Kadija Sesay (eds.) *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001.
- NGCOBO, Laretta (ed.) *Let It be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*. London: Pluto, 1987.

- O'ROURKE, Meghan. "Fiction in Review", *The Yale Review*. 88, 3 (2000): 159-170.
- O' GRADY, Kathleen. "White Teeth: a Conversation with Author Zadie Smith". *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*. 27, 1 (2002): 105-111. 11 Oct. 2007
<<http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/ogrady/zsmith2004.html>>.
- O' HAGAN, Sean. "Zadie Bites Back", *The Observer* 25 Aug (2002): n.p. 11 Oct 2007
<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,7>>.
- OWUSU, Kwesi. *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- PAGE, Benedicte: "After the Windrush", *Bookseller*, 10 October (2003): 23.
- PAYNE, Geoffrey K. (ed.) *Social Divisions*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- PEARSON, Rebecca. "26a, by Diana Evans: Spend Some Time with the Girls who Live Up in the Loft", *The Independent*, 3 Apr (2005): n.p. 10 Jan 2008
<<http://arts.independent.co.uk/books/reviews/article9029.ece>>
- PERFECT, Michael. "The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43 (2008): 119-120.
- PHILLIPS, Caryl. "A Dream Deferred: Fifty Years of Caribbean Migration to Britain", *Kunapipi* XXI, 2 (1999): 106-118.

- PILE, Steve and Nigel Thrift (eds.) *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- PROCTER, James *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998. An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000
- _____ (ed.) *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- _____. "New Ethnicities, the Novel and the Burdens of Representation". In James F. English (ed.) *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, 101-120.
- RENNE, Elisha P and Bastian, L. Misty. "Reviewing Twinship in Africa", *Ethnology*, 40/ 1 (2001): 1-11.
- RENNE, Elisha P. "Twinship in an Ekiti Yoruba Town." *Ethnology*, 40/ 1 (2001): 63-78.
- REX, John. *Race Relations in Sociological Theory*. London: Routledge, [1970] 1983.
- RICHARDSON, Diane, McLaughlin, Janice and Mark E. Casey, *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- RICHARDSON, Diane. *Rethinking Sexuality*. London: Sage, 2000.

- RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, Carla. "Biographical Improvisation in Jackie Kay's Trumpet", *Scottish Review*, 8/1 (2007): 88-100.
- ROSE, Irene. "Heralding New Possibilities: Female Masculinity in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*". In Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene (eds.) *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, 141-157.
- ROSENBERG, Jordana. "'Serious Innovation': A Conversation with Judith Butler". In George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry. *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 379-388.
- RUSSELL, Elizabeth (ed.) *Caught Between Cultures. Women, Writing and Subjectivities*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002
- RUSSO, Maria. "Girl Wonder: The Life so far of Multicultural Literary Sensation Zadie Smith", *Salon Books* 27 Apr (2000): n.p. 11 Oct 2007 <http://archive.salon.com/books/feature/2000/04/28/zadie_profile/print...>.
- RUTHERFORD, Jonathan (ed.) *Identity Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.
- SAID, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Vintage, 1979.
- SANDHU, Sukhdev. *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004.

SCHNEIDER, Dan. "Review of Zadie Smith *White Teeth*". 22 Apr (2007): n.p. 11 Oct 2007 <<http://www.cosmoetica.com/B556-DES481.html>>.

SCHWARTZ, Hillel. *The Culture of the Copy. Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*. New York: Zone Books, 1996.

SELTZER, Richard. "White Teeth by Zadie Smith", *B&R Samizdat Express*. 11 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.samizdat.com/isyn/teeth.html>>.

SESAY, Kadija (ed.) *Write Black Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Hertford: Hansib, 2005.

SEVERIN, Laura. "Interview with Jackie Kay", *FreeVerse: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, 2 Spring (2002): n.p. 22 Dec 2003 <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/freeverse/Archives/Spring_2002/interviews/J_Kay.html >

SHARMA, Shailja. "Race and the National Question in '80s Britain". *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*. 41 (1993): 122-131

SIVANANDAN, Tamara. "Black British Writing: A Review Article". *Race Class*, 43 (2001): 132-140.

SMITH, Zadie. *White Teeth*. London: Penguin, 2000.

SMITH, Anne Marie. *New Right discourse on race and sexuality : Britain, 1968-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- SMITH, Steve. *The Centre-Left and New Right Divide?: Political Philosophy and Aspects of UK Social Policy in the Era of the Welfare State*. London: Ashgate, 1998.
- SOJA, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- _____. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford; Malden and Victoria: Blackwell, 1996.
- SOLOMOS, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*. 1989. London: Macmillan, 1993.
- SPAIN, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 271-313.
- STEFFENS, Daneet. "Diana Evans talks to Daneet Steffens", *Mslexia*, 31 15 Mar (2007): n.p. 10 Jan 2008
<<http://www.mslexia.co.uk/interview/extract31.html>>
- STEIN, Mark. *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004.
- STEVI, Jackson. "Heterosexuality, Sexuality and Gender: Rethinking the Intersections". In Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin and Mark E.

- Casey (eds.) *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 38-58.
- SUTHERLAND, Marcia. "African Caribbean Immigrants in the United Kingdom: The Legacy of Racial Disadvantages", *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52, 1 (2006): 26-52.
- VALENTINE, Gill. *Social Geographies: Society and Space*. Harlow: Longman, 2001.
- VISRAM, Rozina. *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*. London: Pluto Press, 2002.
- WAJID, Sara. "Muse Attacks? Retreat for a While to a More Lackadaisical Environment", *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 25 Mar (2005): 18-19.
- WALTERS, Tracey L. "'We're All English Now Mate Like It or Lump It': The Black/Britishness of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*". In Kadija Sesay (ed.) *Write Black Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 314-322.
- WAMBU, Onyekachi. *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998.
- _____. "Black British Literature since Windrush", *BBC History* 1 Jan (1998): n.p. 30 Oct 2008
<http://db.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/literature_print.html>

- WEBSTER, Wendy. *Imagining Home: Gender, "Race" and National Identity, 1945-1964*. Briston: UCL Press, 1998.
- WEEDON, Chris. *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*. Maidenhead: The Open University Press, 2004.
- _____. "Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing", *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2/1 (2008): 17-35.
- WEEKS, Jeffrey. "The Sexual Citizen", *Theory of Culture and Society*, 15(3-4) (1998): 35-52.
- WELSH, Sarah Lawson. "(Un)belonging Citizens, Unmapped Territory: Black Immigration and British Identity. In Stuart Murray (ed.). *Not On Any Map: Essays of Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*. Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1997, 43-66.
- WHEELWRIGHT, Julie. *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness*. London: Pandora Press, 1989.
- WILLIAMS, Patrick. "Significant Corporality: Bodies and Identities in Jackie Kay's Fiction". In Kadija Sesay and Lola Young (eds.) *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 41-55.
- WILSON, Amrit. *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*. London: Virago Press, [1978] 1984.

- WILSON, Elizabeth. "Into the Labyrinth". In Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp. *Space Gender and Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: Arnold, 1997, 277-284
- WOOD, James. "Human, All Too Inhuman", *The New Republic Online*, 24 Jul (2000): n.p. 30 Aug 2007 <
http://www.tnr.com/story_print.html?id=504a27d4-c41b-46e3-97a3-2c586c927117>.
- _____. "Making it New". *The New Republic Online*, 11 Sept (2003): n.p. 10 Sept 2007 <http://www.powells.com/review/2003_09_11.html>
- WOODWARD, Joan. *The Lone Twin: a Study in Bereavement and Loss*. London, New York: Free Association Books, 1998.
- YOUNG, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- _____. "The ideal of community and the politics of difference". In Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1990a.
- YUVAL-DAVIS, Nira. "Gender and Nation". In Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp. *Space, Gender and Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: Arnold, 1997, 403-408.