



Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in European, American and
Postcolonial Languages and
Literature

Final Thesis

Postcolonial Female Subjects

Rewritten Identities in Andrea
Levy's *Small Island* and Zadie
Smith's *NW*

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Academic Year

2019 / 2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all my professors who have inspired me during my education, enlightened my path with their precious knowledge, and encouraged me to write my thesis. Beyond any doubt, I would not be the person I am without their support and enthusiasm to raise me as a sensible individual.

The melody of my life would not sound so harmoniously if it were not for my loving, gentle, insightful, brave, and strong friends. Their unconditional love and support have embellished my life. This thesis has come to life particularly thanks to their profound conversations, incredible company, and joyful laughter. It is my most tremendous fortune to have met beautiful souls across the world, for which I will always be grateful.

I would also thank my brother for cheering up my life with his sweet and witty spirit and my father for being the most compassionate person he is and supporting my journey in whichever direction I may take. My greatest gratitude is for the strongest, fiercest, and kindest woman with her glittering blue eyes, brightening my life. For teaching me how to live, not survive, how to make my decisions, not conform, and how to laugh even after crying. For being a woman in a hostile and patriarchal environment, building a life for her family, raising her children with humanist values, and believing in us even when we cannot. I am very indebted to my mother for her endless inspiration and motivation.

I dedicate my thesis to individuals who are victimised, oppressed, silenced, abused, and murdered in Turkey and elsewhere. Equality has vanished off the face of the earth and left us with poignant memories, for which we mourn every day. The world will immortalise their stories as we paint, compose, narrate, and speak about them.

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“In a time when your ‘belonging’, who you *really* are, is judged by the colour of your skin, the shape of your nose, the texture of your hair, the curve of your body – your perceived genetic and physical presence; to be black (not white), female and ‘over here’, in Scotland, England or Wales, is to disrupt all the safe closed categories of what it means to be British: that is to be white and British” (Mirza 1997, 3).

“Love is a word another kind of open—
As a diamond comes into a knot of flame
I am black because I come from the earth's inside
Take my word for jewel in your open light”
(Lorde 2020, 184).

1. Introduction

The presence of black people in Britain began in 1555 when Africans wished “to learn English and thereby facilitate trade” (Gerzina 1995, 3). The population then increased with the purposes of the slave trade and court entertainments in the sixteenth century. The increasing black population and slavery caused racist and xenophobic thinking in Britain. Especially, Enlightenment thinkers attempted to justify black people’s inferiority (Fryer 1988, 66).

In the aftermath of World War II, the British economy suffered from the destructive outcomes of the war, and the government called for its colonies to provide the country with a cheap labour force. As a consequence, numerous migrations occurred from the West Indies to London. These journeys ended up in disillusionment because immigrants encountered hostile racism and misogyny in the metropolis.

In my thesis, I focus on black women’s experiences that occurred during the creation of postcolonial Britain that hosts the narratives of marginalised individuals in London under the impact of their shattered hopes. When immigrants’ expectations of finding a rightful place in London clashed with native Britons’ unwillingness to accept them, their hopes shattered and led to the genesis of postcolonial writings that began to look at the metropolis from the periphery.

In the first section of my thesis, I explain the black presence that led to the genesis of multicultural Britain, the identity politics of postcolonial studies that attempt to analyse migrants’ experiences and identity (re)constitutions in a hostile environment overwhelmed with racism. In the discussion of identity (re)constitutions, I use the theories of Stuart Hall (1996, 1997), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Amina Mama (1995) as they state the postcolonial subject is always in process. Particularly, Mama’s notions of subjectivity become helpful in my study to analyse the “contradictory experiences” (Mama 1995, 111) that shape black women's identities in multicultural Britain.

After I provide my study with theoretical background, I aim to analyse Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) as a representative text of postcolonial women's identity (re)formation during the Windrush emigration. The analysis of the novel and its black female protagonist constitute the second section of this thesis. I exemplify Hortense's 'contradictory experiences' in both Jamaica and Britain. Hortense is internalised with the colonial mindset and beings her narrative as the daughter of the empire. After she faces the hostile reality of London, she reconciles with her Jamaican bonds and continues her journey between her "roots and routes" (Gilroy 1993, 133). While she rewrites her identity as a hybrid subject, she also deterritorialises London through walking, which represents her attempts to build a place for herself in the metropolis.

Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) highlights the third section of this study and postmillennial female subjectivity. I choose *NW* to observe the changes in social dynamics in London in the timeline after the Windrush emigration. The black female protagonist of *NW* represents the identity (re)constitution in postmillennial Britain fraught with the aftermath of 9/11, globalisation, and the question of authenticity. Keisha née Natalie Blake goes through a self-invention process and accounts for the postmillennial individual overwhelmed with constantly changing social discourses, hyperreal popular culture referents, and digital addiction. Keisha changes her name, creates another narrative for herself and performs for ideologies only to find out she is a forgery, which fills her with anxiety and fear. While she faces her anxious state stemming from her inauthentic identity, she leaves her social definitions and walks through nowhere, which symbolises there is not a definite destination for black British women but only the journey itself. Strolling in Northwest London, she embraces her complexity and differences as a hybrid subject stuck in between clashing ideologies at the end.

I interrogate Hortense's identity (re)constitution through mostly Stuart Hall's criticism of cultural identity (1994, 1997, 2017) while also consulting also on Amina Mama (1995) and Homi Bhabha (1994). In order to discuss Keisha/Natalie's performative identity, I consult on Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity (1990,

1993) while I also use Homi Bhabha (1994), Jean Baudrillard's simulacra and simulation theory (1981, 1995), and Angela McRobbie's criticism of post-modern feminism (2009) to bring attention to the recent criticisms to analyse postmillennial female identities.

As the conclusion part is concerned, I observe the changes that play major roles in black British women's lives when they decide to reinscribe their identities and what kinds of alternatives both Levy and Smith suggest for hybrid subjects to inhabit in multicultural Britain. I conclude that both novels offer female solidarity as an act of resilience against hostile racism and misogyny in postcolonial Britain. Both Hortense and Natalie share secrets with the other female protagonists of the novels, Queenie and Leah. Despite their differences, all women support each other in their struggle to survive among social expectations, ideologies, and dogmas and acknowledge the multitude of human nature for the coexistence in multicultural London.

2. The Genesis of Postcolonial London

2.1. A Historical Overview of the Black Presence in London

Among the crowd all specimens of man,
Through all the colours which the sun bestows,
And every character of form and face:
The Swede, the Russian; from the genial south,
The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote
America, the Hunter, Indian; Moors,
Malays, Lascars, the Tartar, the Chinese,
And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns (Wordsworth 1995, 363; 221-2).

When William Wordsworth wrote his poem in 1850, titled “Residence in London,” the described city had already become a transnational space where different ethnic and race groups merged. Indeed, Gretchen Gerzina demonstrates the transnationalism of London as she draws on the dominant black population: “thousands of black people living and working under a legal system which recognized most of them only as property and denied them the most fundamental of rights” (Gerzina, 1995, 2). However, as Gerzina demonstrates, London did not offer a rightful space for black people treated as properties rather than individuals. Therefore, black men's lives, not to mention women, were bounded by the servant/master relationship that William Shakespeare portrayed with Prospero and Caliban in *The Tempest*. After usurping the island where Caliban had been his own king, Prospero establishes the colonial relationship, subjugating Caliban to obedience. Enforcing the superiority of the white – preferably male – population, Prospero’s landing to an island and assigning himself as the ‘master’ of the place, imposing his culture, and making Caliban his subject were the representative situations of the black men in Great Britain. Seeing themselves rightful in subduing a place was prevalent in white men’s thinking as Prospero refers to Caliban: “... this thing of darkness! Acknowledge mine”(5.1.275-6; Shakespeare 2004, 94).

The depiction of the black people as inferior to the native British existed before *The Tempest*. Gretchen Gerzina concludes that most historians marked the year as 1555 when Africans stepped on the British lands “to learn English and thereby facilitate

trade” (Gerzina 1995, 3). That period, which initiated Britain's black appearance, was followed by more black people as servants and slaves. In the mid-sixteenth century, the population of African people increased due to their use as “court entertainers” and “the English slave trade” (4). They became so noticeable that Queen Elizabeth issued an edict in 1596 to expel “blackamoors” from England:

[...] there are of late divers Blackmoores brought into the Realme, of which kinde of people there are all ready here to manie, consideringe howe God hath blessed this land w[i]th great increase of people of our owne Nation as anie Countrie in the world, wherof manie for want of Service and meanes to sett them on worck fall to Idlenesse and to great extremitie; Her Ma[jesty]’s pleasure therefore ys, that those kinde of people should be sent forthe of the lande (PC 2/21 f.304).

However, the transatlantic trade relations between Britain, Africa, the Americas, and colonial developments in the West Indies continued to increase the substantial black population in London when British planters returned home with their black servants and saw themselves rightful owners, violating black people’s rights, freedom, and lives. This ‘brave new world’ in 1768 had approximately 20,000 black individuals “out of a total London population of 676,250” (Gerzina 1995, 5). While the increase of black communities often mentioned male members, women also took part in growing the black population, participating in labour force as domestic workers, servants, and prostitutions (Mama 1995, 93). By the end of the eighteenth century, black men and women created solidarity communities across London streets with their own “pubs, churches and community meeting places” (Gerzina 1995, 6).

This growing black presence led to the emergence of racism and xenophobia in England with the influence of its period’s philosophical thinking. The eighteenth century marked itself as the age of the Enlightenment in England, wherein intellectual, philosophical, and scientific developments were born. The historian Roy Porter depicts a facet of this era as “the stage of thrusting achievers, sold on science, dedicated to the diffusion of rational knowledge and eager for innovation” (Porter 2000, 151). This adherence to rationality led intellectuals like John Locke to create a progressive man

image: “Being error-prone, man was imperfect; being educable, (...) improvable” (200). A man was believed to be improved with the necessary education and equipment. This progressive man image led Locke to adopt essentialism that justified slavery and racism in England. “As a senior administrator of slave-owning colonies in the New World, Locke helped to draft instructions to the governor of Virginia in which black slavery was regarded as justifiable” (Fryer 1988, 65). Therefore, favouring the white skin, the Enlightenment image of the imperfect man promoted imperial thinking and slavery for material profits. Another proponent of slavery and Enlightenment philosopher was David Hume, who believed in the Negro inferiority, which negatively portrayed black individuals as the subhuman:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes [...] to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white [...] No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. [...] In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one Negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly (Hume 1994, 86).

Hume saw the distinctions between individuals as the role of nature, and his ideas led to black identity construction as “inherently mentally defective” (Mama 1995, 19). Thus, the notion of white supremacy that mastered and ostracised a whole race was born in England because of its skin colour. The irony of the eighteenth century was its irrational attempt to justify racism. In a century wherein rationality dominated, thinkers attempted to justify slavery with pseudo-scientific ideas. For example, the Enlightenment period believed that “mental illness was conceptualised mainly in terms of moral degeneracy, so Negroes were expected to exhibit more lurid forms of mental disturbance” (21). However, when the deployments of scientific tools that attempted to prove black people’s mental inferiority failed, there occurred a debate, concluding that “black people’s brains were [...] too simple and retarded to be affected” (23).

Other fields that gave justifications for slavery with pseudo-scientific ideas were phrenology and teleology. The former measured the skull to predict mental traits, while

the latter proposed explanations for everything in terms of the purpose they serve. According to phrenologists, black people's skulls "demonstrated their inferiority to Europeans, and that the inferior races would in time become extinct" (Fryer 1988, 66). Similarly, teleologists asserted that black people's purpose on earth was only to serve white people (66). For example, in his "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" (1849), Thomas Carlyle asserted:

I say, if the black gentleman is born to be a servant, and, in fact, is useful in God's creation only as a servant, then let him hire not by the month, but by a very much longer term (Carlyle 1849, 372, as cited in Gerzina 1995, 6).

Those pseudo-scientific experiments and theories attempted to prove black inferiority and justify imperialism (Fryer 1988, 66). They also created a status quo that saw the black individual as an object without any idiosyncrasy. Imperialism and racism led to the idea that black individuals had to be civilised and humanised. And, there was nobody who was more intellectual, educated, and rational than their British colonisers who ruled over and controlled them. The white supremacist ideas persisted during the colonial rule, in which missionaries went to the colonies to subvert the colonised mind and assimilate it to the English culture and Christian beliefs. Missionaries regarded this penetration of the colonised mind as a "quest to convert the 'heathen'" (Mama 1995, 25) as a process of soul-saving. Therefore, the white men's quest took over where slavery left off and exploited the colonial lands by any means necessary.

As Mama concludes, those centuries both witnessed the arrival of black men and women in quests for better life opportunities and the assumption pools about black people in the discourse, in which they had no right to speak while "only white people had power to define, and to articulate knowledges that were taken as scientific truths" (25). As much as there was much said about black people, there was little told about their struggles, ideas, and lifestyles through their voices. To anecdote how a population lived, it is vital to take account of personal experiences; however, the white/master voice was so dominant in those eras that it cut the minority voice off the conversation.

In conclusion, Britain saw an increase in black presence between the eighteenth and nineteenth century owing to slavery, migration for better work opportunities, and births of mulattoes even before the post-war migration. This increase and Enlightenment thinking caused racist attitudes, discriminations, ostracisation, and hostility towards the black population in British society. These ideas that dehumanised a population due to its skin colour have led to serious psychological problems and anxiety in the colonised people's lives with the ideas that they were inherently inferior to the white skin, hence unwanted and undesirable. The black population showed an increase in the empire, as the attempts to reduce it. Both on the part of the government and the British public, these attempts came into focus in the twentieth century.

2.2. Children Arrive at The Mother Country

As the part mentioned above shows, the presence of black people permeated before the post-war emigration. Although the white British society protested against the influx of Caribbean immigrants after World War II, black contribution and population had already been present in many parts of England:

When, a century later [after the Slave Trade], Black people began to enter Britain as immigrants, we came to a country we had already helped to build. Our labour provided the foundations upon which many financial institutions, seaports and industrial centres were built. A local writer said of Bristol at the time that ‘there is not a brick in that city but what is cemented with the blood of slaves’. [...] This country’s past is littered with the names and deeds of Black women and Black men, frequently anonymous and unsung, who have helped to shape it into what it is today. By no stretch of the imagination can we be described as new arrivals (Bryan 2018, 7-8).

The British economy and industry, which had been improved with colonial exploitations of the African and Caribbean lands, suffered from the destructive consequences of World War II and needed a cheap labour force for the sustainable reformation. The empire called for its children to re-build its economy. As a result, “492 men from Jamaica to Britain and a woman stowaway – Averilly Wauchope” (Webster 1998, 26) sailed to London with the SS *Empire Windrush* for new life opportunities on 22 June 1948. However, Britain did not expect its colonials to request equal treatment as the Anglo-Saxons offered to one another. Although West Indians were in a quest for regaining their freedom that was damaged by slavery, colonialism and racist hostility pertained to the British mindset. It was not unimaginable that attitudes towards black people that portrayed them as inferior and justified their subjugation would become more salient in Britain.

The *Empire Windrush* was accompanied by the calypso singer Lord Kitchener’s “London Is the Place for Me,” which was composed specifically for the journey. The

lyrics demonstrated the optimism, hope, and expectations that existed in the aspiring migrants' hearts:

I am glad to know my mother country
I've been travelling to countries years ago
But this is the place I wanted to know
London, that's the place for me (Dawson 2007, 1).

There was a sense of finally coming home in the dreams of those four hundred and ninety-three individuals and their families who arrived in London afterwards. In *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, Kathleen Paul argues that "the populations of the West Indian isles had been encouraged to think of Britain as home, as the cultural and political center of 'their' empire" (Paul 1997, 114). West Indians regarded England as their mother country that had been expecting to embrace her children. However, the migrants' encounters with racist attitudes, in the sequence of slavery and colonialism, proved that England was a homogenous country, accepting only those with white skin in her bosom, rather than a nurturing and welcoming mother. The West Indians' journey to the mother country thus followed marginalisation, discrimination, and social alienation. This clash between expectations and reality revealed Britain's social reality: the empire was rooted not in the wageless labours of its colonised children but in the brutal racism, which has transformed the expectant mother into an illusion. Lord Kitchener's London, after all, was not the place for him.

On the same day the *SS Empire Windrush* docked, 11 Labour backbenchers sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, with a concern about the immigration:

An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned. [...] In our opinion such legislation or administrative action would be almost universally approved by *our people* (Webster 1995, 26; emphasis added).

As Wendy Webster states following this letter, the racialised construction of Britishness created “an opposition between ‘immigrants’ and ‘the British people’ as ‘our people,’” (26) which indicates the national and racial tension during the Windrush immigration in Britain. In other words, the encounter with the Other on British lands caused racial and national anxiety in Britain, calling in question of white Englishness and who is entitled to the term. The government began to experience a sense of “fear that the boundaries between colonizers and colonized might collapse” (28). This fear blurred the boundary between the empire at the top of the hierarchy and its colonised subjects, who dreamt of climbing to the top and reaching equality. Britain did not see the Windrush settlers as the long-awaited children, but rather the “‘immigrants’ who brought with them a ‘colour problem’” (28). There was the familial imagery that was created to represent the colonial subjects as the empire’s children during the colonial era. The idea of Britain was instilled in the colonies’ minds as being the ‘mother’ that loved and nourished her children in spite of the physical distance they shared. Considerably, referring to England as the mother, this familial image evokes children’s return to the symbolic womb and their persistent attempts to find a place in the mother’s bosom. With the sharp distinction created between white British and the Other, this familial image was shattered. As Attlee’s letter implied, the reality rather included a clear distinction between native Britons as ‘our people’ and ‘coloured people.’

In conclusion, while the children of the empire arrived in London with their aspirations, they rather became disillusioned with the hostility and marginalisation that they encountered upon their arrival to the mother country. “Little could we have known the realities which we would have to face, as we entered a society so steeped in its racist past,” Beverley Bryan in the Introduction section of *Heart of the Race* expresses, “[...] our vision of hope, sustained through centuries of exploitation, would be so hard to realise when we set foot on British soil” (Bryan 2018, 16). Therefore, the Windrush phenomenon marked a salient point in the imperial’s history, wherein the discriminatory acts hurt black Britons’ identities, confusing them about who they were and where they belonged. But, it was also the era where the colonised subjects began to heal their

wounds, re-inscribing their identities and the meaning of 'Englishness' in the post-war period.

2.3. Colonised Children Reterritorialise London

In the aftermath of the war, black Britons, whose majority fought as allies of Great Britain during World War II, expected to be welcomed and celebrated by native Britons who would be grateful to them for saving London from the Nazis. London crowned those dreams of England's aspiring children as the setting of the celebration rather than the Caribbean or other islands because London was considered as the great metropolis of the empire and world. Niels Møeller Lund's painting, *The Heart of the Empire* (1904), projects London as the source of British imperialism with "its pink-stained territories as the centre of the world" (McLeod 2004, 4). Drawing from McLeod's observations, London can be seen as the representation of the empire and imperialism:

'London' served as a metonym for imperial power itself: its point of origin, the place where the empire was built and around which it revolved (4).

When hopeful settlers arrived to embrace welcomeness in London's bosom but found themselves locked and confined in the cold weather and atmosphere of the city, they hopelessly went from a house to another to find accommodation, but the English doors were closed even before they uttered a word. These expectations, disappointments, struggles, and pain have defined what is called 'the multicultural London' and have put the struggles over discrimination and estrangement into words in immigrants' writing. Literature has long become a process in which individuals reconstitute themselves with their experiences by (re)telling them. Literature offers the readers diverse perspectives than what history books have told. The influence of colonialism on history, politics, and economy is evident from factual findings. The colonial process, immigration rate, and dates can be found from data, and these phenomena do not change according to each individual. However, individual experiences cannot be defined by facts and restricted into a single framework. And, British literary canon has evolved into its shape today with rich historical past and literary traditions, transforming each period's social events and describing them within borders of London aesthetically, truthfully in protagonists' eyes. With the birth of postcolonial literature, Britain, especially London, has then begun to be recorded as a

cold, hostile, nasty, unwelcoming, rude, and gloomy place, which leads migrants to be out of place and challenge the notion of a singular British identity. The representation of grey London and the feeling of monachopsis are prevalent in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). Finding herself dislocated in a city where the curtains have fallen, Anna Morgan observes:

Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together (Rhys 1934, 8).

These rewritings of London in the marginalised voice are regarded as ways of resistance against the prevalent racism encountered in the aftermath of Windrush immigration. Drawing on Salman Rushdie's article titled "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance," Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin observe the influence of colonial relationships on postcolonial writers' works in their book, *The Empire Writes Back*. According to these writers, postcolonial works have "an inevitable tendency towards subversion" and postcolonial writers "reveal both the configurations of domination and the imaginative and creative responses to this condition" (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 32). These fictional rejoinders enable postcolonial subjects to cope with the oppressive imperialism and digress from "binary models of resistance and identity in order to embrace more ambivalent, multilateral resistances and more transnational, syncretistic conceptions of postcolonial identity" (Ball 2004, 13). In other words, migrant writers create safe places within postcolonial literature, wherein they offer alternative responses against racist British society and challenge the concept of a fixed British identity while differing from colonialist narratives. In doing so, they both reterritorialise the city and renegotiate their identities. It is important to touch upon some theories about the identities of places and individuals constituted within complex relations. Doreen Massey emphasises that a city should be defined not by its actual boundaries but rather the interactions it has gone through for centuries:

The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social

processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, a region or even a continent (Massey 1994, 67).

As Wendy Knepper explains in her observation of Andrea Levy's fiction, London "emerges as an uneasy contact zone of exchange, segregation, and intermixture" (Knepper 2012, 6) to embrace the resistances in postcolonial writing. Migrants recognize the complexities of their identities and explore their fragmented identities through the streets of London "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1991, 34). This act of resistance, in turn, helps reshape the borders of the transnational city. As much as London lead immigrants to (re)shape their identity, the interactions of migrants mutually affect the city's streets. In her *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South Asian Diasporas*, Anuradha Dingwaney Needham observes that the interaction between the coloniser and colonised is a "mutual contamination" (Needham 2000, 9).

In the 'mutual contamination' between the coloniser and the colonised, London surfaces as a space of interactions and its boundaries are reimagined. In this process of redrawing of the boundaries, postcolonial migrants reinscribe their identities. Similarly, John Clement Ball comments that London should be seen "as a decentred centre: a metonym not just of the empire that once controlled the world but also, increasingly, of the world that the empire once controlled" (Ball 2004, 13).

Being an important figure in postcolonial discourse, Homi Bhabha calls the spheres where the mutual contamination occurs as "the realm of the *beyond*," (Bhabha 1994, 1) "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1). Ashcroft's model of distance from the binary oppositions is also significant for Bhabha, who suggests the term "Third Space" for the constitution of culturally diverse identities in the modern world:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial is the need to think beyond narratives of originally and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (2).

The connection between the decentralisation of spaces and the deconstruction of identities is a crucial subject matter of postcolonial studies. And, one of the most influential names in the conversation of identity is Stuart Hall. According to Hall, modern thinkers such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Ferdinand de Saussure caused the Cartesian notion of the stable and independent self to be decentralised. Consequently, modern thoughts created “a fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity” (Hall 1997, 44). This fragmentation led us to an awareness that “identities are never completed, never finished; that they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process” (47). Therefore, Hall asserts that identity is (re)produced in the discursive power of certain historical, political, and social systems. Drawing on Foucault’s ideas about discourse in which power is exercised to produce a subject, making it dependent on ideological rules, Hall discusses that a postcolonial subject is a reproduction of struggles within the colonial discourse. These struggles of the colonised subjects lead the way to the constitution of cultural identity through “critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'” (Hall 1996, 225). Because this constitution of becoming is a product of differences, identities are not fixed in the past but rather “undergo constant transformation,” and they are “subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (225). The existence of differences entails a mutual need for the Other. Stuart Hall discusses that identities are “contradictory, as composed of more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other” (Hall 1997, 49). In other words, the white hegemony becomes master through the otherisation of the black population. Or, a black individual is represented as inferior because of the violence of his/her master. The mutual need for a self and its Other to establish colonial discourse

turns individuals into objects, wherein they have no right to speak among the dominant voices. The pigmentation of 'black' is made problematic in the shades of white. This need for doubleness has constructed an important aspect of postcolonial writing. Taking the oppressive otherisation that was conducted against their selfhood, black individuals have rewritten the meaning of blackness, not through its denial, but a process of reclamation. As Hall evokes his personal experiences: "I went back to England and I became what I'd been named. I had been hailed as an immigrant. I had discovered who I was. I started to tell myself the story of my migration" (54-5). Telling one's story covers a crucial part in postcolonial narratives because "[t]he retrieval of counter memories, of subjugated knowledges, which are thought to lack a history, functions as a challenge to the taken-for-granted normative assumptions of prevailing discourses" (Mirza 1997, 5). Furthermore, Hall calls this (re)composition of black identities in the white hegemonic discourse "Identity Politics One" (Hall 1997, 52) as a practice of resistance against racism in Britain. With this identity (re)construction, black people have attempted to explore their roots, culture, and language. Searching for their roots, black individuals have wanted to reinscribe the absence of black history in school books. It is an "imaginary political re-identification, re-territorialization and re-identification [through which] the margins begin to contest, the locals being to come to representation" (52-3). This fictitious, not necessarily incapable of political change, formation of identity, points to the future that can establish cultural diversity and deny the rigid binary oppositions between national and geographical borders. Therefore, in order to establish multicultural societies, it becomes vital for all individuals – whether they are oppressors or oppressed – to rewrite their identities in the complexity of political and social relations.

It is crucial to acknowledge the act of hybridisation that enables cities to open to cross-cultural influences to rewrite multicultural postcolonial identities. According to Homi Bhabha, cultural activities occur continuously in the "Third Space," which deconstructs a homogeneous and pure identity (Bhabha 1994, 37). This deconstruction in the ambivalent Third Space leads to constructions of hybrid identities. And, the path

to a transcultural world is through not “the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (38).

Consequently, as the imperial power and postimperial migration continue to shape migrants’ hybrid identities, discourses, and experiences; the processes of postcolonialism form a new kind of city. “Texts and images in their way constitute the cities we live in as much as planners and builders and politicians and users do,” John C. Ball argues and asserts that fictional works help individuals imagine how a city could be rather than how it was historically (Ball 2004, 19). Hybridity constituted in London, thus, becomes a significant concept to rethink the Londoner legacy. The historian Roy Porter, in *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, observes that “London dominated Britain as no other European capital: ‘This city is now what ancient Rome once was,’ boasted the London Guide; ‘the seat of Liberty, the encourager of arts, and the admiration of the whole world’” (Porter 2000, 123). The rapid and remarkable social changes, industrial developments, commercial success, and revolutionary scientific researches have gained a reputation of being the rational, intellectual, and rapidly developing city of the globe to London. The constitution of hybridity in the postcolonial state brings other, vitally important, aspects to the discourse of London’s reputation; that is to say, the colonising empire’s divisive ideologies, the exploitation of the underdeveloped colonies, their peripheral situation in the empire, and the isolation of colonised migrants.

What is hopeful about the postcolonial literature is the possibility of hybrid constitutions in a city where cultural diversities cohabit with the native host. The postcolonial London as the contact zone offers opportunities for positive mixture, destabilisation of imperialism, renewal of the global world, and the cohabitation of the familiar with the unknown. It is the heterogenous crossroad of the modern metropolis that these opportunities can be imagined and actualised.

In conclusion, postcolonial literature includes the narrations of those who have been oppressed through the centuries. It becomes a realm where the minority can finally

find its voice and narrate its story. Raking these theories together, London becomes a transnational place which both is changed with the interactions of differences and alters the identities of its inhabitants. In other words, London also becomes a site for the complex process of identity constitutions of migrants, as the “contact zone” (Pratt 1991, 7), “Third Space” (Bhabha 1994, 2), and “second phase” (Hall 1997, 7) where the notion of the fixed identity is dismantled for more complex postcolonial identities. The city of London and the selfhood of migrants emerge in the process of mutual transformations. Each person gains her/his identity as s/he redraws London’s territories and makes them open to cross-cultural influences. Postcolonial literature becomes the realm to observe how singular or communal cultural identities are (re)shaped in the domains of differences such as class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. It is the realm that observes how identities are (re)shaped by political paradigms, which are unstable and decentred. As Hall terms, the literature of the diaspora analyses cultural identities not only as “being” but also “becoming” (Hall 1996, 225).

2.4. Women Renegotiate Their Space and Identity

In a time when your ‘belonging’, who you *really* are, is judged by the colour of your skin, the shape of your nose, the texture of your hair, the curve of your body – your perceived genetic and physical presence; to be black (not white), female and ‘over here’, in Scotland, England or Wales, is to disrupt all the safe closed categories of what it means to be British: that is to be white and British (Mirza 1997, 3).

In the discussion of colonial subjects, migration, and black identity, there is a considerable, if not complete, absence of women. The migrant who came to the mother country with aspirations and dreams was often identified as male. The pronoun of the colonised subject of the (post)colonial process was chosen as ‘he.’ He was the desperate child of the mother who neglected to nourish him. Of course, the fact that the *Empire Windrush* brought 492 men alongside with one woman was influential for male migrants to come to the forefront in the migration discourse. Moreover, under the influence of the patriarchal discourse, women were believed to arrive in Britain as wives, daughters, or sisters of the male migrants with a sense of dependency. However, the majority of black women arrived independently in the mother country with subsequent ships: “fifteen on *The Orbita* only three months later, and then forty-nine more in 1949” (Mama 1995, 93-4). Following the Windrush emigration, women began to participate in struggles to find a place where ‘no coloureds’ signs were hanged in British doors, and hostile gazes hovered around labour force. Although post-war Britain relied on black labour to reform itself from destructions and poverty, it concurrently offered poor accommodations and hostility to immigrants, who were just willing to help the Mother. The poor accommodation and hostility led black women to ask themselves who they were and where they belonged. Since they just left their home to come to their ‘ideal’ home and saw that Britain did not desire them, they tried to renegotiate their place and identity in England.

When I tackled the assumptions about black people during slavery and the colonial era, I emphasised the dominant white population’s attempts to control and devoice the minority. When the victimised subject was piqued, questioned, and

analysed, its voice was ignored beside his/her personal experiences. The same condition persists when the conversation turns to black women. As a matter of fact, a black woman is dually victimised, for oppression towards her is both raced and gendered. As Anna Cooper spoke in the World Congress of Representative Women in 1893, “(t)he white woman could at least plead for her own emancipation; the black women doubly enslaved, could but suffer and struggle and be silent” (hooks 1999, 27). Therefore, the distinction between national Englishness and ‘coloured people’ becomes clearer, and the question of who becomes entitled to belong in Britain becomes more problematic for black women.

The victimisation of women becomes a significant subject matter in colonial discourse because this condition shapes black women’s identities. In her research of analysing the construction of black womanhood, Amina Mama draws attention to the construction of subjectivity as a dynamic process that is influenced by migrants’ experiences both at home and host nation. This influence, in turn, affects individuals’ social lives. As much as Anna Cooper identified black women’s oppression as doubly conducted, she was fortunately wrong about this oppression’s consequences in terms of silencing women. Although racism and misogyny can have pathological effects on individuals’ lives, Mama discusses that these discourses are not omnipresent in black women’s experiences, “acting on passive victims” (Mama 1995, 111-2). These experiences enable black women to have resilience against the racialised and gendered subjugations.

Since the subjectivity’s (re)constitution is a dynamic process, it offers alternatives in which individuals can show “resilience and are so able to *survive* existentially difficult or oppressive situations” (111; emphasis added). As my emphasis implies, women strive to survive in Britain, where Englishness is connected to ethnicity. They face coldness, alienation, inferiorisation, and disappointment. Mama calls racist, misogynistic, and bigoted attitudes of the white society as “contradictory experiences” which “black individuals respond to in the process of constructing themselves as subjects” (Mama 1995, 111-2). In the conversation created by the aforementioned

scholars on differences, hybridity, and postcolonial subjectivities, black women carve out their experiences to reveal the truth. Their creative responses involve the reconfiguration of the self, which is not imposed by the racist colonial hostility but shaped by their individual attempts to uncover the history that previously excluded them. These ‘contradictory experiences’ and creative responses align with the aforementioned scholars’ theories. The encounter with hostile attitudes in the host city, with the invisibility of their stories within history, leads black women to renegotiate their identities, while simultaneously changing the transnational borders of the city, eventually leading a cultural constitution of hybridity. One of these women, who narrated her story of migration and estrangement coming with the dislocation, was Beryl Gilroy. Born in Guyana (then British Guiana), she migrated to London as an aspiring teacher in 1951 and was “one of Britain's most significant post-war Caribbean migrants” (Fraser 2001). After her encounters with an inability to find a job as a teacher, poor accommodation and low-paid job opportunities, Gilroy wanted to tell her story to “set the record straight. There had been Ted Braithwaite’s *To Sir with Love* [1959] and Don Hinds’ *Journey to an Illusion* [1966] but the woman’s experiences had never been stated” (Anim-Addo 1998, 9). Similarly, Andrea Levy began to write after her father’s death. He and his twin travelled to London with the *SS Windrush Empire*. Levy stated that she “wanted to make him visible, record something of his life” (Fischer 2005, 362, as cited in Fernández 2010, 5) and her mother’s struggles. She created *Small Island*’s migrant protagonist, Hortense, getting inspired by her mother and also wrote a collection short stories, *Six Stories and an Essay*, gleaned from her mother’s experiences as an aspiring female migrant. Some of the other postcolonial female writers who narrate women’s experiences during and aftermath of the migration to Britain are Jean Rhys, Erna Brodber, Grace Nichols, Joan Riley, Bernardine Evaristo, Zadie Smith, and Monica Ali. These accounts unveil the reality from black women’s perspectives in the celebration of differences. They deconstruct the colonial discourse, redrawing the borders of London which were established upon the oppressive imperial history. They give voices to silenced female protagonists and help them create their own space in London out of raced and gendered oppression. As John Ball, drawing on Michel de Certeau, writes, “each pedestrian enunciates and writes the city in the image

of his or her own story – transgressing borders, reinscribing spaces, and resisting hegemonies through the individual choices of a unique itinerary” (Ball 2004, 115). For these reasons, while analysing the multicultural facets of London and its evolving progress, these narratives become both testimonials and sites of resilience wherein black women renegotiate their places and identities against the racist colonial discourse.

In the previous chapter, I analysed that (post)colonial relations between white and black Britons have changed the meaning of ‘blackness’ and the ways individuals appropriate the term as a mask of identity. Stuart Hall explains that black people were not aware of their blackness until they arrived in Britain and saw their reflection in the colonisers’ eyes (Hall 1997, 53). “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” the saying goes, meaning that the perception of beauty is subjective and exists only if the beholder looks at the object lovingly. The same situation presents itself and makes the ‘blackness’ a political term. Drawing on Frantz Fanon’s depiction of the encounter between a black man and white Parisian child, who exclaims that “Look, Mama, a black man” (48), Hall asserts that ‘blackness,’ with the oppressive imperialism, has gained a political meaning apart from being a mere pigmentation.

The term ‘blackness’ has become more problematic in women’s cases. Because of the mutual oppression of imperialism and patriarchy, “double colonization” (a term coined by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford) occurs in women’s experiences, rendering women invisible. Both forces “act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects” (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 66). This double oppression asserts itself through the realm of language that also renders the Other and creates a sense of dislocation in black British women’s experiences because they are denied the experience of being both black and British in colonial discourse. Heidi Mirza summarises the sense of displacement accordingly:

To be black and British is to be unnamed in official discourse. The construction of a national British identity is built upon a notion of a racial belonging, upon a hegemonic white ethnicity that never speaks its presence. We are told that you can be either one or the other, black or British, but not both (Mirza 1997, 3).

Like postcolonial theorists' attempts to cleanse languages from binary oppositions that created the 'Other,' women have tried to deconstruct the logocentric language for the sake of renaming themselves. Drawing from Christie Farnham, bell hooks, and Deborah Gray White, Heidi Mirza asserts that stereotypical definitions have tried to represent black women in negative terms: "'Sapphire', the overbearing, domineering matriarch; 'Aunt Jemima', the homely, loyal mammy; '*Jezebel*', the erotic, sensual temptress" (145). By subverting patriarchal and imperial language imposed on their subjectivity, black women have begun to articulate more authentic forms of discourses vis-à-vis the systematical oppression of dominant narratives and reclaimed their identities as black British women.

As a consequence, many female writers from the Caribbean and African heritages have embraced 'blackness' and 'womanhood' as political entitlements in which they have (re)created themselves as a way of resilience against political oppression. Black British women's narratives have become a place where they, out of racialised and gendered oppression, rewrite their "presence in a world where black women have for so long been denied the privilege to speak; to have a 'valid' identity of [their] own, space to 'name' [themselves]" (4). These writers have gained new facets to (re)define identities as 'black British women' and experimented with new narrative forms, themes and genres. In doing so, women writers of the post-Windrush generation new millennium have put women in literary conversations, which was unthinkable in Beryl Gilroy's times. Women writers, reclaiming the terms of 'blackness' and 'womanhood,' have self-consciously created self spaces to protect themselves from alienation and assimilation. As Heidi Mirza states, writers from "different languages, religions, cultures and classes consciously constructed a political identity shaped by the shared experience of racialization and its consequences" (3). Therefore, black women have sought ways to question who they are and where they belong, resisting the political system that subjugates them. This act of resilience and self-constitution has been defined as "literary self-determination" by Pallavi Rastogi (Rastogi 2016, 77). She discusses that this way of narrative to find one's self "forms a matrilineal alternative to

the ‘malestream’, and restores women’s creativities and perspectives to contemporary British literature and its post-war history” (77). Beverley Bryan explains that history has invaded the mainstream narrative by talking about the stories of the powerful, dominant, and oppressive group, which is attributed to white men for centuries, and hence distorted reality “for fear of revealing the extent to which [black] labour is bound up with this country’s rise to power and glory” (Bryan 2018, 15). Therefore, documenting the reality has become obligatory for the marginalised black women to set the record straight. And black British women’s writing has opened windows to ‘*herstory*.’

The heritage of post-war British history and literature within women’s experiences has been constituted primarily by Attia Hosain, Beryl Gilroy, and Buchi Emecheta, who are followed by the next generation with Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo, Monica Ali, and Zadie Smith. The thematic concerns of these writers are to give a voice to the marginal, to dismantle the patriarchal and imperial power, to struggle between two diverse cultures, to question the meaning of ‘Englishness,’ and to rewrite their identities in newly and safely constructed spaces that anchor them in their “roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993, 133) for ethnical preservation and reconstructions of multicultural identities. They prove that the intertwined factors of the politics of sex, race, and class are poignant in postcolonial women’s lives. They have not only written experiences of women, who were being confined to the periphery but also traced the multicultural map of Britain. They have written alternatives to multiculturalism that can survive in Britain and turned British literature into a hybrid realm.

The later generation of women writers has faced different problems in British society than their (grand)parents. These writers have encountered questions of ‘but, where are you from?’ or ‘Will you go back home?’ although they see themselves ‘English’ and consider British borders their ‘home’ for being born in England. The questions of race, religion, ideology, and gender have been attempted to be analysed in their (non)fictional works. They have taken the oppressive political term of ‘black woman’ and questioned it in their narratives while trying to reappropriate the term and to find their rightful place.

Therefore, it is my concern to analyse the ways black women claim their identities in multicultural London, the capital of the empire. I drop my anchor to postcolonial literature because postcolonial female writers present us women's stories, which narrate the immigration process to London and the sense of dislocation coming with this movement. Black British writing about women's experiences, thus, become an illuminative way to analyse women's struggles during and after the Windrush emigration and how they renegotiate their space in London.

Analysing Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Zadie Smith's *NW*, this dissertation observes the (re)constitutions of female identities in postcolonial London. *Small Island* provides readers with an account of hostile London in the aftermath of the Windrush emigration, whereas *NW* engages in postmillennial London, which is more welcoming towards multiple cultural societies. The phenomenons of migration and skin colour become pivotal experiences, threatening women's selfhood in both novels. While *Small Island's* female protagonists go through painful identity (re)constructions due to post-war London's political and social reality, *NW's* women seem to self-fashion their identities, which are also affected by the discursive power of racism and misogyny of the twenty-first century London.

I contextualise Levy's fictional identity (re)constitutions alongside Stuart Hall's criticism of cultural identity while tackling Smith's subjects through Judith Butler's gender performativity. Moreover, this thesis will observe London in the terminology of Mary Louise Pratt as the contact zone where women reinscribe their identities and, in turn, redefine the city of London. I will conclude that by incorporating the marginal and unfamiliar voices with the dominant and familiar ones, these novels contest white-hegemonic discourse and offer alternative scenarios for the coexistence of diversity. This study will demonstrate that both of these postcolonial texts propose female solidarity – whether it is through motherhood or friendship – for a more mutable and hybrid London.

3. Literary Representations of London

The representation of London has occupied a large space in English literary works and academic studies engaged with the issue of spatiality. London has been a site of historical, political, social, and literary phenomena for centuries. Virginia Woolf ambitiously narrates the streets of London as if making the city “a protagonist, personified and dramatised in its own right” (Arana and Lauri 2004, 33). As London is shaped by physical constructions and its inhabitants, the metropolis, in turn, mutually changes those who walk in it. And, not only London and the self are mutually and physically (re)constructed, but also an imaginative portrayal of London emerges through the voices of marginalised, affected by social events, in the city. This representation resists the notion of simple, statistically mapped, homogenous, and heteronormative London.

This homogenous London excluded the marginalised voices in the British canon. Women’s inclusion in the literary representation of London was not until the nascence of women’s writing. Although women occupied the equal – sometimes more – parts of the city alongside men, the rigorous Victorian ideology confined women into domestic spheres and excluded them from the literary narratives of London. Despite London’s dominant black population, as analysed in the previous chapters, black experiences were absent in the discourse of the metropolis. Black women, unfortunately constituting the highest and most violent section of the marginalisation ladder, were not given rights to situate themselves in fictional London. The respective exclusion of white women, black men, and black women in London’s narratives “is linked not only to fantasies of return to the imaginary homogeneity of past whiteness and the restoration of Britain’s imperial status, it is marked by the lingering suggestion that ‘race’, like the black bodies that are its primary bearers and signifiers, belongs elsewhere” (Gilroy 2003, 1). Paul Gilroy, in his analysis of London, points out important aspects. Firstly, the idea of homogenous London is imaginary as we have seen the historical records proving London’s becoming a heterogeneous place. Secondly, the absence of minorities in literary narratives of London strengthens Britain’s situation as the imperial oppressor. Thirdly, asserting that the politics of race are not connected to the metropolis would be imaginative, and in any

possible way, not a true claim. As Stuart Hall explains, “[w]ritten out of the story – forgotten, disavowed, misrecognized – where the prolonged historical entanglements between the Caribbean and Britain. Britons needed to be reminded of this inconvenient fact” (Hall 2017, 55).

To distance ourselves from the homogenous London and to embrace its multiculturalism, Gilroy proposes that we have to develop ways of analysis anew to observe “the colonial character of this city” (Gilroy 2003, 4), not through binary glasses. Moreover, we have to narrate the untold histories of the city, which have been experienced by the culturally, ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse inhabitants. In other words, postcolonial subjects should be represented not as the population bringing the “colour problem” (Webster 1998, 28) to a city, wherein they are denied a right to occupy, but as the rightful inhabitants, contesting the imperial and sexist oppression surrounding their lives. Paul Gilroy, concluding his essay on London, states that to have “a cosmopolitan city in which identity is allowed to be complex [...] we can begin to inquire into the possibility of moving beyond and beneath the old colonial drama into more forward-looking and assertive stance” (Gilroy 2003, 12).

To Gilroy’s arguments, postcolonial women’s narratives are likely to offer alternatives, by both setting the records straight like Andrea Levy and presenting London’s multi-layered facets that celebrate hybrid selves like Zadie Smith. In both writers’ novels, there is a concurrence between the previously periphery’s gaining a voice and the reconfigurations of the transnational London.

1.1. Andrea Levy's London

When Hortense, the black female protagonist of *Small Island*, arrives in the mother country with aspirations and belief that she is destined to be in England, she describes immigrants coming with her on board: "All walking off into this cold black night through an archway that looked like an open mouth. [...] But it would not have been possible to find anything that small in the fading light" (Levy 2004, 16). In her first description of London with a gloomy night and open mouth as if the city is waiting to swallow newly-arrived migrants, Levy implies that Hortense's struggles to find a place within both physical and metaphorical borders of the city will escalate through the novel until she comes to realise that England "is a very cold country" (466).

The disillusion of immigrants or children of Jamaican parents regarding London is a thematic concern in Andrea Levy's novels. In each story, the characters strive to find their rightful place as British citizens within physical boundaries and to make sense of the problematic sides of multicultural London. The attempts to reappropriate places, in turn, build each protagonist's subjectivities. Levy explores London as the "contact zone" (Pratt 1991, 7) to explore black identities and the meaning of 'Englishness.'

Susan Alica Fischer, in her analysis of "Andrea Levy's London Novels," observes that young female protagonists of *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) "go through a process of recognising the many ways that they are marginalised and then begin to redefine themselves and their relation to their space" (Fischer 2004, 199). The marginalisation and sense of unbelonging are evoked in the narratives of Angela, Vivien, Olive, and Faith. In every public sphere of London, they are estranged because of the bigoted British society's unacceptability of their selfhood both as black and British. Therefore, London becomes "a threatening space for the black subject to inhabit" (200).

In *Small Island*, London becomes a space "in which identity is allowed to be complex," as Gilroy discusses. The redrawing of the city occurs in four perspectives: a) London as the imperial capital, b) London as destructed by World War II, c) cold

London of immigrants, and d) bigoted London of natives with a hopeful possibility for multiculturalism. In each representation, the metropolis and the self are reappropriated by social phenomena, embracing the complexity of life as postcolonialism suggests.

It is no coincidence that the novel starts with the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley in 1924 and 1925 for Britain's hope to strengthen the bond within the Empire due to the challenging power struggles with some colonies. The Exhibition is a representation of miniaturising, hence colonising the British colonies: "The Empire in little. [...] every country we British owned. [...] Practically the whole world there to be looked at" (Levy 2004, 3). Queenie's sense of superiority as a native British is seen in her assumption that the whole world is over there. By stepping into the African pavilion, she thinks she has visited the whole continent of Africa. Her mindset represents the oppressive colonialism that entitles itself as the 'whole world' while considering the colonies as the subaltern. Therefore, visiting the Exhibition becomes a process of colonising the land to exploit its sources. Irene Pérez-Fernández comments on this chapter that the colonies "are displayed as 'objects' for the British population to look at and the different populations that are members of the Empire are viewed with ambivalence" (Fernández 2010, 9). The objectification of the colonies occurs in the ambivalent space of London. While the pavilion and African man represent Africa as the continent, London and Queenie, whose name also evokes Queen Victoria, represent Britain. London is an ambivalent space because, as Bhabha theorizes, ambivalence occurs through both repulsion and attraction and it "disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between colonizer and colonized (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 10) and ambivalent subjects 'mimic' the colonizer, "which is never far from mockery" (10). In the Exhibition, Queenie's senses about the African man is both attractive and repulsive: a "black man who looked to be carved from melting chocolate" but also a "monkey man sweating a smell of mothballs" (Levy, 2004, 6). This disrupted relationship between the coloniser and colonised symbolises the newly-emerged multiculturalism that will take more time to be shaped. And, London remaps the territories within the empire.

Secondly, London is portrayed as an unsafe, war-stricken place. When Queenie depicts the bomb scene, she says the bomb “just left the shell, an empty head in the middle of a terrace” (274). Moreover, wounded people are called “population” with their “[b]lackened, sooty faces, red-rimmed, sunken eyes with white [...] like they’d stumbled on to another planet” (278). War-stricken London is far from being a stable and safe place that welcomed the technological advancements of the eighteenth-century. London is rather, as Levy symbolises through Queenie’s portrayal, “[g]lass sprinkled down from [its streets] as constant as a Christmas tree shedding its leaves” (306).

Thirdly, London becomes a disillusioned space for immigrants who arrive in the mother country with aspirations. Gilbert, after fighting for Britain in World War II and returning to London with SS *Windrush*, soon becomes disappointed with Britain’s reluctance to welcome him as her ‘child.’ He cannot get a job because his employer fears “what if [Gilbert] accidentally found [himself] talking to a white woman” (312), he is bullied and denied help for being a “darkie” (317), and even rejected a seat in a cinema (184). Similarly, Hortense also gets disillusioned “after a sharp slap from the Mother Country’s hand” (458). In public spaces, nobody understands her language despite her speaking “English properly as the high-class” (449), and her qualifications for teaching are rejected (455). And, when she accidentally steps into the dark cupboard with “a mop and a broom” (455), the scene becomes metaphorical as if demonstrating the only professional place that London can offer her to occupy is a cupboard. It leads her to confusion and struggles to find her way in London’s streets after leaving the school (456). She and Gilbert, then, begin to deterritorialise London with their visit to the city on the bus. Eventually, London symbolically becomes a “cold country” (466) that offers no places to immigrants.

Lastly, Levy’s London is reflected through natives’ perspectives. Symbolising the bigoted mindset imagining homogenous Britain, Bernard and Mr. Todd try to establish their superiority as the owners of the house, neighbourhood, and country through spatial spheres of London. When immigrants move to Queenie and Bernard’s house in Nevern Street, Mr. Todd thinks that the neighbourhood loses its respectability (112). Similarly,

after his return, Bernard wants to evict the black tenants to re-bring Britain's place as the coloniser power though Queenie is the landlady. He rigorously wants to redraw the city/nation's borders within the hegemonic oppression: "Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people. [...] I've nothing against them in their place. But their place isn't here" (469). Bernard's entitlement of 'Englishness' merely for white Britons clashes with how English Hortense and Gilbert are raised and know about English culture, history, geography, and manners as much as – often more than – white Britons while the mother country does not know them (141-2). Furthermore, as Kim Evelyn discusses, Bernard simply connects the 'house' with the 'nation' "by drawing upon the often repeated domestic metaphor of the nation as a house" (Evelyn 2013, 145) where only whites can coexist and by resisting the complex structure of multiculturalism: "I fought a war to protect home and hearth. Not to be invaded by stealth" (Levy 2004, 470). Yet, after Arthur's death, which symbolises the meaningless sense of being at war with black Britons, Gilbert rightfully asks: "but come, tell me, someone ... which war?" (193).

In conclusion, London emerges as a contested space where Hortense and Gilbert's desire to build a concept of home clashes with Bernard's wish to evict them from Britain. They attempt to renegotiate their space and identity by reterritorialising the borders.

1.2. Zadie Smith's London

London emerges as a space for renegotiating multicultural identities in Zadie Smith. In her debut novel celebrated for its aesthetic representation of multicultural London, *White Teeth*, the metropolis, as much as it welcomes religious and ethnic diversities, is problematised in the sense of assimilating the Other and causing identity confusions. The city and country represent corruption for Samad: "I have been corrupted by England" (Smith 2000, 449) and leads him to separate his children. However, at the end of the novel, Iris's hybrid child suggests an alternative map of multicultural London, "making the city accommodating for all, not just a select and officious few, while looking ahead positively and demanding further changes" (McLeod 2004, 188).

The setting of Smith to describe the multicultural corner is North West London, where she grew up and turns to tackle in more details in her novel, *NW*. Molly Slavin observes that "the postcolonial northwest of London is not the London of Boswell, Johnson, Dickens, or Woolf" (Slavin 2015, 98). In fact, "the change in demographics from West Hampstead to Kilburn, in a space of just over a mile, was too obvious not to remark upon" (98). Northwest London is seen as the peripheral part of London, not like Westminster with Big Ben and Trafalgar Square, and neither does the northwestern area represent London as the gorgeous metropolis. By choosing the periphery of London and multiple voices embedded in the narrative, Smith attempts to portray the postmillennial London with "stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab [...] Polish paper, Turkish paper, Arabic, Irish, French, Russian, Spanish" (Smith 2000, 39), symbolising the multicultural settlers of the North West London and the cultural diversity brought with themselves. And, rather than a city having a centre around which the articulation of spatiality occurs, London is "a decentred centre" (Ball 2004, 13) in *NW*, which represents the fragmentation of postmillennial London.

Smith analyses the fragmentation of postcolonial selves through the damaged parts of London. Shen Leah sees Shar on the corner of her street, 37 Ridley Avenue, she depicts Shar as a "[w]oman in a war zone standing in the rubble of her home" (Smith

2012, 5). Furthermore, the chapters in “Guest” section, where Felix’s story is narrated, “are titled with the abbreviations for London’s postal codes, signifiers of class and racial locations” (Fischer 2013, 25). By deconstructing the centre of London with the articulation of each character’s experiences, Smith redraws the metropolis’s map.

In *NW*, Smith describes the geographic title and setting in a complex way intertwined with politics of identity, class, and postmillennial anxiety. Anakana Schofield comments that *NW* “verges on a psychological ordnance survey map of Willesden and its surroundings” (Schofield, 2012). *NW* has embedded with so many urban features of London that James Wood calls the novel “more intensely English novel than *White Teeth*” with “the imagined, lived, tragic-comic, polyphonic reality of London – its speech, accents, dusty pavements, whining buses, gloomy offices (‘boxy cramped Victorian damp’), wet parks, scandalous disparities (this is as much a book about class as about race), grim housing estates” (Wood, 2012). With the cognitive map of London, Smith presents cartography of North West London, wherein her characters walk and reinscribe their identities. Furthermore, Heather Childress Custer reads *NW*’s characters as forming the four corners of a compass: Felix-East, Nathan-South, Natalie-North, and Leah-West (Custer 2014, 11-12). By walking in the metropolis according to their own directions, these characters transform London into a “physical fact locally lived [...] as a cluster of global-scale associations mentally processes, imaginatively inhabited, metaphorically and metonymically translated into text and narrative” (Ball 2004, 18). The heterogeneous mixture of London in the twenty-first century, thus, is portrayed and recognised through topographical images. Smith’s representation of the metropolis with directions of Google Map, postcodes, and drawing of North West London’s cartography signals the disrupted and discontinuous borders of the city. London is lived not only as a physical landscape but “also a set of representations constituted through the spatial and temporal orderings of narrative” (19).

4. The Windrush Generation: Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

4.1. Andrea Levy

Andrea Levy was born in London, 1956 as the daughter of two Caribbean migrants. Her father arrived in Britain with the Empire Windrush and her mother followed him later that year on a banana boat. Andrea Levy is one of the postcolonial writers who narrated her experiences regarding to immigration, belonging, and alienation. In her novels, she tackles identity struggles that migrants often experience in England alongside with racism, slavery, multiculturalism, hybridity, and cultural conflicts. She analyses the process of identity (re)construction for migrants. As she states in her essay, "This is my England" written for *The Guardian*:

Identity! Sometimes it makes my head hurt – sometimes my heart. So what am I? Where do I fit into Britain, 2000 and beyond? (Levy 2000).

This question reveals itself in all her narratives in which her characters try to (re)negotiate their Caribbean-British heritages since Andrea Levy's writing process began when her father died in 1987 and she enrolled in writing classes. She "wanted to make him visible, record something of his life" (Fischer 2005, 362, as cited in Fernández 2010, 5) and her family's experiences as migrants in Britain. Levy thought that his father "was making a history at the time" (Levy 2000) when she stepped out of the *Windrush*. He left his country, house, family, and his new bride for a better life in England. As mentioned in the introduction, Jamaicans came to England with the aspiration that the Mother Country expected to embrace them as British citizens:

Britain was the country that all Jamaican children learned about at school. They sang God Save The King and Rule Britannia. They believed Britain was a green and pleasant land - if not the centre of the world, then certainly the centre of a great and important Empire that spanned the globe, linking all sorts of countries into a family of nations (Levy 2000).

The question of Englishness and who was entitled to the term confused Andrea Levy's identities during her childhood in England. In her school days, a girl was

transferred to Levy's class from America, being the popular girl and attracting each white British pupil who wanted to be her friends. "Everyone wanted to know about her," (Greer 2004) Levy says in her interview, "Empire's child," with Bonnie Greer. Andrea was also a pupil from a different background although she "was educated to be English" (Levy 2000) but her classmates never desire to become friends with her, which made her to feel embarrassed as her parents were not English. To her classmates, Jamaica "was just a place full of inferior black people. [...] They didn't want to know about the sun, the sugar cane, the rum punch" (Levy 2000). Her friends' reluctance to know Andrea Levy and her culture otherised her in English society with a sense of displacement. She writes that "I want to belong to anywhere but this place where I am made to feel like an outsider – not welcome, definitely not welcome at all" (Levy 2000).

As her anecdotes show, Andrea Levy went through phrases in which she questioned who she was, where she belonged, and who wanted her. Her parents' migration stories, their encounters with marginalisation, and Levy's "in-between" (Bhabha 1994, 2) situation in London gave her materials with which Levy tackled and formed literary works which would make their place to postcolonial literature. *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), which is a semi-autobiographical novel, talks about the story of a Jamaican immigrant family in north London in 1960s, and the youngest girl, just like Andrea herself, tells their story. Emphasising the institutionalised racism, migrants' considering themselves as second citizens, class distinctions, and the lack of opportunities, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* presents the aftermath of WWII and the Windrush emigration.

Set during 1970s, *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996) follows the story of two sisters, Olive and Vivien, born to Jamaican migrant parents and grew up in a council estate. The book's cover has two hands holding each other, one of which has a lighter skin, and the colour problem becomes an important issue in these sisters' identity struggles. Both sisters have a different frame of England, and their experiences evolve around these schemes while they try to negotiate their Jamaican-British background and the displacement that is resulted from this duality.

When she was younger, Andrea Levy went to Jamaica to visit her family and discovered that she had a “jewel” (Levy 2000) in that island. She, then, began to research their genealogy and talked to her mum about their family background. These bits and pieces of her collection shaped her next novel, *Fruit Of The Lemon* (1999). Faith Jackson, a young black British woman, visits Jamaica after encountering racial hostility in Britain. She gains her identity as a Jamaican and a sense of awakening follows her that comes from her family heritage. She analyses the complexity of identity since all individuals come from mixed familial relationships. With her novels, she highlights the hybridity of England as she states in “This is my England”:

Any history book will show that England has never been an exclusive club, but rather a hybrid nation. The effects of the British Empire were personal as well as political. And as the sun has finally set on the Empire, we are now having to face up to all of these realities (Levy 2000).

Levy’s fourth and most notable novel, *Small Island* (2004), tells the story of a Windrush migrant couple (Hortense and Gilbert Joseph) and a native British couple (Queenie and Bernard Bligh) before and during the emigration to the Mother Country. With this novel, Levy won three prizes, including Orange Prize for Fiction, Whitbread Book of the Year, and Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Andrea Levy, with *Small Island*, gives voices to each character. With her multiple narrative techniques, she deconstructs the sense of homogenous Britain. The novel presents historical facts of World War II and its aftermath, and depicts the Jamaican migrants’ survival stories in London as they stay in a lodging house owned by a white British woman. The novel moves back and forth between 1924 and 1948, focusing on racism, discrimination, alienation, national identity, and cultural hybridity. Since all four protagonists experience the changing social dynamics of London wherein they (re)constitute their identities, this novel becomes an epitome of postcolonial British literature.

Andrea Levy did much research for *Small Island* because she wanted to be political as well as personal. In the interview with Bonnie Greer, Levy explains that she

formed the plot of *Small Island* while having conversations with her Jamaican mother and native Briton mother-in-law: “[...] 1948 is personal. That's when my dad came over. I had been talking to my mother about her recollections, and to my husband's mother about the mining communities up north. Then I started to wonder what it would be like if those two met” (Greer 2004).

Using other bits of her research for her next novel, *The Long Song* (2010), Levy tackles the brutal and horrific side of slavery and its effect on human psychology. July, who is taken from her mother by a white British woman to become a maiden and she narrates the stories of slavery, racism, alienation, rape, injustice, and inequality that she has gone through. This books, like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, becomes an epitome for the legacy of slavery.

4.2. *Small Island* – Recounting Immigration Experiences and Black Identity Reconstitution in Multicultural London

As seen in the introduction part of this thesis, London has gone through a social transformation and gained a facet that continues to change the dynamics of the British society and its citizens since mass immigrants from the West Indies on the SS *Ormonde*, *Almanzora*, and most influentially *Empire Windrush*. The emigration of West Indians to Great Britain during the 1950s and 1960s for better life standards have changed not only the worlds of the aspiring migrants, but also the structures of the host nation. This influx of immigration, consequently, has shaped the contemporary Britain and postcolonial literature. Postcolonial studies are interested in the identity formation in with its fragmentations and reconstitutions, in which the dynamics of multicultural Britain has been a significant subject matter. There has been an absence of women's experiences in postcolonial literature owing to challenges that stem from gender, class, and racial biases. In her novel *Small Island*, Andrea Levy presents the readers with two female characters: Hortense as a Jamaican immigrant and Queenie as a native Briton. In doing so, Levy brings different voices to the conversation to draw attention to the complexity of postcolonial London and to the fact that conviviality cannot be achieved without listening to each voice. As Bhabha says, Levy tackles the "complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 1994, 2). With Hortense, Levy's novel emphasises the hybridity of London and her black British protagonist who transcends social definitions that imperialism has imposed on her. Consequently, Hortense reinscribes her identity as a black British woman in the peaceful conviviality while she also reterritorialises the material setting in which she finds herself as an colonised subject.

In postcolonial female protagonists' narratives, London has often found its [place](#) as a place of alienation, displacement, confinement, and destruction. The consequent disillusionment has changed the ways of identity (re)construction of women who belong to the periphery. In the discourse that analyses the ways to (re)construct the minority psyche, the notions of 'identity' and 'self' are used by several theorists and academics. Amina Mama uses the term 'subjectivity' instead of 'identity' and 'self' and remarkably

distinguishes between “the dualistic notion of psychological and social spheres as essentially separate territories: one internal and one external to the person” (Mama 1995, 1). Since both psychological and social spheres are dynamic concepts that change constantly depending on their social and historical conditions in a mutual interaction, it is significant in colonial discourse to see subjectivity always in progress. Chris Weedon comments that humanist discourses that were born during the Enlightenment regard the concept of individual as “unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she *is*” (Weedon 1987, 32). On the other hand, “poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (33).

Not only does This decentralisation of the subject not only enables subjectivity to evolve through time and space, but it also encourages us to resist stereotypical and dualistic discourses in which individuals constitute themselves and simultaneously rewrite alternatives, taking account of their personal narratives. Therefore, the construction of black women’s subjectivities in Britain should be viewed in the context of constantly changing subjectivity. As Mama frames, ours “is a world in which no context is as fixed or static as is assumed by the manichean and dualistic colonial frameworks that counterpoise West and non-West” (Mama 1995, 13).

This concept offers a substantial change to nations that inscribe their nationality to a premised and fixed race or ethnicity. The departure from the monolithic notion of White supremacy, or in other words, the shift “between roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993, 133) as a both physical and metaphorical journey, passes through “a much more fluid and contradictory definition of nations as a multiplicity of diasporic identities” (Mishra 1995, 7). The Jamaican immigrant Hortense’s subjectivity evolves through the metropolis’s hostile attitudes towards her. As her subjectivity is decentralised, she rewrites London’s borders through her personal experiences; therefore, her identity (re)formations will be analysed in the context of constantly changing subjectivity.

4.2.1. 'You bring me all this way for just this?'

Hortense emerges as the daughter of the empire in the novel. Everything she learns, values, and teaches, is connected to the British colonial system; however, this system alienates her from her Jamaican culture. She not only despises everything related to Jamaica such as black skin colour and Jamaican Creole but she also associates ignorance and uncivilisation with Jamaica. Owing to her education and teaching training, she sees herself as a superior British subject who has the qualification to live and teach in England. She makes England her destiny and dreamy place where she will be welcomed. However, when she encounters the racist, hostile, and cold atmosphere of London during the aftermath of WWII, she gets disillusioned with the idea of England, which is symbolised in her repetitive question: "Just this?" (Levy 2004, 21). The idea of the glorious London clashes so sharply with the real reflection of the city that she cannot believe she has come "all this way just for this" (21). The hostile encounters Hortense faces in the streets of London becomes what Mama calls "contradictory experiences" which "black individuals respond to in the process of constructing themselves as subjects" (Mama 1995, 111-2). Therefore, London's hostility shatters the idea of her British/higher self and forces Hortense to reconstruct herself as a black woman and reconcile with her roots. Furthermore, Hortense recovers her cultural values to which she has been estranged due to her colonial education. The reconciliation and recovery occur through rebuilding the bond with her mother(land), and Hortense reinscribes her identity as a black British woman in the metropolis which "emerges as an uneasy contact zone of exchange, segregation, and intermixture" (Pratt 1991, 7). Since Hortense's reconciliation with her roots emerges through a reconnection with her mother, Hortense's self-constitution becomes an act of resilience against political oppression and "forms a matrilineal alternative to the 'malestream', and restores women's creativities and perspectives to contemporary British literature and its post-war history" (Rastogi 2016, 77). At the end, Hortense rewrites her subjectivity as a black British woman who takes her anchor from both "roots and routes" (Gilroy 1993, 133) and presents a complex epitome of multicultural female identity. This part will analyse her colonial education that shapes Hortense's first identity phase, the 'contradictory experiences' that fragment her subjectivity, and her acts of resilience

against this fragmentation. Hortense resists the oppression through building a house, changing her language, and remembering her mother. At the end, she takes off the impositions of the imperial London from her identity and reinvents her values.

Small Island is a *Bildungsroman* of a postcolonial female subject that builds her identity out of social discourses. Hortense pivots the idea of good education, refinement, and superiority around her hegemonic colonial education. Her education shapes the first phase of her identity formation and leads her to alienation from her culture. As a colonised subject of Britain, Hortense gets education in most prestigious schools, she can recite “all the books of the Bible in the perfect English diction spoken by the King” (Levy 2004, 62), the Christmas carol ‘While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night’ (43), the Christian hymn ‘Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise’ (64), “Lord Tennyson’s ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’” (67), and Henry V’s speech (67). In her knowledge of English literature, history, culture, and language, she is an “astute” (67) “star pupil” (44). Furthermore, Hortense learns English with native speakers like Mr and Mrs Ryder and Miss Morgan. Her private school run by Mr and Mrs Ryder represents the spatial and institutional of colonialism in Jamaica. The school accepts “only the wealthiest, fairest and highest-class children from the district” (44) although Mrs Ryder says “these poor negro children” (44) have only education. They choose students according to their social status and skin colours and internalise Jamaican children with English values, teaching them that the entitlement of Englishness is attributed to their skin tones. In this way, Mr and Mrs Ryder represent the imperial, racial, and capitalist oppression of the Empire.

As we have seen, Hortense grows as a student internalised with the imperial culture and history. This wide knowledge of English and Christian doctrines are infected in Hortense’s mind from young ages and distance her from Jamaican culture. She always disdains Jamaica, its culture, and people. She neither learns nor grows interest in her own culture, which consequently makes Hortense have a colonial mindset and implement her teaching on the colonised. Levy exemplifies Hortense’s colonial enforcement through a parody of colonial education with Miss Jewel.

In the colonial era, Britain used the language to assimilate its colonies, convincing them that speaking English is a more refined facet of civilisation. Since Hortense considers the English language as a demonstration of refinement and superiority (450), she represents the colonial internalisation of civilised Englishness as the daughter of the Empire. On the other hand, Miss Jewel represents the cultural authenticity of Jamaica that imperialism attempts to exploit through assimilation. As a country woman, she has probably learned English by picking up certain words, and her language has become what linguists call ‘Jamaican Creole,’ which is a hybrid language developing from the combination of different languages and constructing its own systematic grammar and vocabularies. It firstly shows how Britain has insisted on the use of its language in colonies and disrupted their national heritage. Secondly, Miss Jewel’s dialect symbolises the other part of the students that Mr and Mrs Ryder refuse to educate. When she wants to sing the Christian carol, “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night,” she mispronounces words: “Mr Roberts wash him sock at night. And sidung pon de ground” (43). Hortense corrects Miss Jewel by condemning the “rough country way” (43) of her English. In order to teach English, “properly as the King of England” (43) speaks, to Miss Jewel, Hortense begins to recite William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”. In this part, as a representative of imperial education that aims for assimilation, Hortense teaches literature to impose the language on a native person. She despises her native language and thinks that English literature is an antidote to leave Jamaican roots behind. However, a mistaken belief lies behind this act of teaching. Hortense does not realise that teaching Miss Jewel a figurative speech of language will not help her speak English. It will be merely a recitation, and this awareness will find its way through Hortense when she struggles with understanding the idiomatic English. Moreover, although Miss Jewel learns each word and how conceited Hortense stands in her recitation through imitation, she offers her version of the poem by combining the refined English with Jamaican dialect: “Ah walk under a cloud and den me float over de ill. An’ me see Miss Hortense a look pon de daffodil dem” (44). Consequently, Miss Jewel resists the colonial exploitation of her native language and cultural heritage.

Such an act of mimicry turns into an act of resilience against colonialism. Homi Bhabha asserts that colonisation occurs through imitation because the colonised is enforced to imitate how the coloniser acts (Bhabha 1994, 86). For this reason, the coloniser's language, culture, religion, and education are imposed on the colonised. Colonialism "wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values - that is, 'mimic' the colonizer" (Ashcroft 2000, 10). However, Bhabha maintains that "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal [...] a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Through Hortense's recitation that practices power on the colonised, Miss Jewel recognises the power of language and how she can reverse it. Miss Jewel's reappropriation of the language emerges as an act of resilience that disrupts "the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (88). For mimicry is a mere copy of the coloniser, its menace lies behind the fact that mimicry is never far from mockery. While Hortense imitates the coloniser's language and culture, Miss Jewel mocks and undermines the discursive power of imperialism.

In conclusion, the education that Hortense considers as a sign of superiority in society becomes threatening to the cultural identity because this education imposes imperial doctrines on the colonised. Despite her lack of education and incapability of speaking English 'properly,' Miss Jewel protests against the colonial oppression with her parody of colonisation.

Another aspect wherein the infliction of British superiority is seen is Hortense's beliefs about skin colours. As the empire's daughter, Hortense considers white skin superior. She thinks that white skinned people are more polite, intelligent, and civilised. So much so that, she sees herself entitled for "a golden life" (Levy 2004, 38) for having a light complexion. When Hortense introduces her parents to readers, she creates a notable hierarchical order, giving the first rank to her noble white father. She talks about her father in a remarkably respectable way as the nations describe their soldiers:

Every generation in our district knew of my father and his work overseas as a government man. His picture was pinned to parish walls - cut from the newspapers of America, Canada and England. My father was a man of class. A man of character. A man of intelligence. Noble in a way that made him a legend. 'Lovell Roberts,' they whispered. 'Have you heard about Lovell Roberts?' (37).

The dignity Hortense feels in her description stems from the fact that her father is white, thus belongs to the noble class because there is no mentions of his other success and whereabouts. Indeed, his relationship to Hortense's mother is outside marriage, leading Hortense's birth out of wedlock. Although the issue of consent is not mentioned (it may be as well a rape because rape was common among white soldiers going overseas), Lovell Roberts's interaction is reminiscent of imperial attack. He attempts to own Alberta's body like a colonial desire to own a land and leaves both the body and land irresponsibly. Moreover, there is a sense of distance to her father despite her appreciations of him, for Hortense learns about her father from newspapers. Her knowledge regarding to her father is so limited and unemotional that Hortense's descriptive words become another recitation for her. When she refers to her white father in her interview for the teaching position at the Church of England school in Kingston, she repeats her recitation: "my father, a man of character, a man of intelligence, noble in a way that made him legend" (86). However, the privilege of her white-skinned father does not bring her the job, for which she blames her maternal background "although no word on the [headmaster's rejection of Hortense] passed" (86). As Irene Pérez Fernández argues, "Hortense's golden future is soon proved to be feeble and unstable and as she leaves the security of home in a little village to immerse into the open space of a big city such as Kingston she is *déclassée* because of her illegitimate social origin" (Fernández 2010, 13).

The reason for her assumption that her breeding is "not legitimate enough for him to consider [Hortense] worthy of standing in their elegant classrooms before their high-class girls" (Levy 2004, 86) is that Hortense does not consider her black roots worthy of intelligence and refinement. Hortense's word choices dramatically changes when she begins to describe her mother. While Hortense is the daughter of a noble and intelligent

man who left her, she refers to her mother as “a woman called Alberta” (37). Hortense disregards the significant aspect of motherhood that keeps a baby alive, which is breastfeeding. “It was she who suckled me until I was strong enough to drink from the cow” shows Hortense’s attempts to distance herself from her mother. While there is a physical distance between her and her father, and it is Alberta who raised her, Hortense builds a spiritual wall against her mother. Hortense deliberately creates this distance with her mother because she wants to reject her roots as a black woman. She persists to forget Alberta’s physical features which are signs of her blackness: “I do not recall the colour of her eyes, the shape of her lips or the feel of her skin. Alberta was a country girl who could neither read nor write nor perform even the rudiments of her times tables” (38).

Between her white father and black mother, Hortense posits herself with “the colour of warm honey” (38) and it is the only promise that can offer Hortense “a golden life” (38). Her light complexion provides her with such a strong sense of stability and superiority that she entitles herself to the upper parts of every society. With the concept of superiority depending on skin colours in Hortense’s mind, she believes that only her white roots and light complexion can present the opportunities. She feels entitled for highly persuasions thanks to her father:

When you are the child of someone such as he, there are things that are expected that may not be expected of someone of a more lowly persuasions. And so it was with I (37).

On the other hand, she considers her mother resourceless for her lack of education “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” (38).

In Andrea Levy’s conversation with Bonnie Greer, Levy talks about this shade/class-conscious upbringing of Jamaicans:

My parents came from a class in Jamaica called 'the coloured class'. There are white Jamaicans, black Jamaicans and coloured Jamaicans. My parents' skin was light. They were mixed race, effectively. They came to Britain with a kind of notion that pigmentation represented class. They didn't necessarily have more money or education, but because they were somehow closer to being white, this was seen as a badge of pride (Greer 2004).

Hortense carries her 'badge of pride' for dreaming her 'golden life' and thinks England has been her destiny through her journey. However, Levy questions the artificiality of the "culture of shadeism" (Newns 2014, 139) and problematises it in individual and social identity constitutions through symbolical ways. Whiteness in *Small Island* symbolises the reason for displacement in both home and host societies and sinister enforcement of the imperial. Firstly, the colour-consciousness causes a sense of displacement for Jamaicans in both societies because Jamaican educational system pivots around this 'culture of shadeism.' The prestigious school in Jamaica, the Church of England, only accepts "light-skinned girls" (Levy 2004, 86), and even Hortense's warm honey shade does not meet the requirements to become eligible for teaching at the school. This system not only deprives Hortense of her dream to teach at the Church of England, but also makes her be disappointed in the sight of "wretched black faces [that make her] feel quite sick. All at once [her] lofty dreams and soured to pitiful torment" (87). Although there is a sense of injustice made towards Hortense because of the discursive power of skin colours, she instead expresses her disappointment in the collapse of her 'lofty dreams.' For her golden complexion and its promising 'golden life,' Hortense feels out of place in Jamaica and England becomes her destiny (100). However, she, Gilbert, and other immigrants continue to not find a proper place in London (179, 312, 318). She breaks down in tears when she realises she does not belong to England either: "'I dreamed of coming to London,' she said [and] with no warning she start to cry" (464). Furthermore, the colour-consciousness separates Hortense and then Queenie's son from their families. Hortense is not only estranged from her 'lofty dreams' but also separated from her mother to have "a golden future" (527). Similarly, Queenie gives Michael to Hortense and Gilbert so that the baby

can be with “[h]is own kind” (522). Levy shows that the infliction of colour system runs so deeply that it causes babies to be separated from their mothers.

Secondly, Levy associates whiteness with paleness in the novel. Physical white features have traditionally been accepted as demonstrations of nobility, divinity, and beauty. The ideal beauty has been a white lady with her slender body, red cheeks and lips. This representation of colour spectrum has found its way in *Hortense* through the colonial discourse as I have demonstrated. However, Levy creates an emotional distinction between black and white. In spite of blackness’s presentation of a political problem in England, Queenie associates the blackness of the African man in the Exhibition with “melting chocolate” (6). Similarly, Hortense describes her mother and grandmother with their “bitter chocolate hue” (38) and Queenie also describes Michael’s skin as “nut-brown” (301). These instances symbolise positive, sensual, and warm connotations of blackness. Blackness, as opposed to its traditional usage, is not referred as a dirt, mud, or dread. On the other hand, whiteness is deployed in the novel as representative of paleness and marble-like stance like Desdemona in *Othello*:

Yet I'll not shed her blood
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster (5.2.3-5; Shakespeare 2000, 121).

Although whiteness associated with snow traditionally presents purity and beauty, the marble-like stance also reflects paleness, sickness, and absence of life just as vampires have frightening attributes of pale skin. The traditional representation of blackness as evil (black magic, black heart, etc.), Levy presents whiteness as minacious. Hortense describes Mrs Ryder accordingly:

Mrs Ryder was, without any doubt, the whitest woman I had ever seen. Her short blonde hair sat stiff as a halo around her head. Her delicate skin was so thin that in places it revealed a fine blue tracery of veins. But her mouth looked unfinished - a fast in her face with no lips to ornament the opening (45).

Mrs Ryder fits into the ideal female beauty with her thin body, blonde hair, and white skin exposing her veins. Although she would be regarded as the most beautiful woman with her marble-like beauty in any of Shakespeare's sonnets, she seems *bickerer* and cold. The exposure of 'a fine blue tracery of veins' seems to be the only sign for her aliveness. Similarly, "Miss Morgan had a smile that was so unfamiliar to her face that it had an opposite effect - rather like the leer of a church gargoyle, it made her look sinister" (63). The sinister association with whiteness follows as Hortense sees a woman whiter than Mrs Ryder:

Never in my days had I seen such a white woman. The hair curled upon her head put me in mind of confection - white and frothy as foam. Her complexion so light, beside it paper would look soiled. Eyebrows, eyelashes, even her lips appeared to have no colour passing through them. So pale was she her blood must be milk. [...] 'That woman is so white,' all at once came gushing from me. 'Is she English?' I had to ask Mrs Bligh (334).

The association of whiteness with paleness, hence effeteness, shows itself with "this unearthly woman" (334) as well. Hortense's surprise evokes that her sense of shadeism depends on what she has been indoctrinated. Her favour of whiteness is confused with a different, more extreme, of the white hue. Moreover, the child of the 'unearthly woman' responds to Hortense in the same manner: "Look! She's black. Look, Mum, black woman" (334). The scene implies the artificiality of shadeism and how it depends on the Other to exist and survive. Although Hortense's skin has the tones of 'warm honey,' which recategorises her as a light-skinned person, she becomes just 'black' in the child's perception, which is followed with "golliwog, [...] samba [and] darkie" (334) although another English woman Hortense sees has a "complexion not much lighter than [her] own - the colour of honey" (330). Hortense cannot decide whether both women are English because their hues differ perceptibly. Moreover, the lady with white hue becomes 'unearthly' in Hortense's gaze. At this moment, the entitlement of Englishness belongs neither to English woman nor Hortense. The colonial mindset that builds hierarchy according to skin colours is proved unstable and artificial. Moreover, this recognition, what Stuart Hall calls "doubleness of discourse,

this necessity of the Other to the self,” (Hall 1997, 48) shows how fragile the identities that are depended on the ‘culture of shadeism’ and how they can be fractured and recomposed in the Other’s gaze. As Franz Fanon puts it, “I felt as if I had been simultaneously exploded in the gaze, in the violent gaze of the other, and at the same time, recomposed as another” (Fanon 1967, 118). Levy represents Fanon’s explosion and recomposition with Hortense: “The white woman then turned a glassy gaze on me. Who was the most astounded? For we both stared, certain we were viewing an apparition before us. [...] ‘Don’t point, Georgey. She’s not black - she’s coloured”” (Levy 2004, 334). Then and there, Hortense is ‘fractured and recomposed in the Other’s gaze.’ Both examples of white ladies play the role to alienate Hortense from her culture through otherisation. Even though Hortense uses the descriptive words such as ‘blonde hair, pink cheek, blue eyes, and slender lips’ upon her first encounter with Queenie (12-3), they never carry negative connotations. Rather, Queenie’s “eyes [were] so blue they were the brightest thing in the street” (12-3). Queenie’s positive description foreshadows the bond these two women will create at the end of the novel. The problematisation of colour/class system is thus emphasised by Levy in the descriptions of skin colours, referring to colonial idea of whiteness as pale, lifeless, and sinister.

4.2.2. 'Why no one in this country understand my English?'

Hortense's British values around which she pivots her identity shatters vis-à-vis the hostile metropolitan. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall argues that "[w]e belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the 'Other'. We are at the outer edge, the 'rim', of the metropolitan world" (Hall 1994, 228). While Hortense believes she will be welcomed in the boundaries of London, native Londoners cast her out the borders because of her difference. She cannot survive in London with her colonial education and her inability to survive is exemplified through her language, domestic life, and job interview. These oppressive 'contradictory experiences', however, do not make Hortense a passive victim, but rather a resilient figure.

Firstly, Hortense's 'impeccable English' that she taught to Miss Jewel does not help her be understood in London. Hortense comes to know that her recitations and doctrines cannot help her survive in England and her sense of Englishness disintegrates. Her struggle with the language and natives' persistence not to understand her English are maintained through the novel. Firstly, the taxi driver does not understand her until she shows him the address, which is followed by Hortense's confusion of "the Isle of Wight" (Levy 2004, 13) with 'white island'. Despite Hortense's wide knowledge of English, Levy presents her with an inability to know idioms, which symbolises the juxtaposition between the idea of Englishness as taught in institutions and real England. When Queenie asks her if "[c]at got her tongue," Hortense thinks: "What cat was she talking of? Don't tell me there was a cat that must also live with us in this room" (227). Hortense's struggle to combine her abstract knowledge of what Englishness means with the practical use of the term is represented through a comical representation. When Hortense asks for a 'basin' for four times (228), Queenie does not understand her and begins to teach Hortense English despite her resistance as "[Hortense] can speak and understand the English language very well" (228). Furthermore, Hortense's struggles continue when she visits English shops with Queenie and asks for condensed milk for "five times" (331), which creates a "silly dance of miscomprehension" (332) and brings Hortense to her rightful remonstrance:

Why no one in this country understand my English? At college my diction was admired by all. I had to point at the wretched tin of condensed milk, which resided just behind his head.

‘Oh, condensed milk,’ he told me, as if I had not been saying it all along (331-2).

In conclusion, Hortense’s first ‘contradictory experiences’ occur through the unrecognisability of her impeccable English that native Britons are unwilling to comprehend. Ann Murphy discusses that “Hortense’s choice of language is dependent on whom she addresses, and the identity she wishes to project” (Murphy 2012, 7) since she is comfortable in Jamaican Creole with “her unmarked Creole verb, non-inversion of the question form, and code mixing” (7). Her attempts to use the refined English that most English people are unable to use in the novel emphasise how she emerges her identity intertwined with the use of language that is spoken by high-class citizens and presents herself as a superior British subject, wherein an ironical problem lies. Hortense’s sense of superiority that comes with English runs so deeply that she keeps confusing the subject pronoun with the object pronoun. Hortense learns English with best teachers, imitates the BBC pronunciation to speak the language “properly as the high-class” (Levy 2004, 449), knows grammatical rules, syntax, and vocabulary of the language in which she can express herself very well. However, she persists to make the pronoun mistake by repeating “I” instead of “me” whenever she talks about herself or wants to assert her authority (11, 37, 38, 66, 87, 95, 329, 478).

Murphy asserts that Hortense’s persistent mistakes of the most basic subject of the English language is Levy’s successful deployment of language to create a parody of Hortense to ridicule her Britishness. I also want to add that this misuse stems from her internalisation with white supremacy as she also compares herself with everyone who is socially in a lower position than herself or her sense of superiority is shattered with the repetitive use of “a woman such as I” (227, 329, 447, 450). The obvious emphasis on the pronoun “I” to talk about herself consequently becomes both a parodical representation of Hortense’s English and her sense of superiority. In this sense, Levy uses the language as a significant means to constitute one’s subjectivity. Since Hortense

uses the English language as a way of constructing herself as a British citizen, her identity is fragmented when the native acquirers of this languages do not comprehend her.

4.2.3. 'Pushing my finger to hear the ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling.'

The second aspect that shatters Hortense's integrity as a British self revolves around her dream of middle-class domestic life in London. Hortense's dreams about England are related to her desire to build a house and domestic life in the host nation. The novel presents Hortense for the first time "on one of the tallest houses [she] had ever seen" (Levy 2004, 12). Levy's tall house is a metaphor for Hortense's ambitious dreams as an immigrant. She and Celia Langley emphasise that living in England and behaving like a British are ways of superiority. When Celia talks about England, her voice becomes "high-class and her nose point into the air" (11). Similarly, Hortense presents herself with her head aloft whenever she performs her higher self with the perfect English language (67) or manners (330). While England is the utmost dream to achieve and arrive for Celia, Hortense rather thinks that England is her destiny (100). Feeling destined to be in England, she makes her way to reach her destiny and stands at the door of a house that represents the Mother Country. With Queenie's house, Levy creates the analogy between house and nation. As Lucinda Newns cites Rosemary Marangoly George, this analogy "expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses considered necessary for the existence of subjects: the notion of belonging, of having a home, and a place of one's own" (George 1999, 2, as cited in Newns 2014, 149). Therefore, home is used as a metaphor for the nation which signifies Hortense's desire for entrance after "sailing with bananas" (Levy 2004, 26). However, Hortense's not hearing the "ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling" foreshadows that the Mother Country is not so expectant for her arrival. Whereas she expects to be welcomed in the grand house where a doctor, lawyer or the King's friends might have lived, the house offers Hortense "a small lump of dog's business" (12) and an English woman who cannot understand Hortense's perfect English.

Moreover, even though Queenie opens the door and learns that Hortense will be another tenant at the house, she shuts the door in Hortense's face (13), which symbolises the distrust and doubt of the Mother Country towards immigrants. Not surprisingly, Hortense's first thought revolves around the ways to climb to the top of the house: "I wondered how could a person [...] get to the top of this tall house?" (13-4). It

signifies that as an aspiring migrant, her desire is not only to arrive in England but also to climb the social ladder and find a place for herself in the nation. She understands that her journey will be challenging, for “[r]opes and pulleys was all [she] could conceive” (14) to reach the peak. She gets used to the stairs that she has climbed successfully in the Jamaican social ladder (14), yet she has to make more efforts in London. Indeed, when she finally “grab[s] the banister to pull [herself] up stair after stair” (20), the lighting is so dull and stairs are so steep that she is “groping like a blind man at times with nothing to light the way” (20). Her palpitating heart reflects its exhausted beating on her question: ““What a lot of stairs. Could you not find a place with fewer stairs?”” (20). In this way, the house at Nevern Street symbolises Hortense’s attempts to occupy a space in London and the steep stairs symbolises her ascent to the top of the British society.

Moreover, Corrine Duboin reads Hortense’s climb in the light Homi Bhabha’s ideas. Bhabha argues that “[t]he stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white” (Bhabha 1994, 4). Consequently, the staircase at the house in Nevern Street becomes an “interstitial passage” (4) that initiates Hortense’s identity formation without singularity and “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4).

Furthermore, before she comes to London, Hortense dreams of her destiny in a peaceful and domestic setting:

A starched tablecloth embroidered with bows. Armchairs in the sitting room placed around a small wood fire. The house is modest - nothing fancy, no show - the kitchen small but with everything I need to prepare meals. We eat rice and peas on Sunday with chicken and corn, but in my English kitchen roast meat with two vegetables and even fish and chips bubble on the stove. My husband fixes the window that sticks and the creaky board on the veranda. I sip hot tea by an open window and look on my neighbours in the adjacent and opposite dwelling. I walk to the shop where I am greeted manners, ‘Good day’,

politeness, 'A fine day today', and refinement, 'I trust you are well?' A red bus, a cold morning and daffodils blooming with all the colours of the rainbow" (100-1).

Hortense dreams of London as a polite place where she will be welcomed to occupy a place. She will also make it a multicultural sphere, combining rice and peas with fish and chips in her English kitchen. However her dreams slowly dissolve when she meets her domestic place which is a direct opposition of what she imagined: "All I saw were dark brown walls. A broken chair that rested one uneven leg on the Holy Bible. A window with a torn curtain and Gilbert's suit [...] hanging from a rail on the wall" (20). As Duboin argues, "the top-floor room reads a marginalization rather than achievement" (Duboin 2011, 27).

Since England initially evokes a sense of successful destination and settlement for Hortense, London in its grim reality: war-stricken, waning, hostile, dark, cold, and bigoted. She rather sees the metropolis in her elevated sense of England. When she steps to London, there is a clear contrast between Jamaicans who arrive in the city and who have already experienced the city. The contrast between women with "their church best clothes - their cotton dresses with floppy bows and lace; their hats and white gloves looking gaudy" and "[b]lack men in dark, scruffy coats, [h]unched over in the cold" (Levy 2004, 14) meet at "an archway that looked like an open mouth" (16). Levy's clear description of London as a grim disillusion signifies that the metropolis does even swallow newly-arrived migrants, denying their legitimate rights to take space in the city. Hortense's association of England with daffodils and rainbow is juxtaposed with the shivering cold. Despite this cold and dark description of London as opposed to the warm, sunny setting of Jamaica, Hortense draws 'ropes and pulleys' to approach her destiny. However, each attempt shatters with an abrupt intervention from the Mother Country. The Englishwoman erases Hortense's idiosyncrasy by assuming that Hortense is her nanny because she is black: "she's one of you" (15) and does not let Hortense use her vowels. The taxi driver persists not to understand her English accent "that had taken [Hortense] to the top of the class [after her] recitation of 'Ode to a Nightingale'" (16) until she shows him the address. He further assumes she does not know about "bells and

knockers” (17), symbolising the colonial assumption of Jamaica as an uncivilised jungle, and speaks to her with “the slow exaggeration [that she] generally reserved for the teaching of small children” (17). In spite of the apparent discrimination towards her ethnicity, Hortense refuses to acknowledge the social reality, thinking that white men from working-class are just fools with her class-conscious superiority. Her colonial education makes Hortense “blinded and deafened by her class snobbery and inflated expectations of imperial England” (Murphy 2012, 130).

Hortense’s romanticised notion of England, accompanied with the language issue, in which she dreams to be kindly approached shatters when she finds herself among natives in public that recovers from war damages and deny her arrival. Her astonishment and shatter are intensified by Hortense’s associating the idea of Englishness with certain manners, lifestyles, and dress codes that she learns in her colonial education in Jamaica. She maintains her Englishness with her clean coat, white gloves, and hat. Her astonishment towards Queenie’s “dreary coat” (Levy 2004, 329) shows Hortense’s idea of England that has Victorian middle-class values. Andrea Levy, in her essay “This is my England,” writes that “[t]he things [her parents] thought of as quintessentially English - manners, politeness, rounded vowels from well-spoken people were not in evidence” when they arrived in London. Levy also depicts the disappointment of this absence in Hortense. Hortense’s shock is even intensified upon her realisation that “every Englishwoman [...] is also attired in a dowdy housecoat” (330). At the same time, Queenie looks at Hortense “distasteful, up and down” (329) while Hortense cannot figure out the reason for she “was dressed as a woman such as [she] should be when visiting the shops in England” (329). However, Hortense’s clean clothes do not fit the grey reality of London “as if the Almighty had stolen the rainbow from this place” (330). Hortense’s surprise upon the realisation that the real London does not resemble what Hortense has learned in books creates the deflation of the mythological representation of the metropolis. With the language gap, reality of Hortense’s middle-class domestic dream, and juxtapositions between the appearances of Hortense and Queenie, Levy attempts to deconstruct this mythical representation of England and questions the term of ‘Britishness.’ Since Hortense is taught to become

British as her essential identity, her confusion about how the reality differs for native Britons causes her identity to be fragmented and her arrival to the Mother Country turns into a departure for her “roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993, 133).

4.2.4. 'I will come back again when I am qualified to teach in this country.'

Hortense's disappointment increases and reaches its peak when she presents herself at an English school to teach with her "fluttering wings" (Levy 2004, 450). As seen from examples, Hortense pivots her identity around her colonial education which has gained her a perfect English diction and teaching qualifications. These profits make Hortense believe that she can survive as a native British in London and initiate her journey by giving money to Gilbert. However, this interview, which is a reminiscent of the fruitless interview at the Church of England due to her 'illegitimate origin,' breaks Hortense's wings when the Mother Country slaps her in the face (458). Despite her letters of recommendation proving her proficient teaching skills, the woman at the Inquiries only plays with letters "without even glancing at their contents" (452) and tells Hortense that she is unqualified to teach in England (454). Since her teaching qualification is the main reason for Hortense's belief that she can settle in English society, her all dreams and romanticised idea of England shatters when the Mother Country does not recognise her success. As a consequence of the event, Hortense takes a tour around London, recognises her black identity, and begins to rewrite her identity as a multicultural black woman.

Hortense puts on her best dress, her high spirits and two letters of recommendation she has deserved in Jamaica "to present [herself] for a position as a teacher at the offices of the education authority" (449). Even though Gilbert warns her that "this is not the way England work" (450), she quintessentially pays him no mind and declares that "a teacher such as [she] was not someone to be treated in the same way as a person in a low-class job" (450-1). She still considers England's misfortunes stem merely from its class system and believes that she will soon uplift herself with her position at an English school. However, she is squashed into the cruel moment when the woman at the school administration refuses to open even Hortense's letters of recommendations. Symbolising the racist imperial mindset, the woman ignores Hortense's qualification, education, skills, and determination with her racial discrimination. Hortense's light complexion, which is believed to promise her golden life, proves invalid in the administrator's eyes. Hortense decides to leave when she is

rejected a place in the society; however, she walks into a cupboard with “a ladder, a mop and a broom” (455). As Irene Pérez Fernández interprets it, the humiliating moment of stepping into a cupboard is “a symbolic space that denotes the working possibilities of Black people in London at the time” (Fernández 2010, 13). Hortense realises that Queenie’s unmuted doorbell, her linguistic struggles, and the suffocating dirty room in Nevern Street show rather racial connotations than class differences. When her promising skin colour leaves her with unread letters of recognition that symbolise her determination, her whole identity cripples in the face of fragmentation. Hortense’s journey to a dream place rather becomes “a journey to the shattering of illusions, inaugurating a process of protracted disenchantment” (Hall 2017, 552). However, in the face of intense ‘contradictory experiences,’ Hortense does not become a passive victim as Mama asserts that racist attitudes are not omnipresent in black women’s experiences (Mama 1995, 111-2). Instead of becoming a passive victim oppressed by her shattered illusions and the women’s “rising laughter” (Levy 2004, 455), she shows an act of resilience and protects her dignity as a successful, determined, and ambitious woman: “‘I will come back again when I am qualified to teach in this country. [...] I paid them no mind. I fixed my hat straight on my head and adjusted my gloves ‘Thank you and good day’” (455). Stuart Hall observes that colonised people’s identities are defined from outside. Colonised subjects first encounter “face-to-face the imperial metropole, which they actually know only in its translated form through a colonial haze, but which has functioned as their ‘constitutive outside’: constituting them, or us, by its absence, because it is that they - we - are *not*. This is a manner of being defined from the beyond” (Hall 2017, 554). Hortense’s colonial education she received in Jamaica has constituted her from outside in an absence of imperial country and her father as representative of the colonial haze. This constitution ‘from the beyond’ turns inwards and Hortense realises that she does not belong to the empire’s borders because of the imperial discourse. As a consequence, she develops her cultural identity. When Stuart Hall discusses the cultural identity, he asserts that dominant discourses, which practise power on the marginalised, position a group of people as the Other within narratives. The dominant colonial narrative subjects Hortense to imperial representations by the medium of Foucault’s ‘power/knowledge’ and makes her believe

in the arbitrary concept that Englishness is the most accepted form of truth. She is subjected to the dominant discourse “by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm” (Hall 1994, 226) because she initially rejects her roots. However, since this positioning is a “continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power,” (225) cultural identities tend to transform and reconstruct themselves. While Hortense reconstructs her identity as a black British woman, she also mutually affects the metropolitan borders that have estranged her.

Hortense’s confusion she felt in the cupboard - “I wondered how I would find my way out through this confusion” (Levy 2005, 455) - continues when she leaves the school. Gilbert describes Hortense’s struggle to find her way:

She change direction for two steps. Then stop once more. She look up the street one way, then down the street the other. A paper drop from her hand on to the ground. She stoop to pick it up. Then bump against a big man who call at her, ‘Oi, watch where you’re going.’ And the paper slip from her again. She chase it. Struggling with the clasp from her handbag she stuff the paper in before she start anew. Four paces this way then two paces the other (456).

Hortense’s dislocation represents her in-between situation as her identity has shattered. She cannot find her way because she belongs neither to her homeland nor to host nation. Since she has detached herself from Jamaica under the influence of her colonial education and she is estranged from England with the Mother Country’s slap, she does not know where to turn. Ironically, although she did not want Gilbert to accompany her to the school lest he could “darken up the place” (450), she finds herself in the dark cupboard (455) and Gilbert “rescues” (91) her again from the ambiguous situation. Since the past is “constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth,” as Stuart Hall argues, cultural identities that black people constitute in the face of otherisation “are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (Hall 1994, 226). Since these identities are ‘unstable,’ their reconstruction is a process of “*positioning*” (226), which makes Hortense’s identity go through a ‘positioning’ as a black woman

with Gilbert's support when their fantasy about the Mother Country deflates. At that moment, she and Gilbert begin to walk in London's streets for the first time and look at Piccadilly Circus, Eros, the Houses of Parliament, and Big Ben on the top of the "bus" Hortense imagined in her English life (Levy 2004, 101). Naming each historical monument that Hortense learned from school books, she reinterprets London under the influence of her experiences. Her walking and looking at the city "'transform' the city as a function of time and narrative, and [de-emphasize] its qualities of planned and static and organizing 'place' in favour of active and spontaneously reorganized 'space'" (Ball 2004, 9). This 'reorganized space' distances from Hortense's romanticised notion of London. John Ball explains this changing situation in *Imagining London*:

If [colonised immigrants] have received a colonial education, they will have been exposed to that imaginative geography and will often draw on its representational traditions - its images and tropes - as they respond to their metropolitan experiences. Many therefore travel to a London they have idealized at a distance as a place of light, knowledge, empowerment, opportunity, pleasure [...] but many will be prompted appropriate equally time-honoured literary images that construct the city as bewildering labyrinth, alienating crowd, dangerous street, isolating room, or oppressive routine (21).

Indeed, the place of 'opportunity' is juxtaposed with the dirt and coldness in Hortense's experiences. Hortense's first encounters with London's shivering cold in the face of the city's open mouth (16) and dirty, suffocating, and broken room find their ways to the metaphorical coldness of the city: "I have found that this is a very cold country" (466). She realises this spiritual coldness when she talks to a Jamaican person "from home" (463) although she used to avoid Jamaicans for the sake of her Englishness.

Hortense recognises her black identity in the gaze of the Other and starts to reinscribe her identity and city that surround her body. After a boy tells Hortense "[y]ou're black" (463), Hortense straightens her hat as a way of protecting her dignity and habitually replies: "I pay them no mind" (463). "The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by

a dye,” Frantz Fanon (1967, 109) comments on this movement of glances, “I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self” (109). The position of the Other vis-a-vis the colonial gaze brings Hortense back to her Jamaican roots, hence another self she then begins to reinscribe.

Hortense’s rewriting, in the words of John Ball, is “to take over the city: to claim it in the image of [her] own story, [her] own unique tour through its spaces” (Ball 2004, 9). She talks to a Jamaican person “from home” (463) and they build a community through social interactions and share their personal experiences. The city’s borders present immigrants opportunities to rebuild their selfhood through a sheer sense of collective identities.

In conclusion, the sense of exclusion Hortense feels inside London’s borders turns her idea of England as a ‘destiny’ to a departure point so that she can reform her subjectivity because as Robin Cohen asserts “[t]here is no longer any stability in the points of origin, no finality in the points of destination and no necessary coincidence between social and national identities. [We now have] a chain of cosmopolitan city and an increasing proliferation of subnational and transnational identities that cannot easily be contained in the nation-state system” (Cohen 2008, 175). As discussed in the first chapter, there is a “mutual contamination” (Needham 2000, 9, as cited in Ball 2004, 13) between the relational identities and city’s reterritorialisation. Hortense’s reconciliation with her roots and her mother brings her past back to the metropolis. Hortense’s mnemonic adherence to her culture will be processed in London and deconstruct the singular idea of Englishness.

4.2.5. 'Me sprigadee.'

After Hortense encounters reality in London and begins to reconstruct her identity as a black British woman, her language and memories about her mother change. As seen above, Hortense initially disdains Jamaican Creole, trying to correct Miss Jewel and finding Kenneth vulgar: "The man is rough and uncouth. You hear his language?" (Levy 2004, 446). Moreover, she refuses Gilbert to accompany her to the school interview because she finds his English unrefined with his Jamaican habit of sucking on his teeth, uttering 'cha' and 'nah, man' (450): "Anyone hearing Gilbert Joseph speak would know without hesitation that this man was not English [...] he talked (and walked) in a rough Jamaican way" (449). Andrea Levy, who writes about Hortense under the influence of her mother's experiences, in her essay "Back to My Own Country" remarks that "[m]um was desperate for my dad to lose his accent and stop saying 'nah man' and 'cha' in every sentence" (Levy 2014, 7).

Despite Hortense's disdain, she adopts this Jamaican way of speaking after the traumatic cupboard event: "[Hortense] sucked on her teeth in a most unladylike manner" (Levy 2004, 465). Furthermore, although she disapproves Gilbert's use of 'cha,' she utters it whenever she gets angry or feels that her superiority is challenged: "If [Queenie] was to realise that I am an uneducated person then surely I would have to answer her enquiry. Cha" (229, 477).

Additionally, when she sees the Englishman handing her the bread with his dirty hand, she is astonished as this is not the manner she expects from a refined English person and huffs: "Cha, why he no lick the bread first before giving it to me to eat?" (332). The changes to the Jamaican Creole when her notion of English superiority shatters signify that her identity is fragile, she turns to her language to express the disappointment and resists the sense of alienation by using her language. Eventually, when Hortense realises Gilbert's support and decides to ally with him, she begins to build a house with him and invites her husband to the bed for the first time, and they share their common dialect together:

‘Gilbert, you wan’ come into this bed?’

[...]

‘You no hear me, nah?’ (505).

Gilbert describes this reconciliation with a sense that he is back to his home country: “The rest of my grateful body soon followed, settling itself down into the warmest place on this earth. At that moment if the Caribbean sun had been shining on me” (505). The feeling of perishing from cold they frequently experience is suddenly eased and a warm sensation takes kindly these two Jamaicans to its embrace. Hortense’s metaphorical awakening that “[England] is a very cold country” (466) turns into ‘the warmest place’ on which ‘the Caribbean sun’ gleams and she reimagines her dream of English domesticity with her husband: “‘Tell me, Gilbert, will there be a bell at the door of our new house? And will the bell go ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling?’ While her foot – the mucky one – began gently to stroke up and down my leg” (506).

Hortense’s adopting her cultural language and building a house with Gilbert signify her attempts to reconstruct her cultural identity. Indeed, “the English domestic space as a metaphor for the contestations over the right to belong in the space of the British nation,” Lucinda Newns comments, “[w]hen faced with a British nation that will never admit her into the conventional form of Englishness, no matter how accurate her reproduction of its norms and practices, Hortense begins to adopt a new identity as a member of the black diaspora in Britain” (Newns 2014, 152). As the oppressed Other, their building a house in the Mother Country that did not embrace them becomes a political act with the combination of their language, culture, and values. London, indeed, will have kitchens with ‘rice and peas’ and ‘fish and chips bubble on the stove’. bell hooks argues that “homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects” (hooks 1991b, 42, as cited in Newns 2014, 26). This new identity that emerges from “the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society” (Hall 1997, 52). The black British woman identity that is created “to find some other roots on which to stand” (52) thus reflects the constitution of hybridity in London. Hortense recognises

that there is no singular identity in multicultural societies and the term of Englishness can be redefined with individuals' personal experiences at diasporic encounters that transcend racial and gender biases.

Hortense's resistant actions merge with the reconciliation of her mother to maintain the black British womanhood that shapes the last phase of her identity (re)construction. This reconnection is symbolically significant because Hortense initially associates her mother with Jamaican ignorance while refusing to remember her and her father with English nobility. As discussed above, in spite of the familial bond, Hortense's father is an absent figure in her life. He does not take care of his daughter, and nobody knows his whereabouts. In this aspect, he represents Britain which is the imperial force that has alienated Hortense from her motherland and neglected to nourish her. Lovell Roberts becomes an intruder to Alberta's "wooden hut" (Levy 2004, 38) like Britain trespassed on the West Indies. He, then, leaves his family and neglects its needs like Britain did not care about its children until the need to ask for their help to recover from World War II. Lovell Roberts is unfamiliar with his family like the Mother Country does not know about its children. As Gilbert points this ignorance out with his rhetorical question, "if Jamaica was in trouble, is there any major, any general, any sergeant who would have been able to find that dear island?" (142).

Andrea Levy creates this analogy between Hortense's parents and nations to symbolise the cultural values just as the author emphasises the climate conditions of both countries and metaphorically associates cold England with indifference towards immigrants and warm Jamaica with nourishment. Although Hortense favours her absent father and England, both are indifferent to her. After the Mother Country's slap, she notices the absence of a nourishing father figure like England and starts attributing the definition of nobility to Gilbert. When Gilbert grievously talks about the artificiality of skin colours and remarks that there is nothing different than pigmentations between him and Bernard, Hortense notices that "Gilbert Joseph, my husband, was a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence" (526). Hence, her definition of nobility leaves

the arbitrary notion of white supremacy. As Gilbert takes the noble place of Lovell Roberts, Hortense begins priding on her mother. Alberta and her mother, whom Hortense never refers as grandmother, play the significant role in Hortense's upbringing: "it was [Alberta] who bought me shoes for the journey I was to take holding the hand of her mother, Miss Jewel" (38) to grow up in her father's cousin's house, in which Miss Jewel sacrifices her dignity to become a servant. After encountering racial otherisation in London, Hortense confides in her memories about Alberta "with a gentle song and 'me sprigadee'" (37):

'You wan' hear what I know of my mummy? A flapping skirt, bare black feet skipping over stones, the smell of boiling milk and a gentle song that whispered, 'Me sprigadee,' until my eyes could do nothing but close" (527). The song 'me sprigadee' becomes symbolical for their bond, which Miss Jewel strengthens even in the absence of Alberta. When Hortense reconciles with her black roots and revives her mother in her memory, she passes her mother's legacy to Michael: "[Michael] looked on my face with languid eyes before a smile briefly stretched his lips. One day this boy will want to look on a bird's nest and I will have to lift him to show. He will torment spiders and dress up a cat. 'Me sprigadee,' I said, and I kissed his forehead (528-9).

When John Ball discusses the multicultural essence of London, he cites Kian Tajbakhsh: "For many transnational, diasporic migrant communities, in contrast to those of the nineteenth century, individual and community identities are structured across multiple, sometimes contradictory spaces in complex patterns of imaginary representations and memory that suggest the need for a reconceptualization of identity and consciousness" (Tajbakhsh 2001, 8, as cited in Ball 2004, 34). Therefore, Hortense's 'reconceptualization of identity and consciousness' occurs through the revival of her memories with her mother(land) to achieve a hybrid, complex character while she reterritorialise the metropolis in which she establishes her home and belonging. Hortense's resistant attempts and reconciliation with her roots hence can be read as "the rediscovery or the search for roots" (Hall 1997, 52) in Hall's words. In addition, she will continue to search for solid ways to settle and belong in London, which promises the construction of cultural hybridity. When Hortense arrives at

Queenie's house for the first time, readers read her habit of straightening her coat, pulling her back up straight, and adjusting her hat in case it leaves her "looking comical" (Levy 2004, 12). Her high-standing becomes symbolic through the novel to emphasise her dignity and character as a diligent and ambitious woman. When she moves out the house at Nevern Street, Levy echoes the same words: "I adjusted my hat in case it sagged in the damp air and left me looking comical. [...] I paid it no mind as I pulled my back up and straightened my coat against the cold" (530).

Therefore, Hortense reverses her colonial education that internalised her with arbitrary imperial values, resists against her 'contradictory experiences' and embraces her new identity with "the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha 1994, 38). She has "found that this is a very cold country" (Levy 2004, 466); however, she will embrace every hardship by taking her anchor from both her "roots and routes" (Gilroy 1993, 133) with her straightened back 'against the cold'.

5. *NW* — Recounting Black Identity Reconstitution in Postmillennial Britain

Postcolonial literature and the representations of London have witnessed a change in the literary realm in the postmillennial era. The multicultural London at the turn of the millennium differs from the previous works of postcolonial literature. Drawing from Kian Tajbakhsh's observations, John Ball argues that the postmillennial London has been affected by "advances in technology (especially world-shrinking transportation and communications systems), decolonization and its troubled aftermath, and the increasing integration of the world economy under processes of corporate globalization" (Ball 2003, 34). Moreover, the events of 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' campaign have brought the modern way of living to a more anxious edge. Consequently, all these influences have created "new patterns of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity [...] within fixed national boundaries" (Tajbakhsh 2001, 5, as cited in Ball 2003, 34).

One of the pioneers of this period is Zadie Smith, born in London in 1975 to a British father and a Jamaican mother. She appeared in the literary scene with her debut, *White Teeth* (2000), which is considered a classic that portrays London's multicultural facets with its comic portrayal of Northwest London alongside diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. In the novel, London differs from Andrea Levy's representation in *Small Island* (2004). London, in *White Teeth*, has healed from its war-stricken position. As much as the elements of race, gender, and ethnicity are prevalent in the characters' lives, they do not cause social hostility and alienation like Hortense and Gilbert witness in the aftermath of World War II in *Small Island*. Indeed, Smith creates the only native Briton, Archie, as an individual who distances himself from prejudices. His friendship with Samad, a Muslim immigrant, symbolises the acceptance of diversity in London.

Smith's narrative offers a more optimistic representation of London with the portrayal of diverse backgrounds both in *White Teeth* (2000) and in her subsequent novels like *NW* (2012). As John McLeod puts, her novels "suggest new routes and passageways in the city, alternative spatial practices that resituate, remap and transform London. The optimism they enshrine is exquisitely postcolonial: it bears witness to the

achievements of Londoners in making the city accommodating for all, not just a select and officious few” (McLeod 2004, 188). With this optimism, *NW* does not concern the turbulent struggles of migrants that Hortense and Gilbert encounter in *Small Island*, but the postmillennial struggle: how can one have an authentic identity by distancing herself from race, ethnicity, religion, and gender? Social issues and explicit racism fade away in *NW*, and London's social milieu has changed between the timeline from Levy to Smith, yet the question of identity remains prevalent.

Smith's novel revolves around Northwest London that is known for its diversity. This part of the city plays a vital role in Smith's works. In an interview with Sadiq Khan, she says that “[t]here's also the microcosmic nature of north-west London in particular. A lot of things that happened in England over the past three centuries can be found in north-west London in miniature: enclosure, industrialisation, suburbanisation, immigration, gentrification” (The Guardian 2018). This place has witnessed not only numerous social issues but also multicultural bearings for centuries. Molly Slavin, who anecdotes her experiences that she felt during her visit to Northwest London, says that she was the only white person alongside her friend in that particular part of the city and “the change in demographics from West Hampstead to Kilburn, in a space of just over a mile, was too obvious not to remark upon” (Slavin 2015, 98). Slavin continues her observation by stating that “the postcolonial northwest London of Zadie Smith is not the London of Boswell, Johnson, Dickens, or Woolf” (98). The coexistence of multiple ethnicities and religions gives a different perspective to Northwest London. Since it is not the London that is known from modernist writers' narratives, Smith gives a voice to the periphery. With *NW*, Zadie Smith returns to the observation of Northwest London in more detail that will consist of the rest of this dissertation.

Zadie Smith's *NW* plays a vital role in postcolonial literature in the way that it analyses how black women respond to the recent changes such as poverty, racism, misogyny, and anxiety that has occurred since 9/11. The novel questions how individuals constitute their identities as subjects who stay in the current anxieties threshold. Since the novel's black female protagonist, Keisha/Natalie, was born in

London, she does not carry the ethnic values related to her heritage. *NW* observes how black women (re)constitute in their identities in a rapidly changing city and emphasises the impossibility of authentic identities although the characters think that they have the power and control to be “the sole author” (Smith 2012, 3) of their lives.

In this context, Smith’s *NW* both provides a narrative that observes the above-mentioned challenges of London’s modern urban life and a counter-narrative to the previous postcolonial works where the term of Englishness is entitled to a specific skin colour or ethnicity. *NW* presents us with hybrid characters who search for *routes*, with Paul Gilroy’s analogy (Gilroy 1993, 133), among in-between spaces in London. As David Morley and Kevin Robins assert, the characters of *NW* face “the question not so much of where they are from, as of where they are between.” (Morley et al. 1995, 129). This change of focus from *roots* to *routes* suggests a more pluralised way of identities of postcolonial subjects.

As Wendy Knepper calls, *NW* is “a highly experimental, revisionary late modernist novel” (Knepper 2013, 112) and analyses the dynamics that result from the modern challenges in a city and these dynamics’ influence on identities. Smith focuses on how the “anxious dynamics [and] socioeconomic pressures” (112) shape individuals’ lives in Northwest London and how characters respond to these changes. Overall, as John Ball summarises, London “emerges as a city whose transnational dimensions and transhistorical connections are woven, in varied and surprising ways, into the fabric of its residents’ lives, whether first- or second-generation, ‘black British’ or white” (Ball 2004, 226).

5.1. Zadie Smith's Experimental Narrative Style for *NW*

It is important to emphasise Smith's thoughts about lyrical realism and the future of the novel to analyse *NW*. In her essay entitled "Two Directions for the Novel," Smith writes that "all novels attempt to cut neural routes through the brain, to convince us down this road the true future of the Novel lies" (Smith 2009, 202) and she asks how the future novels will represent the reality truthfully. Smith juxtaposes Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* with Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, observing that the former is written in the tradition of lyrical realism that is "in long-term crisis" (205) and seems insufficient to capture the truth with "the incantatory power of language to reveal the truth [and] the essential fullness and continuity of the self" (206) alongside the "consoling myth of lyrical realism – the self is a bottomless pool" (210). Smith criticises that lyrical realism has become a "bedtime story that comforts us most" (207) and the sense of comfort falls wide of the mark "where a community in recent crisis – the Anglo-American liberal middle class" (205) in the aftermath of 9/11 events and a global financial crisis.

Moreover, the notion of the authentic self becomes unreliable in the postmillennial era, fraught with anxiety and ideological adherence to race and gender politics. By stating that the latter novel serves literature "to shake the novel out of its present complacency" (259), Smith implies these are the times wired with anxious politics and identity crisis. *Remainder* is an "alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward [with its] constructive deconstruction (259). The particular trophy *Remainder* gets in Smith's essay is the novel's avoidance to represent self as authentic to "destroy the myth of cultural authenticity" (244). She criticises *Netherland* for offering readers "the authentic story of a self" (229) and asks: "But is this really what having a self feels like? Do selves always seek their good, in the end?" (229).

Analysing two directions for the future of the novel, Smith suggests that there can be another road, which combines modernist and postmodernist recognition of the inauthentic self with realist practices. In an interview, she mentions her wish "to get close to the real" (Knepper 2013, 113) and attempts to reflect the reality in its bizarre

existence “because our real experience doesn’t come packaged in a neat three act structure” (113). To represent the raw reality, she takes James Joyce as an example as “he found it to be so idiosyncratic he needed to invent a new language for it” (113). She concludes her commentary on Joyce by relating it to *NW*: “All I was trying to do in *NW* was tell fewer lies than last time, and it came out the way it came out” (113). By not choosing one road to write her novel but adopting experimental writing with diverse narrative modes such as “concrete poems and graphical textual representations, web and online references, stream-of-conscious narration, games with numbers and disrupted chronologies” (112), Smith draws another path to observe the complex and inauthentic identities and aims to not comfort her readers.

At the crossroad of literary traditions, Smith classifies McCarthy’s novel as “an alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward” (Smith 2009, 259). Consequently, her modernist influence merges with the postmodernist approach of the “constructive deconstruction” (260) Smith’s quest for the perverse self and rigorous observation of the contemporary world paves the way for her novel, *NW*, where she experiments with different narrative techniques to speak about the unspeakable.

NW is divided into five sections, and each focuses on a character whose paths cross with one another. Smith uses different narrative modes for each character. The novel starts with Leah, the daughter of an Irish migrant family, in a hammock where she is fenced in. The “Visitation” part is where Smith’s modernist influence is prevalent. With the “Visitation” part, Smith uses the modernist stream-of-consciousness prose while she narrates Leah’s personal dilemma regarding her wish to not have a child alongside socioeconomic and multicultural elements of Caldwell, the fictional district of Northwest London. The stream-of-consciousness shifts Leah’s mind around events and the radio. Vanessa Guignery analyses that the novel is embodied with “a brilliant juxtaposition of contemporary technology and modernist narration: while chapter 9 is a pastiche of Google Map-type factual direction instructions to walk from point A to point B, chapter 10 is its stream-of-consciousness alter ego: ‘From A to B redux’ (Guignery

2014, 5). While this cumulative record of Leah's thoughts and impressions reminds of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Guignery discusses that the shape of the apple tree in chapter 7, Leah's husband's monologue, and her colleagues' gossip about her life evoke Bryan S. Johnson's *Albert Angelo* (1964).

Moreover, Smith removes inverted commas when she creates direct speeches. As Guignery points out in her article, Smith undertakes the Joycean technique as he believed the quoted words evoked "an impression of unreality" (Joyce 1957, 75, as cited in Guignery 2014, 5). While the influence of the modernist techniques is apparent in the novel with "stream-of-consciousness techniques, overhead conversations, prose-poems, fragmentary and disjointed passages and numbered vignettes such as found in the 'Host' section of her novel, which are modeled on the 'Aelous' chapter of *Ulysses*" (Knepper 2013, 113), Smith's deployment of modernist narration aims at "a truthful transcription of both thoughts and monologue, without any narratorial intervention" (Guignery 2014, 6) and leads her to create an idiosyncratic account of real experiences. With the strong influence of modernism on her narrative, Smith chooses the combination of the multiple directions to write the future's novel and also adds postmodern notes with fragmented narratives that consist of Natalie's section, calling out the reader in the "Rumpole" section: "Reader: keep up!" (Smith 2012, 193), and the play with the number 37. The number 37 draws readers' attention first in Leah's narrative when it appears as the number of chapters (42, 58, 74, 94) which disrupts the linear narrative of realism and as the address of the place, 37 Ridley Avenue (42), where Shar lives. These chapters are related to Leah's memories about abortion or Shar, which as Guignery analyses, are "the times when Leah, according to conformist society, crossed into forbidden territory" (Guignery 2014, 7).

Smith then moves to the "Guest" section where she narrates Felix's one-day journey that begins in the place of his lover, Grace, with whom he decides to build a life together because his "happiness has finally arrived" (Smith 2012, 116), moves to the visitation of his father, his ex-lover, and ends when he is stabbed on the subway on 27th August 2010 for helping a pregnant woman when they are about to pull into Kilburn

Station. His narrative is a more conventional third-person narration. The technique reminds of a one-day narrative of *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* in the way that the death of an individual connects the society.

The third section, “Host,” witnesses Keisha née Natalie Blake’s self-invention from her school years in the mid-1980s, through her university, marriage, motherhood, until 27th August 2010 when Felix was murdered. The part is divided into 185 short numbered instalments. Smith’s use of listicles with short passages reflects Keisha’s identity (re)constitution as she believes making listicles is a way to attain her identity, and short anecdotes represent her fragmented identity. This specific narrative echoes the fragmented postmodernist techniques of “constructive deconstruction” (Smith 2009, 260) and does not distance the narrative from its reality. *NW* rather becomes an answer to Smith’s rigorous questions about O’Neill’s *Netherland*: “But is this really what having a self feels like? [...] Are they never perverse?” (229).

Furthermore, the number 37 appears again in the “Host” section, where Natalie’s self-invention is narrated, reflecting the postmodernist influence of the novel. Firstly, Natalie’s 24th listicle tells that the number 37 is the bus Leah should take to go to Camden Lock from Caldwell (Smith, 2012, 185). Secondly, the 37th vignette is the only part that is missing in Natalie’s narrative at a precise time of her break with Leah. This repetition and omission of the number 37 is “the playful dimension of postmodernist fiction” that disrupts linearity and implies self-invention processes are not linear or infrangible. Because Smith also asks in her essay, “Two Directions for the Novel,”: “And is this how memory works? Do our childhoods often return to us in the form of coherent, lyrical reveries?” (Smith 2009, 229). Hence, the number 37 becomes a symbol that represents the nonlinear process of memories and truthful events in both women’s narratives. Smith zigzags around their memories to imply the unpackaged form of our experiences.

Smith moves to the fourth part, “Crossing,” where Natalie and Nathan’s paths are crossed. Natalie’s secrets are exposed to her husband, leaves the house, and walks

idly around Northwest London while Nathan hides from the police and his murder of Felix. This section is narrated by the omniscient narrator and reflects Natalie's sense of being lost and having no control of life while she is walking from Willesden Lane to Hornsey Lane but has nowhere to go. It is this section in which she has a breakdown upon hearing that she is "nobody" (Smith 2012, 314) despite her efforts to invent herself.

The final part has the same title as the first section, "Visitation," and the story reflects a circular narrative movement where Natalie finds Leah in the hammock under the August sun. This part is a short, traditional third-person narrative that ends up with the postmodernist take. Readers do not know how the police will respond and what will happen in Northwest London when Natalie calls the police to report Nathan. Yet, Smith makes sure that her postmodernist ending is also truthful: "Natalie dialled it. It was Keisha who did the talking. [...] 'I got something to tell you,' said Keisha Blake, disguising her voice with her voice" (333). As Roxane Gay states, Smith represents the truth as we are "disguising [our] voice with [our] voice as [we] tell some version of the truth" (Fassler 2014). In conclusion, what Smith attempts to do with her narrative style is not to strictly follow either modernist or postmodernist attitude but to combine them in a way that will offer a truthful representation of postmillennial London. It is under the influence of her desire to portray fiction truthfully, Smith criticises the concept of the authentic self that lyrical realism offers us "assure us of our beautiful plenitude" (Smith 2009, 227).

In this context, Smith opts for a more detailed analysis of self, which will be presented with its complexity, plurality, and tendency for reinventions. In Wendy Knepper's words, *NW* demands "a more rigorous lyrical realism, which is not bound by the conventional identity politics of race/gender, but operates through the disclosure of formerly unrecognized correspondences and points of convergence" (Knepper 2013, 116). At *NW*'s convergence point, Smith creates the elusive character of "the absent and the unspeakable" (Smith 2009, 255), deploying "strategies of immersion, interaction, intersection and imaginative remapping" (Knepper 2013, 116).

5.2. The Spatial Choice of ‘NW’

With Smith’s choice to represent her surrounding truthfully and portray every perverse facet of the self, she chooses Northwest London as the peripheral part of London that is absent in central London representations revolving around Buckingham Palace. The Kilburn is regarded as the periphery of London owing to multicultural communities. Drawing on Homi Bhabha, Molly Slavin observes that if “the city is where ‘the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced’ (Bhabha 1994, 243 as cited in Slavin 2015, 98), this particular corner of London, due to its capacity to be many things to many people, is an especially well-suited place from which to explore that perplexity” (Slavin 2015, 98). Then the local setting of *White Teeth* and *NW* aims to give voices to ‘many things’ with an attempt to deconstruct the place’s Other position vis-à-vis the central London of Dickens or Woolf. If a city should be analysed, Smith implies that it cannot be observed without the periphery's perplexity and complexity that hosts immigrants and their stories. Therefore, Smith bases both the fictional story on Northwest London and Northwest London on the fictional story with her subtle choice of naming the novel with the postcode of the area. Hence, the specific focus on the peripheral part of London draws attention to the equal importance of every individual's story without social restrictions of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Zadie Smith succeeds in portraying truthful facets of Northwest’s multiculturalism, and in doing so, deconstructs the singular notion of Englishness entitled to white Britons. She represents Willesden not as a neutral place that coincidentally becomes a setting of her characters’ story but rather as an active force that shapes protagonists’ lives. In her analysis of *Remainder*, Smith applauds the novel for filling “time up with space by breaking physical movements [...] or by examining the layers and textures of a wet, cambered road in Brixton as a series of physical events rather than emotional symbols” (Smith 2009, 265). The absence of the realist concept that turns exterior forces into symbols for characters’ inner turmoils “forces us to recognize space as a nonneutral thing” (265). Smith admires the novel for its interconnection between the world and the self “circling each other in space” (266). Hence, Smith’s notion of an integrated novel consists of the zinging spaces that have

active roles on the elusive self. Due to the novel's spatial aesthetics, Smith comments that *Remainder* presents "the opportunity for multiple allegories [...] On literary modes (*How artificial is realism?*), on existence (*Are we capable of genuine being?*), on political discourse (*What's left of the politics of identity?*) and on the law (*Where do we draw our borders? What, and whom, do we exclude, and why?*)" (266).

Smith's questions construct the building stones on which *NW*'s spatial aesthetics are built. As mentioned above, Smith chooses to give voice to London's periphery which hosts different ethnic groups. As the beginning part of *NW* depicts, "[i]n Willesden people go barefoot, the streets turn European" (Smith 2012, 3). The rest of the novel further follows the multicultural trace with Irish-English Leah, Jamaican-English Natalie, Afro-Caribbean Felix and Nathan, French-Algerian Michel, Indian-English Shar, Afro-Italian Frank, Polish nanny, Indian and Pakistani neighbours. Smith's insistence on portraying multiethnic characters and her attempt to reflect the space as a nonneutral concept come together in *NW* and help her interrogate the racial and cultural Others and their identity constitutions in their surroundings.

Wendy Knepper draws on Smith's public lecture, "How to Fail Better," which was delivered in 2006 and comments on Smith's attempt to draw personalised cartographies. To Kierkegaard's thought, "[t]o exist under the guidance of pure thought is like travelling in Denmark with the help of a small map of Europe, on which Denmark shows no larger than a steel pen-point – Aye, it is still more impossible," (Knepper 2013, 115) Smith responds: "You have to be open to the idea that Copenhagen might look and feel completely different to what you expected or might look and feel completely different to what you expected or believed it to be. You have to throw away other people's maps" (115). Consequently, Smith deconstructs the idea of London as having one centre consisting of Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace and reimagines new pathways with the implication that the city is experienced differently in each inhabitant's perspective.

Smith's choice of spatial space bears political deconstructions as well. The traditionally accepted map of London excludes racial, cultural and social Others and presents the myth of England. As much as central London has become at the forefront for its geographical location or historical constructs, the implication lies in politics. The racism that was prevalent at immigrants' arrival in London in the aftermath of WWII has changed its shape in contemporary society with Immigration Acts that attempted to exclude immigrants from the Englishness status.

Drawing on The Falklands War in 1982 and The British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990, headed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Kathleen Paul comments that "the British national identity still retained an element of imperialism" (Paul 1997, 185). This imperial mindset "created a demographic hierarchy with a primary split between center and periphery" (187). While the privilege of being located at the centre is bestowed on white-skinned citizens, "the majority of subjects of color received little of actual value in terms of citizenship and were placed on the periphery" (187). Hence, Smith's attempts to reimagine the borders of London enables her to analyse and deconstruct identities (re)constitutions in political and geographical definitions. In her essay on Kafka, "F. Kafka, Everyman," she ponders:

In what, for example, does the continuity of 'Blackness' exist? Or 'Irishness'? Or 'Arabness'? [...] What is Muslimness? What is femaleness? What is Polishness? What is Englishness? (Smith 2009, 197-9).

By asking these questions to her characters, she draws their imaginative maps and helps them redraw London's map. NW is a crowded novel, but not in the catastrophic sense. It is a novel that rather includes multiple voices making a place more peaceful and livable. In Smith's fiction, the English nation has a place for everybody. Smith deconstructs racism, class issues, gender inequality, and heteronormativity by rewriting and reconstructing English identity in the periphery's borders.

In this context, Leah and Natalie's narrative can be examples to move the novel forward and reimagine alternate ways forward from the mythical centre of London as

the women constitute the population of racial, cultural, gendered, and sexual Others. Having Irish and Jamaican heritage, being female, and resisting monogamous heteronormativity, Leah and Natalie represent the diversity that lies behind the city centre. They deconstruct the term of Englishness not only for being racial and cultural Others but also for threatening the traditional English family that does not accept childless mothers, polygamous relationships, extramarital affairs, and bisexual pleasures.

Their resilient narratives are precisely delineated in the corners of the North West through the Google Map locations in Leah's section, enumeration of the areas in Felix's part. When Nathan and Natalie walk around the area in the "Crossing" section, the chapters are respectively titled "Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road" (Smith 2012, 299), "Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green" (309), "Hampstead to Archway" (311), "Hampstead Heath" (315), "Corner of Hornsey Lane" (316) and "Hornsey Lane" (318). Natalie realises only when she arrives in Hornsey Lane that she "was heading" (318) to the bridge where she ponders on the possibility of jumping. She talks about herself as if she was another woman: "In the country, if a woman could not face her children, or her friends, or her family – if she were covered in shame – she would probably only need to lay herself down in a field and take her leave by merging, first with the grass underneath her, then with the mulch under that" (319). Yet, Natalie is a city woman and compares herself with the construction and symbol of a city, a bridge: "Here nothing less than a break – a sudden and total rupture – would do. [...] The act remained just that: an act, a prospect, always possible. Someone would surely soon come to this bridge and claim it, both the possibility and the act itself, as they had been doing with grim regularity ever since the bridge was built" (319).

Natalie's act of identification with the bridge as if they were both objects that are subject to rupture demonstrates the delineation and the interwoven way of their narratives. As Michel de Certeau observes, Natalie "enunciates and writes the city in the image of his or her own story" (Ball 2004, 115) while drawing a map around it. The act of being broken is possible for both the city and Natalie. Each has the possibility to

destroy one another and draw one another's imaginative maps. As mentioned in the introduction section, John Ball states that postcolonial narratives serve to digress from "binary models of resistance and identity in order to embrace more ambivalent, multilateral resistances and transnational, syncretistic conceptions of postcolonial identity" (Ball 2004, 13). Hence, Leah, Natalie, Felix, and Nathan's narratives serve the postcolonial purpose by challenging the concept of a fixed British identity to which white-skinned subjects used to be entitled. In conclusion, Leah, Felix, Natalie, and Nathan weave a multitude of individual paths that end up merging with one another. They write their own narratives that are not bound by race, class, gender, and sexuality politics and governmental injustice towards immigrants.

Smith's characters attempt to make sense of their lives and the city because both stories and cities are woven narratives to be deciphered. Citing Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, "*Qu'il est doux parfois d'être de ton avis,*" Michel de Certeau resembles pedestrian figures with "trees of gestures" and states that "'trees of gestures' are in movement everywhere. Their forests walk through the streets. They transform the scene, but they cannot be fixed in a certain place by images [...] nor can the meaning of their movements be circumscribed in a text" (de Certeau 1984, 102). His similar comment to Kierkegaard's above-mentioned quote about Denmark become influential on Smith's text. The city is never a definite and unchangeable phenomenon. It is rather both an active and passive presence that is vulnerable enough to be deterritorialized. Therefore, Smith presents both the city and characters as texts that are subject to "a semantic rarefaction" (105). Both the text as a city is rewritten, and the city as a text is redrawn.

In the first and second chapters, I mentioned postcolonial writers, who wrote about World War II's aftermath, used writing as an act of resilience to navigate through hostile encounters and to reconcile with their identities. At the turn of the postmillennial era, writings about the metropolis and experiences take a more positive turn with "the achievements of Londoners in making the city accommodating for all, not just a select and officious few" (McLeod 2004, 188) and the contemporary narratives offer a sense of determination and dedication for further changes to welcome all marginal groups.

NW, in this context, shows how a black woman reinscribes her identity during a seemingly positive period and how social discourses such as race, gender, and sexuality play roles in her process of rewriting her identity. Therefore, my thesis will focus on her identity reconstitution through performative acts, popular culture, and online secrecy, attempting to define the changes that have occurred since World War II and influenced black British postcolonial female subjects.

5.3. The Contemporary Black British Female Identity: Keisha née Natalie Blake

5.3.1. Performative Identity – ‘What a difficult thing a gift is for a woman! She’ll punish herself for receiving it.’

“That’s you. That’s her. She is real. You are a forgery. [...] She is consistent. You are making it up as you go along” (Smith 2012, 188) may be the summarising point of Natalie’s narrative as a black woman in contemporary Britain. Natalie Blake grows up in Caldwell, the fictional part of Willesden, and strives for passing beyond her racial and socioeconomic status. The 184 instalments of her narrative constitute her life’s progress with embedded literature, cinema, and popular culture references. Smith’s narrative techniques differ from the modernist desire to portray the truth with stream-of-consciousness mode and the traditional third-person narrative. Short and fragmented vignettes demonstrate both Smith’s postmodernist take on the future of the novel, adopting “constructive deconstruction” (Smith 2009, 259) and the fragmentation of Natalie’s identity.

Keisha née Natalie Blake represents the modern woman who thrives on being authentic and independent and goes through self-invention to rewrite her identity to make sense of her surrounding. Molly Slavin states that “by inscribing [her] cartographies on [her] place,” Natalie creates an opportunity to claim her story in “a larger picture of Britain” (Slavin 2015, 115). In reinscribing herself and cartography, she deals with the issues that stem from her racial and working-class background and attempts to reconstitute her identity that is not bound by gender or class-related inequalities. She reinvent herself with literary references as if writing a fictional character. In fact, Smith begins Natalie’s section in the particular way of storytelling: “There had been an event. To speak of it required the pluperfect. Keisha Blake and Leah Hanwell, the protagonists in this event, were four-year-old children” (Smith 2012, 173). Natalie, as Smith narrates her as a fictional character, rewrites her selfhood through performative acts. In this context, she presents Judith Butler’s notion of performativity.

Judith Butler published her groundbreaking book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in 1990, and it has become influential in women's studies and queer theory. Butler's main purpose is to deconstruct the binary opposition between the male/masculine and the female/feminine subject by asking, "what is gender, how is it produced and reproduced" (Butler 1999, xxiii). In other words, she aims to subvert the essentialised notion that genders have particular traits and gender spectrum is reserved to biologically-born male and female subjects, which exclude trans and intersex individuals. Butler argues that gender is a performative construct, which we take on through social norms (23). Norms function to produce us as subjects to maintain the ideological powers, and confine us in certain definitions regulated under the discourses of gender, race, and sexual orientation. Moreover, the identities that fail to conform to socially-regulated norms fall in the realm of "intelligibility" (23). In other words, our social maxims do not validate the existence of genders who cannot meet the "heterosexualization of desire" (23). Butler's discussion leads to the shattering of identities because if gender is another regulation of social discourses, it means that what we consider as essential identities is also a product of norms, summarised as:

To what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility (23).

Butler asserts that "the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established (178). We constitute our genders through actions based on social norms. What we think we internally are "is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body," Butler states, and how we constitute ourselves internally is "that we anticipate and produce certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (xv). Therefore, "gender is

an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (179). Since gender’s constitution depends on performative acts which can change through time and diverse social structures, “a substantial model of identity” (179) becomes an illusion and rather turns into the notion of “*social temporality*” (179).

Accordingly, what we think of as “a seemingly seamless identity [is] the *appearance of substance* [...] a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience [...] come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (179). If gender is constituted through performative acts, there can be no claim of stable and seamless identity, and “the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (180).

The performative acts of gender merge with the effects of race, gender, and class issues in Natalie’s formation. Her narrative represents her fragmented identity that is shattered and difficult to be collected at the postmillennium that, as Zadie Smith comments, “aren’t particularly healthy times” (Smith 2009, 202). As Natalie’s narrative displays the phases of her identity formation, Natalie seems to enact the rules pre-written by social discourses, as Butler states. She is a hybrid subject that navigates through in-between spaces of postmillennial London, struggling with race, gender, and sexuality discourses. As Butler associates the performer of norms with actors on stage (Butler 1999, 24), Natalie embodies an actress’s role with her stage directions (Smith 2012, 274) and performs to the multicultural audience of London.

Keisha starts her identity reconstitution as a child, which begins with her memory with Leah, “with whom she had bonded over a dramatic event” (Smith 2012, 174). She grows up with the self-awareness that she would “exist for other people” (179). The self-invention serves her to make sense of the world that she cannot

distinguish “between what she believed she knew of herself, *essentially*, and her essence as others seemed to understand it” (178). This difference can be explained through Butler’s sense of seamless identity versus performative identity. Keisha seems to wonder what her essential identity is, if there is one, and decides to take on a model of identity to exist and perform for others through discursive repetitions. For example, her relationship with Leah is “based on verbs, not nouns” (179), and Keisha evaluates their relationship with what they are doing, rather than being. As Moya Lloyd summarises Butler’s thoughts, Keisha’s identity “has no abiding essence, except as the effect of performative enactment” (Lloyd 2005, 25).

As Butler discusses in *Bodies That Matter*, “[p]erformativity is thus not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present” (Butler 1993, 12). Therefore, the girls’ actions are reiterations of similar acts that are common in everyday lives: running, jumping, singing, riding bikes, reading magazines, sharing chips, sneaking cigarettes, and “many other things of this nature” (Smith 2012, 179).

Moreover, Keisha builds her identity based on language, which enables her to conform to repetitive enactments. She is a child who “could not start something without finishing it [which] manifested itself as ‘intelligence’” (178). Due to this “compulsion [Keisha found herself] in search of something like ‘completion’ [...] every unknown word sent her to a dictionary [and] every book led to another book” (178). This rotation implies Keisha’s desire to learn the language to invent herself through repetitive cycles of reading and learning. Drawing on Derrida, Butler repudiates the sentence Leah hears on the radio at the very beginning of the novel: “I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me” (Smith 2012, 3). Butler follows Derrida and emphasises what we constitute as dialogue is “a performative utterance” (Butler 1993, 13). “According to Derrida, the only reason that a performative utterance works is because it repeats or reiterates a ‘coded’ model [and] the practice and possibility of citationality” (Derrida 1991, 104 as cited in Lloyd 2005, 25) makes a performative enunciation succeed.

Therefore, “Derrida makes clear that this power [of performative discourse] is not the function of an originating will, but is always derivative” (Butler 1993, 13).

Similarly, Keisha comments that her compulsion to complete every word and sentence, which “others mistook for intelligence was in fact only a sort of mutation of the will” (Smith 2012, 178). Although she is “crazy busy with self-invention” (209) and believes she can do it, she is also aware of the language’s derivability and opacity. When she ponders on the difference between clitoral and vaginal orgasms, she lacks the specific vocabulary to describe her sensations and considers that it can be “simply a phenomenological problem. If Leah Hanwell said the flower is blue and Keisha Blake said the flower is blue how could they be sure that by the word ‘blue’ they were apprehending the same phenomenon?” (190). Furthermore, as Keisha narrates and hence reinvents her story, she knows that “[p]eople were not people but merely an effect of language. You could conjure them up and kill them in a sentence” (248). With Keisha’s self-invention, Smith questions the existence of an authorial or authentic writer of our sentences. As much occupied as Keisha is with her reinvention, her selfhood is an effect of her repetitive enunciations to which she is conditioned.

In order to analyse the points Keisha takes as a reference to reinvent herself, this thesis will observe her idea of self-invention, her double identity under the impact of popular culture references, and digital invention. All these factors become influential discourses for Keisha to rebuild her identity and perform for others. Zadie Smith brings a contemporary perspective to the conversation of black British subjectivity and argues if we are free to choose who we are in the existence of physical and digital tools for self-invention.

Keisha’s narrative, as mentioned above, constitutes 184 listicles, which symbolises her fragmented identity. She is obsessed with the process to reinscribe her selfhood and uses listicles to build her life. Since Smith represents her life as a text and her text as a life, the use of listicles as a narrative form represents her inauthentic self-invention because listicles are deprived of deep meaning and only demonstrate the

superficial aspect of a text. Therefore, she moves from her lower-class background in Caldwell to her upper-middle-class milieu while renaming herself and her life.

Firstly, Keisha's notion of self is affected by the social discourses to which the contemporary world has been exposed. Stuart Hall, who aims to analyse the question of identity in "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," under the influence of globalisation contends that identity has become "a point at which, on the one hand, a whole set of new theoretical discourses intersect and where, on the other, a whole new set of cultural practices emerge" (Hall 2009, 42). Keisha's journey to put on an identity passes by these theories about identity and new 'cultural practices.' Furthermore, going further in his analysis of identity in a globalised world, Hall asserts that "identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self" (49).

In this context, Keisha's self-articulation becomes her way of narrating herself as she navigates in life. Since Keisha's self-invention resembles the process of writing a narrative, I argue that her process can be seen as diary-writing. Her self-awareness of her hybridity and in-between situation as a black British woman leads to her self-invention in the way of diary-writing, which renders her subjecthood artificial. In her essay, "Life-Writing," Zadie Smith emphasises the "dishonesty of diary-writing – this voice you put on for supposedly no one but yourself" and confesses that while writing her diary entries she attempted to "frame things to [her] advantage in case so-and-so at school picked it up and showed it to everybody" (Smith 2018, 787). While Keisha gives place to her memories, albeit written by a third-person narrator, she is also too self-conscious, and her anecdotes revolve around her ambition to reinvent herself. For example, when she mentions "their fundamental compatibility" (Smith 2012, 209) with Frank, she says Frank, like herself, is "too full of himself and vain and posh and racially confused" (209) and she could ask him "to accompany her on the strange life journey she was preparing to undertake" (209).

Moreover, her self-awareness shows itself when she insists Frank on writing his narrative, hence reinventing his 'racially confused' self. When Frank reduces his whole childhood and adulthood into a short sentence, "[r]are Negroid Italian has happy childhood, learns Latin, the end. Then nothing very interesting happens between 1987 and tonight" (221), Natalie fusses about it as though she is a babysitter: "[p]erhaps she would always look after him, help him become a real person. After all, she was strong!" (221). Similarly, she wonders "whether Frank's boarding school might have done the same job for him" (222) in the next chapter entitled "Nota bene" ("Please note") to draw the reader's attention. Being aware of her self-invention process, she forces others to articulate their narratives through representations as well.

Furthermore, she interprets the events that revolve around others according to her own narrative. While making theories about Michelle Holland, another person from Brayton in their university, she confesses to observe "the progress of Michelle Holland with a closer attention than she did her own life – without ever speaking to her" (212). Natalie assumes Michelle is from Caldwell, her father is in jail, and her mother is sectioned, and as a person, Michelle is "sensitive and sincere, awkward, defensive, lonely" (212). She justifies her assumptions in the frame of her own background: "It was Natalie's belief that she, Natalie Blake, didn't have to say a word to Michelle Holland to know all of this – that she could look at the way Michelle walked and know it" (212). Smith also embroiders this section to draw the reader's attention to the artificiality of her interpretation and hence self-awareness with subsequent sentences in parenthesis: "(Natalie presumed), (This was Natalie's interpretation), (Natalie's conclusion)" (212). After presuming she has the knowledge about Michelle's life, Natalie uses the novel's catchphrase as well, "I am the sole author" (212), implying that she can have control of her life's and others from the same background. She not only reinscribes her selfhood through representations but also pries into other marginalised selves.

Consequently, Natalie writes her life/diary as she keeps her guard up lest someone gets a wrong impression of her as Smith herself eluded, or in other words so

that she can adroitly perform. Smith continues to argue in her essay that “[a]t that rate the writing of the life will take longer than the living of it” (Smith 2018, 789). Similarly, Keisha is quite conscious about time, especially in regards to womanhood. Not only she plans to complete her life phases such as childhood, university, and the law degree in the given time, she also wants to settle in the social script written for women with a successful job, husband, and children (208, 216, 268) in a time span that is socially accepted suitable for women. Her awareness of the speed of time and her anxious state for trying to keep up with time are seen in chapters entitled “Time speeds up” (269, 275). Analysing neoliberal spatiality’s influence on the subjectivity in *NW*, Tan Ciyiltepe comments that time is an important factor in the constitution of subjectivity under the effect of “the continuing neoliberal assault on personal time in the twenty-first century” (Ciyiltepe 2017, 57). Agreeing with this point, I would also add that Natalie’s anxious state of mind regarding time’s speed results from the incompatibility of time between living and narrating one’s life, as Smith emphasised in her essay and the social script written for women.

As Natalie mentions “[t]here was much written about this phenomenon in the ‘Woman’ section of Sunday supplements, and Natalie read this material with interest. The key to it all was the management of time” (Smith 2012, 274). This section not only implies women’s anxiety in the modern neoliberal world where time is problematic, and the ‘War on Terror’ attitude prevails but also their concerns regarding their biological clock. In the chapter entitled “Nature becomes culture,” Natalie realises the “difference in procreative age between men and women. Age itself” (262). Furthermore, she acknowledges her connection to time as a woman: “Women come bearing time. Natalie had brought time into this house. She couldn’t stop mentioning the time, and worrying about it. If only she could free herself from her body” (264). As being the female protagonists of *NW*, both “Natalie Blake and Leah Hanwell were of the belief that people were willing them to produce” (268), the narrator writes in Natalie’s 158th chapter. Natalie realises women are bound by time in the contemporary culture, decides to “go to war against these matters, like a soldier” (262), acts accordingly, and assumes that “time management was [her] gift” (274). However, she simultaneously finds herself

in her anxious state of mind. While Natalie's awareness of time is given in the "Semi-detached" (274) chapter, she wishes "if only she could slow the whole thing down" in "Time speeds up" (275). Similarly, the moment she realises she would "exist for other people" (179), the chapter is entitled "Thrown" (179).

All the subtle references to the speedy time and states of being 'thrown' and 'detached' demonstrate Natalie's sense of living apart from the world in which she inhabits and the anxiety resulting from her in-between self. She neither lives in the world overwhelmed by ideologies and discourses nor becomes authentic in the process of remaking herself. The relentless attempt to become 'the sole author' of her identity clashes with the invention process's artificiality, which causes her to perform and feel anxious.

Natalie's performative self and awareness about her reinvention process present themselves in her daily activities. The narrator describes her day with stage directions (274). When Natalie and Frank meet their friends, Ameeta and Imran, to have Saturday brunch, Natalie describes the moment as "a more lively occasion than usual, and more comfortable, as if by rejoining a commercial set and acting, at least in part, for the interests of corporations" (250). This event of 'set and acting' wherein Natalie acts according to scripts is also evoked in the chapter entitled "Spectacle", where Frank and Natalie's life is described as an everyday event, about which Natalie feels conscious and acts accordingly:

The Blake-De Angelises started work early and tended to finish late, and in the gaps treated each other with an exaggerated tenderness, as if the slightest applied pressure would blow the whole thing to pieces. [...] They only truly came together at weekends, in front of friends, for whom they appeared fresh and vibrant (they were only thirty years old), and full of the old good humour, like a double act who only speak to each other when they are on stage (254-5).

As seen in these examples, Natalie constantly performs according to social discourses and changes her identity based on different socioeconomic backgrounds in

which she enters. Since Natalie's rewriting of her self and narrative are associated with each other, the repeated 'sole author' phrase becomes a subtle reference to the artificial creative processes of a self and text. As Beatriz Pérez Zapata similarly argues, *NW* emphasises this artificiality "through the dictum 'I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me,' calling attention to how selves and texts must be understood as fictions that can never emerge in isolation and that will thus never be original or authentic" (Zapata 2020, 185). Not surprisingly, Natalie breaks down in two parts of the novel, which makes her realise the artificiality and in-betweenness of her identity:

'Really good to see you,' said Leah. 'You're the only person I can be all of myself with.' Which comment made Natalie begin to cry, not really at the sentiment but rather out of a fearful knowledge that if reversed the statement would be tendered practically meaningless, Ms Blake having no self to be, not with Leah, or anyone. (208).

Leah's comment makes Natalie confront herself, or rather the self she tries to take on, and she is overwhelmed by the 'fearful knowledge' of having no self at all, which renders the whole practice meaningless. The latter example happens when she has lunch with Layla, with whom Keisha sang and made notes and noticed her forgery after a Lacanian mirror scene as a child (188), and she experiences another breakdown of the 'fearful knowledge':

'Right. It's not like I have to become another person just because –'
'You always wanted to make it clear you weren't like the rest of us. You're still doing it.
[...]
She was struck with dread. Her heart beat madly. She had a schoolgirl's impulse to report Layla Dean née Thompson to the waiter. Layla's being horrible to me!
Layla hates me!
[...]
'Even when we used to do those songs you'd be with me but also totally not with me. Showing off. False. Fake. Signalling to the boys in the audience, or whatever.'
'Layla, what are you talking about?'
'And you're still doing it.' (278).

As she feels terrified in the former experience, she is anxious after Layla's accusation of Natalie's inauthentic self and in-betweenness. She uses self-denial as a defence mechanism to protect her invention for which she has spent all her childhood and adulthood; however, despite all her denials, she comes to the realisation of the artificiality of her reinvention. This artificiality hence erases her notion of permanent and stable identity. Although Natalie uses the storytelling of her self as a means to make "the future safe" (242), her future becomes distant to any sense of safety and stability. Referring to the modern identity under the impact of globalisation as a narrative, Stuart Hall continues his discussion by explaining that identity "is not a sealed or closed totality" (Hall, 49) because identities revolve around social discourses and discourses do not have an ontological status outside of social practices to which they are bound, which make them apt to change through time. Similarly, Butler asserts that "construction is neither a single act nor a casual process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction [...] is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms" (Butler 1995, 10) and discourses. Therefore, Natalie's identity tends to change as norms change through time and different social regulations. In this context, the subsequent chapter is not a coincidence, entitled "In drag" (Smith 2012, 278), which, I assert, evokes Butler's notion of drag.

Pondering on the question of performativity through gender, Butler poses questions to rethink the gender normativity: "what is gender, how is it produced and reproduced, what are its possibilities?" (Butler 1999, xxiii). Since gender performativity functions under the norms such as "ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity" (xxiii), the reiteration of these norms cause heteronormativity and excludes those who do not meet the definition. In other words, these norms "establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be 'real'" (xxiii).

If norms are products of social discourses, how do we decide what is real or not? How can we classify a non-heterosexual person, for example, unintelligible just because s/he does not conform to normativity? Butler provides drag as an answer to these

questions, which enables us to understand that “‘reality’ is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be” (xxiii-xxiv). Butler uses the discussion of drag to expose the “ostensible reality” (xxii) of gender:

If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the “reality” of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks “reality,” and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance (xxii).

Therefore, drag renders what we know as “gender reality” (xxii) as “mere artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion” (xxii). The difference between outside and inside one’s body turns the gender, which has socially been essentialised and normalised, into an illusion. “If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies,” Butler argues, “genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of [...] identity” (174).

Since gender is rendered as a ‘fabrication’ in Butler’s context, “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (174). In other words, drag unveils both the performative nature of gender, which becomes another social norm and its inauthenticity. Butler’s drag is deployed in *NW* through Keisha/Natalie’s performative acts depending on her social circumstances. Therefore, Natalie’s 170th chapter of her self-invention evokes Butler’s concept of drag:

Daughter drag. Sister drag. Mother drag. Wife drag. Court drag. Rich drag. Poor drag. British drag. Jamaican drag. Each required a different wardrobe. But when considering these various attitudes she struggled to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least authentic (Smith 2012, 278).

Also analysing Butler’s theory in regards to Natalie’s identity reconstitution, Beatriz Pérez Zapata states that Natalie’s concept of drag is used in *NW* “not only for gender, but also for Natalie’s disguises in terms of class, nationality and the private/

public divide, exposing them as constructions” (Zapata 2014, 92). Natalie, as the contemporary hybrid subject, thus finds herself in-between every social role. As she becomes a daughter, sister, mother, wife, lawyer; or as she gets richer, poorer; or as she reconciles with Her Jamaican roots, British routes; she changes her acts and identities as clothes. Navigating through her “strange life journey” (Smith 2012, 209), she searches for a self that will be the truest, yet encounters with a mere conclusion that her self-invention is “perhaps the least authentic” (278). As a consequence, Smith portrays the impossibility of an original identity. “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*” (Butler 1999, 175), as Butler concludes.

As the ultimate section implies, the novel tackles the self’s ‘imitative structure’ in terms of gender, race, class, and sexuality. “‘I got something to tell you,’ said Keisha Blake, disguising her voice with her voice” (Smith 2012, 333). Implying Natalie’s different selves as an inevitable part of contemporary identity “torn between pride and shame” (Smith 2009, 390), Smith is not timid to show the elusive nature of a self. Most individuals in our recent world have mixed cultural backgrounds, hence “messy histories [...] and multiple narratives” (381). Our multitude makes us messy yet does not define us as more artificial or inferior than the other. It rather makes us flexible, and Smith suggests flexibility as a way to navigate through the postmillennial world, for “flexibility of voice leads to a flexibility in all things” (409). Self is a complex structure in a constant state of flux between opposing ideologies and voices, and we change our voice by disguising it with our other voice as postcolonial subjects, which creates the harmonious coexistence of human nature.

5.3.2. Double Identity – ‘The longer she spent alone the more indistinct she became to herself.’

Postcolonial literature has often analysed split identities as they remain between spaces of their host and home nations. As Homi Bhabha observes in *The Location of Culture*, the complex and constantly changing identities of postcolonial identities are constituted in “the Third Space” (Bhabha 1994, 37), which “challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originally Past” (37). In this context, *NW*’s London represents the Third Space where “the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable” (37). Moreover, this in-between space that paves the way for new identity reinscriptions is based “on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (38). Using Renée Green’s use of the stairwell as “a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness” (3-4), Bhabha asserts that this in-between situation “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4).

As we have seen in *Small Island*, the stairwell at Queen’s house is a symbolic liminal space, “leading to the top floor [as] a transitional space of ambiguity and uncertainty” (Duboin 2011, 27). It becomes a threshold for Hortense to build her identity in relation to the Other. Using this liminal place to reach her destiny, Hortense reconciles with her Jamaican identity that carries the traces of her past at the end of the novel. In the previous chapter, I have concluded that she chooses both her “roots and routes” (Gilroy 1993, 133) at the beginning of multicultural Britain. Keisha/Natalie, on the other hand, remains stuck in her liminal space as a hybrid postcolonial subject and chooses to erase her past identity. She aims to leave her working-class and black backgrounds to climb the social ladder of London. Although both Hortense and Keisha remain at the threshold and do not feel they belong to London, Hortense resists her counter experiences with embracing her past and future while reinscribing them. Keisha becomes Natalie in her self-invention and symbolises the artificial identity that is overwhelmed in postmillennial discourses. She takes on a double identity, stuck

between opposing ideologies and identity politics. She constitutes her double self with popular culture references.

Keisha's first attempt to reinvent herself is through changing her name to Natalie, which hides the Jamaican connotations and makes her name sound more like a middle-class white woman. Zadie Smith changed her name from Sadie to Zadie at fourteen that is a critical period as seen in Keisha and Leah's life: "[n]ow that the girls were fourteen, a new policy revealed itself" (Smith 2012, 184). It should be no coincidence that Smith chooses fourteen as a critical period in girls' lives where a policy is unveiled when she herself made the radical decision of changing her name at that age. Although Smith's motive behind her decision is not stated, it is possibly her inspiration to create Keisha/Natalie, and their reasons may align with each other.

In her essay, "Speaking of Tongues," Smith explains that her English with which she grew up changed during her college years at Cambridge "along with the unabridged Clarissa" (Smith 2009, 365). She thought, "this was the voice of lettered people, and that if [she] didn't have the voice of lettered people [she] would never truly be lettered" (366). Speaking differently at home (Willesden) and college (Cambridge) gave her "the flexibility of [...] being alive twice" (367).

The split identity Smith herself experienced is embodied by Keisha in Smith's fiction. With a desire to leave her Willesden background, Keisha becomes Natalie and adopts the double voice of her family and her college friends. As she says, "parental legacy meant little to Keisha Blake, it was her solid sense that she was in no way the creation of her parents" (Smith 2012, 181) and with "an unforgettable pulse of authorial omnipotence" (178), she assumes "[m]aybe the world really was hers for the making" (178), which becomes influential for the rest of her journey. Smith's notion of 'flexibility' aligns with Keisha's sense of 'authorial omnipotence,' and hence she changes her name to Natalie, as the protagonist of her story. After referring to herself as "Ms Blake" (202), she is introduced as Natalie by Leah to both Leah's friends and actual readers of *NW* (203) in the chapter entitled "Proper names" (203). "University is

a time of experimentation and metamorphosis” (202), Natalie comments, evoking Smith’s experimentation with her double tongues. Smith, as if responding to Natalie’s observation about how to turn experimentation into a permanent action, says “flexibility is something that requires work if it is to be maintained” (Smith 2009, 367) since Smith’s choice of picking up a new voice was like “an exotic garment [she] put on like a college gown” (367). Seeing a direct connection between changing one’s voice and direction on the social ladder, Smith further comments:

If you go (metaphorically speaking) down the British class scale, you’ve gone from Cockney to “mockney” and can expect a public tarring and feathering; to go the other way is to perform an unforgivable act of class betrayal. [...] We feel that our voices are who we are, and that to have more than one, or to use different versions of a voice for different occasions, represents, at best, a Janus-faced duplicity, and at worst, the loss of our very souls. Whoever changes their voice takes on, in Britain, a queerly tragic dimension. They have betrayed that puzzling dictum “To thine own self be true” (368-9).

Natalie’s decision to change her voice, name, social class, and identity brings her to a clashing situation where she cannot be her true self. Hence, she realises her “forgery” (188) after looking at the mirror. She, then, takes on a double personality.

Acknowledging that “Natalie Blake was crazy busy with self-invention” (209), she “put her faith in [...] politics and literature, music, cinema” (209). By adopting these forms to build her double identity, she refuses her religious, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Popular culture embodies the self-referential points that modern identities put on themselves. Playing with popular culture references is not innovative for Smith. Beatriz Pérez Zapata analyses how Smith has entangled them with her previous novels such as *White Teeth* (2000), *The Autograph Man* (2002), and *On Beauty* (2005) (Zapata 2020, 183). *NW* refers to several popular culture images as well. For example, when Keisha and Leah look for “[s]ome answers” (Smith 2012, 176) to define their favourite singers, movies, and songs, Smith gives place to Bob Marley, Madonna, Michael Jackson, Harrison Ford, *Hurricane*, *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *E.T.* (176). Moreover, Keisha and Leah learn “the obscene dance

popularized by Salt-N-Pepa, and many other things of this nature” (179) such as *Vivre Sa Vie* (184), *Black Orpheus* (209), and *She’s Gotta Have It* (271). Furthermore, as writing becomes a form of self-invention for her, as I have discussed in the previous section, reading books is also an expression for self-reading for Keisha. “Every unknown word sent her to a dictionary – in search of something like ‘completion’ – and every book led to another book, a process which of course could never be completed” (178).

With her attempts to erase her past with discourses she learns, Keisha’s life becomes reminiscent of this vicious circle of reading books. “As might be expected, this route through life gave her no small portion of joy, and indeed it seemed at first that her desires and her capacities were basically aligned” (178). This route of reading books suffocates her as she explains as “the last thing a drowning person needs is another drowning person clinging to them” (192) when Marcia introduces Rodney Banks to her as a person always reading like Keisha. In the subsequent instalment titled “On the other hand,” Keisha says, “[b]eggars cannot be choosers” (192). Since her identity reconstitution revolves around performative acts and popular culture references, she lacks an authentic personality, as mocked by Smith from the beginning of Keisha’s narrative. Thus, Keisha is a beggar who goes through all self-invention processes with every popular culture reference she learns. I would argue this process is also not real alongside Baudrillard’s ‘simulacra and simulation’ theory (1981).

Jean Baudrillard argues that the postmodern era suffers from the hyperreal consequences of our media-driven lifestyles. Television has become a medium that distorts reality as “the first great formula of this new era [which] is now intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real” (Baudrillard 1995, 22). Consequently, he argues that media has replaced the real with the hyperreal simulacra “without origin or reality” (3). It is an artificial process because it has no real images; it is “a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (3).

As Tracey K. Parker reads Smith's *The Autography Man* through Baudrillard's ideas, she explains that "[i]f the contemporary subject is invested in pursuing simulacra with lives coordinated within the hyperreal, then by default, such an existence becomes superficial, devoid of substance" (Parker 2013, 70). In this context, Natalie's creating herself in the impact of popular cultural images deprives her of any real substance. The referents such as Salt-N-Pepa (Smith 2012, 181), *Vivre Sa Vie* (184), James Baldwin and Jesus (192), reading Albert Camus (193) and Friedrich Nietzsche (197), and dressing as Angela Davis (211) give her no meaningful sense of identity. These referents make her create a double identity for herself, influenced by "Discourse Founders" (211), and as the *Black Orpheus* reference implies, she becomes a doppelgänger in herself.

I have already emphasised Natalie's self-invention process, the realisation of her Other self and forgery (188), her thought experiment of splitting her personality: "At what point would you cease to be yourself? At what point would you become another person?" (196). I will further elaborate on this chapter when Natalie acknowledges her double personality. In the 102nd chapter, "Save yourself," the narrator begins the sentence as "[t]o explain herself to herself, Natalie Blake employed a conventional image" (225). Natalie, who has strived to build another personality for herself since her childhood, feels a need to explain herself to herself. Although the 'conventional image' consists of a broad river, turbulent water, and stepping stones, which helps Smith play with the literary realist tradition of using nature's images as a method to describe characters' inner turmoils, this need for an image can also be attributed to Baudrillard's simulacra. She runs out of money and does not know how to pass this gap which is "almost too wide to jump" (225). Then, Frank offers his family's money to Natalie, whose "invention of love" (208, 216) phases gain material meaning: "[l]ow-status person with intellectual capital but no surplus wealth seeks high-status person of substantial surplus wealth for enjoyment of mutual advantages, including longer life expectancy, better nutrition, fewer working hours and earlier retirement, among other benefits" (227). Natalie's identity is thus shaped around the imaginary orbit, which

consists of nothing real, but merely hyperreal simulacra. The different personalities become like a wardrobe for her and lead her to self-confusion:

[...] Natalie feared that in her own - Natalie's - absence, her own - Natalie's - personality was also being encapsulated by Pol, although she could not bring herself to truly fear this possibility because at base she could not believe that she - Natalie - could ever be spoken about in the way she - Natalie - spoke about others and heard others spoken about. But for the sake of a thought experiment: what was Natalie Blake's personality constructed around? (230).

Natalie's identity is split around social discourses and hyperreal simulacra of the media-driven contemporary world. She attempts to explain herself to herself and inhabits alongside other Natalies in her body. In the "Conspiracy" chapter, Natalie points out that both she and Leah are aware that "[r]elatives, strangers on the street, people on television, everyone" (268) expect them to give birth. Similarly, Natalie forwards the emails attached with mothers' pictures alongside their newborn babies to Leah (262) with the same consciousness. I have already argued that Natalie's self-invention revolves around the script pre-written for womanhood. What I would like to emphasise further is that Baudrillard's notion of simulacra that is created by media influences Natalie to wear the dress of motherhood as well. Natalie calls this consciousness a "conspiracy [that] went deeper than Hanwell imagined" (268), which makes Natalie feel like "a double agent" (268), who knows about the conspiracies but also performs for them. She is also 'a double agent' on Leah's side because Leah is aware of her social scripts as well but refuses to conform to them by taking secretly contraceptive pills and having an abortion.

Consequently, social discourses and popular culture references that Natalie puts on in her self-invention brings her a double identity. If she does not accept the pre-written and arbitrary script, she fears the experience "of being made ridiculous by failing to do whatever was expected of her" (268). The situation she finds herself as a contemporary hybrid subject symbolises the process of self-articulation that has changed since *Small Island's* Hortense. This transformation also demonstrates that the postcolonial subject is always "in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse

each time we think or speak” (Weedon 1987, 33). The final part of my thesis regarding Zadie Smith’s *NW* will tackle Natalie’s shattered identity vis-à-vis motherhood, digital self-invention and her realisation of the artificiality and absurdity of the notion of authentic identities. Her way of throwing herself to the streets of NW symbolises her in-between situation in issues of race, class, and gender and her struggle to reterritorialise her space in London as a black British woman.

I have analysed so far why and how Keisha/Natalie Blake goes through a self-invention process through diary-writing, social discourses, performative actions, and popular culture references. Through the narrative, she proceeds to rewrite her identity and leaves the corners of her socioeconomic, religious, and racial backgrounds. Although she changes her name to adopt a more white, middle-class persona, Natalie uses her black identity to conform to society in regards to the current social situation of Britain. For example, while writing her social criticism, she types:

I am very aware that I am not what most people have in mind when they think of a ‘Banker’s wife’. I am a highly educated black woman. I am a successful lawyer (Smith 2012, 273).

Natalie wears her blackness, education, and profession as a means to prove her identity to her audience and herself. The identity she puts on is unlike what Stuart Hall suggests with “Identity Politics One” (Hall 1997, 52) that black people have adopted to explore their roots, culture, and language as a practice of resistance against racism in Britain. Instead, Natalie’s racial, gender, and professional features lose their meanings and become a digital document in the absence of the real in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, Leah helps fund “a charity auction for a young black women’s collective” (Smith 2012, 286) and invites Natalie to speak for black women. Speaking at the podium, Natalie gives a speech about what she knows as methods to construct successful subjectivity in postmillennial Britain: “time management, identifying goals, working hard, respecting oneself and one’s partner, and the importance of a good education” (287). As much as her words may sound sincere to her audience, her mind travels “to obscene tableaux. She wondered what Leah and Michel, who always seemed

to have their hands on each other, did in the privacy of their bedroom. Orifices, positions, climaxes” (287). She is devoted to neither her speech nor the cause of the auction, which makes her action a performative gesture. “In between the top of page two and the beginning of page three she must have been reading out loud and making sense, there must have appeared to be an unbroken continuity - no one in the audience was looking at her like she was crazy” (287), the narrator describes. In her attempt to create ‘an unbroken continuity,’ the speech symbolises how she enacts in her life according to racial, social, class, and gender expectations despite her very much broken identity. The chapter shows that Natalie refuses her black identity, attempting to rewrite another one that is not bound by racial and class connotations. Speaking in a charity that is organised to help black women and not helping the real causes, Natalie artificially speaks up only to demonstrate her self-invention and attempts to convince both her audience and herself that she is real. “‘And it was by refusing to set myself artificial limits,’ explained Natalie Blake to the collective young black women, ‘that I was able to reach my full potential.’” (287).

However, Natalie is unsure what her ‘full potential’ even means and whether she has succeeded to unlock it. It is not only Natalie that is unsure of herself. Leah is similarly unable to comprehend Natalie because of the artificial image Natalie creates, in which she cannot believe herself:

‘You’re difficult for her to understand.’

‘Why? What’s difficult about me?’

‘You have your work. You have Frank. You’ve got all these friends. You’re getting to be so successful. You’re never lonely.’

Natalie tried to picture the woman being described (268).

Despite all her attempts to recreate a new real personality, Natalie fails not only to create an authentic subject but also to comprehend the one she has created. The last attempt to find the realness becomes the experimentation of motherhood, for it is what society expects from women. Being an expert in time management and afraid of being ridiculed by others for not meeting what is expected from her, Natalie uses her last

chance to approach reality with giving birth. The birth forms the last phase of her self-invention as a black British woman, and she assumes motherhood will fulfil her because social discourses demand women to produce. However, being pregnant “brought Natalie only more broken images from the great mass of cultural detritus she took in every day on a number of different devices” (269). As discussed above, popular culture references that Natalie pivots her life around give Natalie hyperreal images, and her life will become simulacra (Baudrillard 1995, 3). Similarly, the narrator comments that “[t]here is an image system at work in the world. We wait for an experience large or brutal enough to disturb it or break it open completely, but this moment never quite arrives. Maybe it comes at the very end, when everything breaks and no more images are possible” (Smith 2012, 269). The contemporary media-driven world, its anxieties, and social discourses hence form Natalie’s identity only to make it “intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real” (Baudrillard 1995, 22). Natalie realises that her identity is far from authenticity or consistency when she does not feel complete during her pregnancy as well. “To behave in accordance with these images bored her” (Smith 2012, 269); the narrator describes Natalie’s state of mind, implying her unsatisfied self overwhelmed with hyperreal images, and continues “[t]o deviate from them filled her with the old anxiety. She grew anxious that she was not anxious about the things you were meant to be anxious about” (269).

This passage demonstrates Natalie’s realisation of her shattered identity despite her struggle to rewrite a stable identity while her attempts to keep up with the time of contemporary Britain with her ‘old anxiety.’ Her friend, Layla, comments that having a child is like “meeting yourself at the end of a dark alley” (270); however, “[t]hat was not to be for Natalie Blake” (270) because of her lack of a self. Consequently, her childbearing becomes “the brutal awareness of the real that she had so hoped for and desired - that she hadn’t even realized she was counting on - failed to arrive” (270). Since motherhood is another discourse that is imposed on women in postmillennial Britain, it does not bring Natalie the sense of a stable self. With the delivery, she realises she has counted on the arrival of the real; however, her artificial reconstitution leaves her with a diffracted identity.

As the next eponymous chapter implies, Natalie becomes a m(o)ther in herself. The person Natalie has become is a doubt for her as the eponymous vignette implies in the 167th section: “Spike began to speak. His favourite things to say was: ‘This is my mummy.’ The emphasis varied. ‘This is *my* mummy. This is my *mummy*. *This* is my mummy.’” (275). However, Natalie approaches Spike’s identification with doubt. In the constitution of her split identity, she becomes a stranger to herself and cannot comprehend real any longer.

5.3.3.Reinstalled Identity – ‘Truth is stranger than fiction.’

The otherness Natalie feels in her self-invention is reflected primarily in the digital realm. I would argue that her shattered identity’s digital reflection distinguishes contemporary black women’s identity reconstitutions from the previous selfhood creations like Hortense in *Small Island*. As Baudrillard suggests, the postmodern world’s artificial images have lost their real meanings and turned the world into a realm of hyperreal. Attempting to reinvent herself but struggling to find a real identity, Keisha/Natalie ends up reinstalling an identity for herself. When I analysed the “Spectacle” vignette, I mentioned that Natalie is conscious of social scripts and acts accordingly. The subsequent chapter labelled “Listings” tells that “around this time that Natalie Blake began secretly checking the website” (255) and finds herself more addicted every day. She justifies the time she spends on her Blueberry as “‘I have it for work.’ ‘It’s for work - I don’t pay for it.’ ‘I’ve got to have it for work, and actually it makes a lot of things easier.’ ‘It’s my work phone, otherwise I wouldn’t even have one.’” (255).

Moreover, her digital addiction opposes her performative identity, and she becomes more hungry for time: “Natalie Blake, who told people she abhorred expensive gadgets and detested the Internet, adored her phone and was helplessly, compulsively, adverbly addicted to the Internet” (255). She grows impatient while trying to download “the new website of her chambers before the doors closed on the elevator in Convent Garden Station” (255). Smith’s subtle description of a modern-day individual is deployed here when Natalie cannot wait for her “twenty-minute tube ride” (256) to have her Internet access again. Lourdes López-Ropero (2016) reads Natalie’s reinstalling her identity in the light of *The Aftermath of Feminism*, where Angela McRobbie discusses feminism has been institutionalised through words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’ in media and popular culture (McRobbie 2009, 1) with the influence of “today’s fast-changing world” (Smith 2012, 256).

This new feminism has become a substitute for real feminism and “as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means” (McRobbie 2009, 1). McRobbie further discusses that post-feminism is under the effect of popular

culture and its language, hence constitutes another social discourse that seizes women's lives with "personal narratives, and by colourful 'self-biographies', and by TV programmes like *Fame Academy* or *The Apprentice*, which emphasise talent, determination, and the desire to win, and which feature highly motivated young women" (1). The new discourse resulting from today's "*faux-feminism*" (1) has caused "a new gender divide" (75) that qualifies women "according to their ability to gain qualifications which provide them with an identity as female subjects of capacity" (75). As a consequence, young women have begun to adopt this "the 'can do' girl" (Anita Harris 2003, as cited in López-Ropero 2016, 126). In this context, post-feminism creates a woman who attempts to reconstitute, or rather, reinstall for today's technological means to rewrite our identities, imaginary womanhood that is far from reality and represents a backlash of feminism. In this context, Natalie's digital identity construction symbolises 'the can do girl' alongside "the new gender regime require willingness, motivation and aptitude on the part of young women that if instilled within the school system will be sustained and further developed in the workplace" (McRobbie 2009, 75).

Natalie's reasons to adopt this digital identity stem from her educational and racial background. McRobbie argues that the British school system from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s aimed at a more competitive and accountability-directed schooling regime "so that feminist pedagogy is seen to be a thing of the past, frozen in educational history as marking out a moment of outmoded radicalism" (McRobbie 2009, 76). The generation of this regime has coincided with the aftermath of 9/11 events and its anxious environment, reforming vocabularies of assimilation and integration rather than those of cultural difference and multiculturalism. Keisha uses education to achieve her purposes in life and leave traces of Northwest London behind. She studies diligently, reads adamantly, and works hard to firm her place up in courts as a barrister and reach her potential. However, as López-Ropero discusses in her paper, McRobbie's post-feminist identity at issue is "illusory and unsustainable" (McRobbie 2009, 120, as cited in López-Ropero 2016, 129) and leaves Natalie unfulfilled. As I have discussed, Natalie attempts to climb her social ladder by adopting different values and prioritising

her educational and professional success. She is filled with ambition and believes that “life was a problem that could be solved by means of professionalization” (Smith 2012, 202). López-Ropero similarly argues that Natalie goes through her self-invention as being “actively engaged in the production of [her] self,” (McRobbie 2009, 60, as cited in López-Ropero 2016, 130) “through her adoption of an ethos of meritocracy and individualism, overcoming familial, class and race barriers” (López-Ropero 2016, 130) and her “life is guided by the principles of expediency and pragmatism” (130).

Taking into consideration popular media examples that commodify women for the male gaze, McRobbie further discusses that digital channels of communication disparage feminism and create images about femininity that not only has no essential connection with womanhood and inclusivity but also exploits these notions. Similarly, Natalie’s self-invention goes through the digital reconstitution phase under the impact of the neoliberal conservative values and discourses of authentic identity. She produces a digital identity for herself by using her real name in her email, “keishaNW@gmail.com,” and engages in extramarital sexual activities. She struggles to adopt an authentic identity with “the new-found freedoms of young women in the west” (McRobbie 2009, 19). Moreover, Michelle S. Bae argues that women’s mediated images through popular media centralises whiteness and the middle class. Drawing on Banet-Weiser (2007), she emphasises that the post-feminist media image encourages young women to be “cool, authentic, and urban” (Banet-Weiser 2007, 204, as cited in Bae 2011, 33), making women “racially ambiguous” (Bae 2011, 33). In this context, the conservation of freedom, choice, and empowerment become “pseudoliberation” (29) under the neoliberal capitalist system.

Natalie’s attempts to perform according to racial and gender norms and adopt ‘the can do girl’ attitude with her education and profession bring her to reinstall a digital identity and become addicted to her online persona. She tries to shape her digital persona around this discourse that encourages young women to become something that has no real connection. As Tan Ciyiltepe discusses, “Natalie’s alias is not merely an alternate mode of self-presentation but an act of mediation that has been informed by a

particular discourse online” (Ciyiltepe 2017, 92). She begins to spend more time as her digital persona and adopt this persona more profoundly. While waiting for Leah in the park, Natalie checks the listings, emails, and newspapers. When she puts her phone in her pocket, ten further minutes become so unbearable for her, and she cannot stand her loneliness, for it lacks an essential self: “The longer she spent alone the more indistinct she became to herself” (Smith 2012, 268). The indistinctness stems from the artificiality of her identity. Since she feels more indistinct to herself in the absence of her internet connection, I would argue that she uses the digital realm to cover her artificiality in the real world. Natalie’s real-life fake personas in real life eventually shatter in the digital realm. All the meritocratic achievement she has gained to become the successful modern woman and all the performative attitudes she has exhibited to conform to her society’s gender norms lead her to learn the brutal fact about being a racial and gender Other in postmillennial Britain, acquiring this fact as an aphorism: “What a difficult thing a gift is for a woman! She’ll punish herself for receiving it” (288).

The acute realisation of her arbitrary identity that has conformed to what is expected from her hence clashes with what is not expected from her as a wife and mother. Smith brings a representation of complex women who can choose neither heterosexual conformity nor motherhood. Natalie perhaps becomes a fictional representation of the ideas of all the theorists mentioned in this thesis, questions what they have criticised as an artificial and performative identity under social discourses, and puts forth the central question of the novel and contemporary Britain that she faces upon Frank’s interrogation after he has caught her infidelity: “Who *are* you?” (295). Smith’s subtle choice of italicising ‘are’ is not a mere coincidence. By giving the emphasis on the word, Frank demands to know who Natalie is when she stays naked of her social, racial, and gender labels. He interrogates who the different selves are that inhabit under her skin. With the emphasis, Smith also directs the question to *NW*’s readers, actual persons of the actual world, and wants to make them face with the same enquiry. ‘Who *are* you?’ in this context is not only asked to Natalie but also readers. ““What the fuck is this? Fiction?”” (294), Frank asks and although readers know *NW* is

a fictional work, they are equally and acutely aware of its reality that revolves around the contemporary world in which they live.

Natalie's identity crisis then leads her to stroll around Northwest London's streets or "nowhere" (295). However new it seems for Natalie to go just nowhere, the sense of purposelessness has long inhabited in her mind. In the park with her child, Natalie starts shouting: "Nowhere. Said Natalie. Nowhere. Nowhere. NOWHERE" (281), and she only realises it when Naomi tells her to stop shouting lest Natalie could make herself ridiculous. The novel's title hence becomes a postcode not only for Northwest but also nowhere. When she strolls around Willesden Lane, Kilburn High Road, Shoot Up Hill, Fortune Green, Hampstead, Archway, Hampstead Heath, Corner of Hornsey Lane and Hornsey Lane in the "Crossing" section of the novel, she both goes nowhere and reterritorialises London as a complex woman of the contemporary world.

In *Small Island*, I have discussed that Hortense's sense of being lost is reflected in her confusion to find her way in the streets after she is disappointed in her job interview and begins to reterritorialise her surrounding against racism and misogyny by adopting her past values. In *NW*, Natalie's in-between situation is a representation of her walking through the North West.

In her essay, "Speaking of Tongues," Smith further discusses the doubleness of voice/identity and describes the situation of the contemporary hybrid subject extending "through the specter of the tragic mulatto, to the plight of the transsexual, to our present anxiety - disguised as genteel concern - for the contemporary immigrant, tragically split [...] between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices - whatever will become of them?" (Smith 2009, 373). Being a subject of contemporary Britain, Natalie is left with an unknown feeling of going somewhere. Both in her narrative and voyage in the North west, she cannot figure out which direction will lead her to her destination or if she will ever have enough time to reach her destination. Being stuck between discourses, Natalie leaves all

her social identities/drag when she leaves her house without thinking about anything and recognising herself:

She was no one. [...] Walking was what she did now, walking was what she was. She was nothing more or less than the phenomenon of walking. She had no name, no biography, no characteristics. They had all fled into paradox (Smith 2012, 300).

As Michel de Certeau argues, “walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (de Certeau 1984, 97) and hence Natalie reads/writes the city as a pedestrian through walking. I have also pointed that both the text as a city is rewritten, and the city as a text is redrawn in the novel. Natalie’s pedestrian movements symbolise her life; therefore, she continues to write both her story and city. If her life and physical movements in the streets are entangled, Natalie’s confession to Nathan can be taken as her confusion towards life: “I don’t know what I’m doing here” (Smith 2012, 301). When she takes off her drag costumes as a daughter, wife, mother, and barrister, she cannot meet essential selfhood and desires to become an object: “There was some relief in becoming an object. Without making any errors she could serve as a useful buffer between the breeze and these two Rizlas being set carefully in an L construction” (302). She realises through her walking process that she has neglected her past to the extent that each person she knew “was now unrecognizable to her and her imagination [which] did not have the generative power to muster an alternative future for itself” (303). With the chaotic boredom and artificiality she experiences in her life, Natalie feels far from each person in her life and cannot find a way towards a real future. By representing a postmillennial subject who struggles to find her way between discourses and lanes, Smith asks if we ever know our directions, if we will ever have one or “whatever will become of [us]” (Smith 2009, 373). All the reasons I have discussed that caused Keisha to become Natalie stem from her need to function socially, to become a standard person out of marginalised labels - a heterosexual, successful, middle-class, married person in Natalie's case - whose clothes she is willing to put on. However, it all becomes an artefact in the end, and she realises

that there is no specific, pre-written, and socially accepted destination for black British women under the neoliberal world.

5.4. Redrawn London – ‘Walking was what she did now, walking was what she was.’

The last section, entitled “Visitation”, makes the novel have a circular path and end up where it has started. Whereas Leah and Natalie’s lives are told from each other’s perspectives, not in detail, only with subtle references to their relationship, the narrator presents them alone, having a serious conversation about their life and the central issue of the novel: “I don’t understand why we have this life” (Smith 2012, 331). Natalie returns to her house to perform according to her old self, who abets heteronormative roles of womanhood and motherhood. “There was a choice of either status or propulsion” (324) in her actions, and she “couldn’t tell if this was the consequence of a dramatic event, a form of game, or something else again” (324). The last section shows Natalie will continue to struggle in her life by trying to perform what is expected of her.

When she comes to talk to Leah fenced-in hammocks as Leah has begun to narrate her story. Just as Frank has caught Natalie’s secret, Michel finds Leah’s contraceptive pills that are prescribed with Natalie’s name. Both women end up with their exposed secrets and struggle to navigate in contemporary life. Although Leah needs to know what is real and what is happening in their lives, Natalie wastes her time with “a selection of aphorisms, axioms and proverbs the truth content of which she could only assume from their common circulation. [...] Honesty is always the best policy. Love conquers all. Each to her own” (330). Natalie is still under the influence of media culture’s language that becomes too simplistic to talk about their real problems, their tragically split identities, their stagnancy, and their state of being stuck between ideologies. Natalie knows that Leah will not speak unless Natalie sacrifices something equal in return, “a newly minted story, preferably intimate, hopefully secret” (330). Even though Natalie can give her adulterous story, the brute awareness of her artificial identity to her friend, and “an account of her own difficulties and ambivalences, clearly stated, without disguise, embellishment or prettification” (331), Natalie’s identity is strictly tied to her performativity that she is afraid to expose. Her “instinct for self-defence, for self-preservation, was simply too strong” (331).

When Smith analyses Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), she comments that the novel "sits at an anxiety crossroads where a community in recent crisis – the Anglo-American liberal middle class – meets a literary form in long-term crisis, the nineteenth-century lyrical realism" (Smith 2009, 205). I would state that Smith's *NW* then sits at an anxiety crossroads where postcolonial female identities find themselves in crisis with the contemporary juxtaposition – where the path towards freedom that seems attainable clashes with the dominant appearance of social inequalities, which creates the split identities. The question of authenticity revolves around the novel under the bombardment of identity politics and pre-written roles for hybrid subjects. As *Netherland*, *NW* recognises the tenuous nature of a self" (226) and plays with that self. Smith criticises the novel for wishing to offer readers "the authentic story of a self" (229) because the contemporary selfhood is far from being authentic and stable. As seen from the examples and theories, the discourses that have shaped multicultural Britain today does not render an account of authentic self possible. "Are [selves] never perverse?" (229) Smith asks following her discussion and offers us that "selves can be perverse" in the multitude of voices and cultures in postmillennial Britain. When Leah calls Natalie a hypocrite for being a "coconut" (Smith 2012, 63), black outside but white inside, it is not Natalie who is hypocritical but only the racist and heteronormative society that creates an arbitrary hierarchy between skin colours, ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, and class differences.

Natalie attempts to negotiate her life as a hybrid female subject in contemporary urban Britain by adopting tools for self-invention; however, her choice does not make her more perverse or hypocritical when all the images that are bombarded upon us are extensions of hyperreality. Smith presents Natalie as a 'perverse' self but also reminds us of our own perversity, madness, weirdness, and states of being hysterical that have become epithets for our differences. Smith emphasises merely the state of being a self, no less or more than anybody else, by acknowledging our multitude of identities and navigate through life with them. "She had no name, no biography, no characteristics" (300), the narrator says when Natalie leaves her social labels at home and traipses in the North West. Natalie, who symbolises the complex and anxious postcolonial female

subject, has no categories that society has long defined but merely an elusive self with whom she will walk and navigate in life, for “[w]alking was what she did now, walking was what she was” (300).

6. Conclusion – ‘Whatever will become of them?’

Postcolonial literature has long wished to give voice to marginalised individuals’ experiences vis-à-vis colonialism, hostile racism, misogyny, capitalism, neoliberalism, otherisation, and alienation; however, the narratives of women are short of representations in the postcolonial discourse. Although emigrations to Britain brought mostly male individuals, women were equally included in their challenge to find a place and make it home in the host nation. Even though women were given representations, their roles mostly revolved around domestic duties and barely found a place in the public sphere. This dominant representation consequently reduced women into singular frameworks.

Andrea Levy and Zadie Smith are prominent figures who give different representations to women’s experiences in the aftermath of World War II. Their narratives account for diverse women’s lives, hardships, choices, and thoughts and avail the postcolonial literature by offering readers complex female identities. In doing so, both female writers have attempted to change the singular definitions traditionally attributed to women and emphasise the complexity that each woman holds in themselves. Moreover, by giving voice to doubly-colonised individuals in terms of both race and gender, Levy and Smith have diversified the representations of the periphery. At the same time, their characters have changed London’s borders by deterritorialising the city. While rewriting their identities in the metropolis, they have reinscribed the city according to their experiences.

In my thesis, I chose Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004) and Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012) as both novels present black women’s identity (re)constitutions in the metropolis and a timeline between World War II and the postmillennial era in Britain. By analysing these novels, I aimed to observe the changes that play major roles in black women’s lives when they decide to reinscribe their identities. In this context, *Small Island* helped me understand the dramatic change that the British society experienced in the aftermath of World War II and how native Britons reacted to the fast-changing social dynamics of their surroundings. On the other hand, *NW* offered me an account of how black British

women have taken these changes of social dynamics to today and reacted to them while (re)writing their identities. In the timeline of these two novels, I observed that new social discourses were born, and they influenced the black British women's subjectivity today.

The Jamaican migrant of *Small Island*, Hortense, presents us a *Bildungsroman* character who starts her narrative as the daughter of the empire but rewrites her identity along her journey. She is internalised with colonial values, colour hierarchy, and British middle-class fantasy, which represent the mental colonisation of the empire in the aftermath of slavery. Adopting these values and erasing her Jamaican identity, Hortense considers herself a British subject and thinks that she is destined to live in London. With the fragile hope that her mother country would embrace her, she steps into British society only to encounter racism, misogyny, inequality, and verbal abuse against her skin colour. Acknowledging that there is no place for her in British society, Hortense begins to reconstruct her identity by turning to her Jamaican roots and pursuing her destiny in London. She reconciles with her mother, representing Hortense's Jamaican bond, and rebuilds a new life in London with her husband. While analysing Hortense's identity reconstitution, I left my anchor mostly on Stuart Hall's criticism of cultural identity (1994, 1997, 2017) while also consulting also on Amina Mama (1995) and Homi Bhabha (1994), who contributed to postcolonial studies in terms of their analysis of cultural, hybrid, black, and female subjectivity. Their studies enabled me to observe the multicultural formation of London and the influence of its citizens.

Taking the multicultural analysis of London from the aftermath of World War II, I tackled Zadie Smith's *NW* as it displays young black women's attempts to make sense of their surroundings. Keisha/Natalie symbolises many theorists who have explained young women's struggles to construct selfhood under the impact of social norms, online presence, and neoliberal values with her self-invention process. She begins her journey by recognising the barriers that she has in the contemporary London for belonging to racially, socially, and sexually marginalised groups. Her decision to change her name to sound less exotic and adopt several performative norms represents the multicultural

London's hybrid identity that is stuck between discourses, ideologies, and conflicts. Her inner turmoils stem from the complex world in which she inhabits, which leads her to reconstitute a fake persona that is influenced by artificial images, social discourses, popular culture, and the digital realm. Acknowledging that she is not free to choose who she is and what she can achieve, Natalie loses herself both in her life and the streets of London, attempting to know which direction she is supposed to go. To delve into Natalie's self-invention, I read her story alongside Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity (1990, 1993) and Stuart Hall's cultural identity (1994, 1997, 2017) while I also use Homi Bhabha (1994), Jean Baudrillard's simulacra and simulation theory (1981, 1995), and Angela McRobbie's criticism of post-modern feminism (2009) to bring attention to the recent criticisms to analyse postmillennial female identities.

I analysed postmillennial female identities by choosing two novels that portray London and its social milieu in different timelines and respectively observed the motives for black British women to (re)inscribe identities and the influence of their race, class, and gender. As concluding my thesis, I would like to discuss what these female writers suggest as an alternative to cohabit in London that hosts different cultural backgrounds. While Levy and Smith narrate the struggles of black British women who stay in-between situations around the discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality, both novels include a white female protagonist that serves for black protagonists to position themselves in the face of the Other and rebuild their identities. In both novels, female solidarity becomes an alternative for women to make sense of their worlds in time of ideological bombardment and male hegemony.

At the end of *Small Island*, Hortense builds a special connection with Queenie while helping Queenie deliver her secret child. Despite racial and social issues of the time and the power struggle between two women, Queenie trusts only Hortense at a very crucial time. The scene symbolises many vital points at the dawn of multiculturalism in Britain. Firstly, Queenie subverts the social hierarchy that racist and colonial mindset created in the country and chooses Hortense's help over her husband. Although Queenie embraces multicultural diversity since her childhood, she still tries to

establish her authority against Hortense. However, their final reconciliation helps them create an equal bond: “Straightening up, the darkie woman took [Queenie’s] arm. [...] Then both women staggered from the room like battle casualties” (Levy 2004, 474). With the imagery of women like ‘battle casualties’ under the colonial and patriarchal oppression, Levy shows the possibility of female solidarity, albeit their different skin colours, in the face of the exploitation of women. Both Queenie and Hortense struggles to build their home in the patriarchal setting and draw their lives with their own independence and money; therefore, resisting the dominant narrative of male superiority, these women proposes an act of sisterhood to deconstruct the gender and racial norms.

Secondly, Hortense and Queenie are bonded through Queenie’s black child, who is Hortense’s kindred, and this act deconstructs the notion of Englishness as entitled to white Britons. The hybrid child makes readers question who is more English in a space where the pure origin cannot be defined. Queenie trusts Hortense to leave her baby, for Queenie believes that he will have a better future with his own people. Although racism is at a point that causes a mother to leave her child, the event can also be interpreted as promising because Bernard and Queenie accept the coexistence of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in London. The slight subversion of the racial hierarchy surprises Hortense and deconstructs her sense of English superiority: “I never dreamed England would be like this. Come, in what crazed reverie would a white Englishwoman be kneeling before me yearning for me to take her black child?” (523).

At the end of the novel, Hortense taps Queenie’s door to say goodbye (532). Although Queenie does not respond to her, Hortense feels Queenie’s presence “on the other side” (530) of the door and her “timorous hand resting unsure on the doorknob” (530). Nevertheless, Queenie looks at Hortense from the window: “A curtain at the window moved – just a little but enough for me to know it was not the breeze” (530). With the tiny detail of the curtain’s moving, Hortense and Queenie silently understand each other. In conclusion, Hortense and Queenie’s solidarity suggests female friendship as an alternative act of resilience against the racist and patriarchal society that prevailed

in London during the aftermath of World War II. All characters come into terms with their multiple identities and the myth of homogenous Britain.

Similarly, *NW* that tackles the issue of artificiality and impossibility of attaining authentic identities in the anxious contemporary world seems to offer Leah and Natalie's friendship as the only genuine connection that is maintained in the novel. Natalie saves Leah from drowning, which makes these girls be "bonded over a dramatic event" (Smith 2012, 174). Leah serves as "a sort of passport" (191) for Natalie to be accepted in social spaces and helps Natalie explore her sexuality by gifting her a dildo for her birthday (187). In a society where patriarchal ideologies dominate and female pleasure is not talked about enough, this secret act of sisterhood creates a special connection between these women as they get to know their bodies. It can also be read as an act of resilience against gender norms to which Natalie spends all her life trying to conform.

Additionally, both women see their differences that would be considered as faults in social discourses and yet support each other, acknowledging complexity in individuals. As Natalie is afraid "of being made ridiculous by failing to do whatever was expected of her" (268), Leah knows that her friend "dislikes being reminded of her own inconsistencies" (63), daring also that her inconsistencies are actually hypocrisies because Natalie attempts to adopt a self that does not belong to her. Natalie is like a "coconut" (63) for being black outside but white inside. Likewise, Natalie knows her friend is "depressed. [...] Completely stuck. Stasis" (288) because Leah struggles to conform to the heteronormativity by being a mother. Neither can understand each other. Leah says to Natalie: "You have your work. You have Frank. You've got all these friends. You're getting to be so successful. You're never lonely." (268) while Natalie cannot comprehend her representation in Leah's mind and feels quite lonely and indistinct to herself. Natalie asks Leah fenced-in hammocks: "From where I'm sitting you're doing all right. You've got a husband you love and who loves you – and he's not going to stop doing that if you just tell him the truth about what you're feeling. You've got a job, friends, family, somewhere to ..." (332); however, Leah's situation is not the

kind that can be solved with Natalie's learned script. Nonetheless, both women help each other survive in patriarchal, capitalist, and racist society. Leah becomes Natalie's passport to leave her working-class background, and Natalie takes Leah's contraceptive pills under her name, which is kept as a secret not only from Leah's husband but also readers to emphasise their solidarity at the end of their stories. Despite their inability to understand each other's problems, both women meet at a crossroad where ideologies and discourses lose their power, and they can be free of what is expected from them. They meet at the place where they acknowledge how different women can be than the magazine or online representations that dominate (popular) culture, how each woman has her own dilemmas and inner turmoils, how it is challenging for them to have their freedom, and how they can find support and solidarity by embracing their differences and listening to one another.

In conclusion, both novels present us challenging and painful narratives written under hostile social factors such as racial, ethnic, misogynistic, religious, and social discrimination. Black women are doubly oppressed for being the racial and gender Other, yet they resist against these factors to shape their identities and embrace new forms of rewriting their identities. Smith asks whatever will become of the contemporary hybrid subject who tragically stays between ideologies and feel fraught (Smith 2009, 373). Whether they attain authentic identities is not an issue at this point when the world is bombarded with hyperreal images and arbitrary discourses. Consequently, whatever will become of them is unknown when each subject has inconsistencies and still in process as cultural and social values change. What is significant is that postcolonial female identities are willing to embrace their identities, own their different voices, and build solidarity among one another that shapes the reality of multicultural London.

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