Literary Intersections at the Metropolitan Centre: Mapping New London Narratives of Migrant Experience in Contemporary Fiction

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ID No.: 10263195

Date: 29/1/16

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Abstract

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Rebecca D'Arcy

Contemporary British migrant literature writes back to the legacies of imperialism while also being firmly grounded in the present cultural moment. Approaching the reading of late twentieth and early twenty-first century British migrant narratives from a postcolonial perspective, this research project sets out to deliver a critical assessment of the major themes and preoccupations of fiction written at the metropolitan centre that writes back to imperialism and its legacies, while also exploring in detail questions of cultural identity in the present. The critical approach to the interrogation of this research question is theoretically grounded in the discipline of postcolonial literary criticism, while also taking cognisance of important scholarship in the field of cultural studies. The central research question probes the diverse ways in which contemporary authors depict immigrant experience amongst first and subsequent generation migrants in Britain. The project considers myriad moments of intersection and overlap that occur across a diverse selection of contemporary, London-based narratives of migrant experience. Authors of Black, Asian and Irish ethnicities are read in dialectic exchanges with one another on topics ranging from belonging and exclusion, to identity, to marginalisation and violence, and the nature of trauma and memory. The aim in reading novels from authors of different ethnic backgrounds is to establish the extent to which migrant experience is similar or differs among diverse ethnic groups. In the project I assert that the immigrant figure can be seen as a lonely voice in literature, therefore a central aim of the project is to pay attention to what this voice has to say. I argue that an exploration of the plight of the immigrant can inform us about the problems of modern society, including loneliness, isolation, and the breakdown of community and lack of integration. Thus the project is at times interdisciplinary in terms of its theoretical framework. Although postcolonial theory is the foundation of the main thesis, the arguments also draw on other areas of knowledge that inform postcolonial studies, such as psychogeography and memory studies.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The diverse literary output that emerged from migrant writers in Britain in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be broadly categorised as new migrant writing. A point of intersection amongst these diverse narratives is found in a spatial sense through a proclivity of the writers to concentrate the salient points of action around the city of London. Thus, it becomes possible to identify a strand of migrant writing that revolves around new London narratives of migrant experience. Throughout this project it is argued that the city of London represents a point of coalescence for writers of postcolonial migrant literature and in so doing it facilitates intersections and exchanges in a cross-cultural, transnational paradigm. At the crux of this research project is an imperative to detail how the lived and inherited experiences of British imperialism inform and shape the narratives of diaspora experience in contemporary English literature. All of the authors selected for study within this framework have written prose works that refer directly or indirectly to colonialism and the subsequent experiences of the colonised and their descendants as migrants in the United Kingdom.

The texts read in the project focus on post-1945 waves of migration and how London has shaped and been shaped by these migrant experiences. Three distinct immigrant groups are depicted in the texts read across the project and each group has its own history of settlement in Britain. The experiences of imperialism of these groups are also different, thus their relationships and interactions with Britain and the idea of its colonial past are distinct. The first migrant group to be discussed is referred to throughout the project as Black British, encompassing Nigerian, Jamaican,

Trinidadian nationalities. The second group is British Asian, comprising Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese nationalities. The final group is Irish. The texts encompass the colonial and postcolonial legacies of British rule in Ireland, Africa, Asia and the West Indies. These are texts that are produced by writers from diverse countries, including Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Jamaica and Ireland, with a history characterised, to a greater or lesser degree, by British colonialism. The novels are concerned with the dual legacies of colonialism and emigration, both in historical and contemporary contexts. They are texts written by those who have migrated to Britain from its former colonies or those who are descended from the former group. Therefore, their narratives are infused with the concerns of the diaspora in the postcolonial era.

The aim of this introduction is to set out the structure of the project, while providing an overview of the five chapters and their thematic and theoretical concerns. The project is structured along thematic lines. Rather than analysing the work of a specific author or authors in turn, each chapter addresses a stated theme and develops it with reference to relevant selected texts. The theoretical framework of the dissertation is linked to this thematic structure. Each chapter is grounded in one or more theoretical field and sets out to apply literary theory to a thematic consideration of selected texts in order to reveal new layers of meaning. Furthermore, the history of the postcolonial literatures in English and the historical development of Black, Asian and Irish writing in the twentieth century is an important point of reference throughout the project. The central research question explored throughout the project is essentially framed in terms of an investigation of the diverse ways in which contemporary authors depict immigrant experience, particularly with regard to marginal and hybrid existence. The project considers myriad moments of intersection and overlap that occur across a

diverse selection of contemporary, London-based prose narratives of migrant experience. Authors of Black, Asian and Irish ethnicities are read in dialectic exchanges with one another on topics ranging from belonging and exclusion, to identity, to marginalisation and violence, and the nature of trauma and memory. One of the aims of this project is to identify the existence of intertwined experience and shared space in narratives of migrant life in postcolonial literature. As Edward Said states, 'all cultures are *involved* in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic'(1994, xxix). To address the topic in microcosm, it is necessary to delineate the boundaries of postcolonial experience. Thus, London is the geographical and historical setting for the texts read in this research project. This is an appropriate setting for a number of reasons. London was the metropolitan centre of the British Empire. In a postcolonial context, London retains a central status as a destination for emigrants of Britain's former colonies. Thus, it continues to exert influence as a site of postcolonial control.

The project is constructed on a foundation of a series of close readings of a selection of contemporary postcolonial prose narratives set in London. With the exception of one literary memoir, all of the texts are written in the novel form. The decision to limit the scope of enquiry to this specific literary form was in part informed by Said's assertion that the novel is inextricably linked to the historic development of western imperialism. Said says that novels were 'immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references and experiences'. He continues: 'I do not mean that only the novel was important, but that I consider it *the* aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study'

(Said, 1994, xii). The novel continues to be an apt literary form for engagement with the legacy of imperialism and neo-colonial problems and this is particularly true for authors who write from contemporary Britain but look back to the colonisation of their ancestral homelands. As Said so succinctly states, stories 'become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history' (1994, xiii).

Throughout the project, there is a consideration of the degree to which the trauma of imperialism informs contemporary writing at the metropolitan centre. Said notes: 'Many of the most interesting post-colonial writers bear their past within them – as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a new future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire' (1994, 34-5). Thus, the rationale for the thesis is based on a perceived need for the establishment of a coherent literal and figurative map of the work of post-colonial migrant authors writing in and about contemporary London.

As a metropolitan centre, London is a key space in which authors can explore the past and present legacies of British imperialism. It is important to acknowledge how the British imperial project, particularly its aftermath, changed not only the nations and peoples it colonized, but also altered irreversibly the nature of British society and culture at home. In the postcolonial era, one of the most significant changes was the reversal of colonial journeys, as the former natives of colonised countries began to settle in British cities such as London. It is the nature of these changes and how they

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manifest themselves in novels of London diaspora experience that is of most interest here, as London is framed it terms of a diasporic space, but also a space that is changed by the presence of migrant communities. Thus, London is reconstructed in diasporic terms. In this version of London, the 'experience and legacy of migration are altering the ways in which individuals think of their relation to place, and how they might "lay claim" to lands that are difficult to think of in terms of "home" or "belonging"' (McLeod, 2000, 214).

The situating of narratives of contemporary migrant experience in London provides authors considered in this project with a rich canvas on which to develop their themes. The history of the city, specifically those historical aspects that relate directly to empire and literature, is an important backdrop to all of the novels selected for study. The post-colonial world of London, as it is represented in the novels, is thus explored and mapped throughout this project. Thus, the project can be described as a cartography of post-colonial literary London, mapping the 'Imaginscape' of the terrain of the diasporic literary imagination in London. Throughout the project there is a comprehensive exploration of the myriad interconnections between the city and the literary imagination. These include how iconic buildings, resonant spaces and postcolonial neighbourhoods inform the dual development of personal and public identities. Furthermore, the project investigates the depiction of different spatial contexts, such as inside and outside spaces, gendered spaces, class spaces and memory spaces. To borrow a phrase from Said, spaces of overlap in these novels of London migrant experience are re-envisaged as 'locales on the ideological map' of the city

(1994, 27).

A community of London-based postcolonial immigrant writers has long been established, indeed the majority of the writers referred to here are second-generation Londoners. The project therefore does not set out to establish the existence of such a community, but rather to identify and explore the points of intersection in their writing, particularly with regard to shared space, shared identity, and shared cultural experience. In the same way that Sam Selvon brings together a diverse group of immigrants of different backgrounds in *The Lonely Londoners* - a process C.L. Innes describes as bringing into being 'a gathering of people who find their identity less through their different places of origin than through their mutual presence in London'- this project sets out to weave together the narratives of contemporary London migrant authors into a patchwork discourse on postcolonial experience at the metropolitan centre (Innes, 2007, 180-1). Many of these authors can be described in terms similar to those used by Said to describe Conrad's authorial perspective in *Heart of Darkness*; that is, they seem to bear within them 'an extraordinarily persistent residual sense of their exilic marginality' which imbues their narratives with 'the provisionality that comes from standing at the very juncture of this world with another, unspecified but different' (Said, 1994, 27). This is notable, for instance, in the narratorial interventions in *White Teeth*, when it seems Zadie Smith is speaking directly to the reader from a position of liminality and otherness. An instance of this is when she writes of the character Irie Jones, 'Sometimes you want to be different. And sometimes you'd give the hair on your head to be the same as everybody else' (Smith, 2001, 284).

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Marginality, Hybridity and History: The Literary Heritage of Marginality in British Migrant Fiction

Literary portrayals of strands of migrant experience in Britain in the post-second world war era pose crucial questions about the legacy of imperialism and the construction of identity in the postcolonial period. Novels and literary memoirs written within the paradigm of immigration to Britain from her former colonies engage on a number of levels with the creation of new homelands in a transnational context. As delineated in the opening section of this introduction, one of the key avenues of inquiry throughout this project is an examination of the depiction of marginal and hybrid experience in migrant narratives amongst disparate diasporic groups in contemporary Britain. Many of these texts depict how immigrants came to be placed in marginalised positions as a result of discrimination and racism. These are ideas that find expression in the work of Paul Gilroy, particularly in his discussion of how the legal system came to place immigrants in a marginal position in his seminal text *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*. In this work, Gilroy traces the development of British governmental and legal policies towards immigrants, focusing particularly on the issue of criminality. Gilroy flags as significant the year 1971 as it was the year that the Immigration Act brought an end to primary immigration and 'instituted a new pattern of internal control' (1992, 151). The year 1971 is significant in the context of contemporary migrant literature because it can be seen as a starting point in terms of tracing the impact of the Immigration Act on the narratives of legal marginality. An interesting point of intersection in the texts' discussion of legal and criminal marginality of migrant groups can be identified in the aforementioned Gilroy text. This point of intersection revolves around the writers' discussion of the Enoch Powell 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Gilroy argues that in the post Immigration Act and 'Rivers of Blood' speech era, 'black transgression of [the law] became further evidence

of their alien character and their distance from the substantive, historical forms of Britishness which are the property of white culture' (1992, 141). This idea can conceivably be applied to all migrant groups, not just Black immigrants. The theme of class is not considered in great depth in any of the chapters to follow, however its relevance to all of the strands of the discussion of the narratives herein is acknowledged. Class divisions are of particular importance when discussing themes such as marginality and hybridity because a relationship of cause and effect often exists within these frameworks.

Irish Migrant Writing in Britain

In the paragraphs that follow the distinct migrant groups depicted across this project are explored in more detail. While this project focuses on depictions of migrant life in Britain in the post-1945 period, it also acknowledges that the history of Irish settlement in England spans a much greater period of time. Irish emigration to Britain occurred on a low level prior to the 1840s, but accelerated rapidly during and in the decade following the Great Famine. The midlands, Liverpool, Lancashire and London were among the most common settlement points. The second significant wave of Irish migration to Britain took place between 1931 and 1971, reaching its peak in 1971 with a recorded high of 958,000 Irish-born respondents to the census (Walter, 1979, 298).

The place of Irish writers and the figure of the Irish migrant in the literary landscape of London has been to some extent overlooked in recent scholarship. Therefore, this project seeks to reveal a particular strand of the history of Irish writing in London while

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simultaneously unveiling the figure of the Irish migrant in the literature of modern London and other English cities. The impetus to pursue further study in this area of literature was in some part provided by the publication of Bloomsbury's *Irish Writing London* series, now in its second volume. This series makes a valuable contribution to scholarship in this area, raising some interesting points that will stimulate further fascinating research in this field of literature.

The authors selected for study in this project are contemporary writers who address questions of Irish migration in various different ways through their work. Two of these writers have been largely overlooked by mainstream literary criticism. These two writers, Robert McLiam Wilson and John Healy, could be described as contemporary chroniclers of the underground Irish migrant community in London. Both writers have offered readers an alternative view of the life of the Irish immigrant in London, and it therefore seems appropriate to set up their writing as an alternative to the body of work by more established writers acknowledged in the Bloomsbury series, such as Wilde, Shaw, McGahern, and Heaney. Indeed Healy and McLiam Wilson have more in common with literary forebears such as the dramatist Tom Murphy, as each of these writers demonstrate a remarkable flair for depicting the plight of the working class Irish migrant in modern England. A third Irish writer who depicts Irish migrant experience in Britain is William Trevor. His novel *Felicia's Journey* is discussed in detail in this project. In this novel, Trevor crafts a delicately poignant vignette of the life of a young Irish woman surviving the daily trials of physical and mental resilience on the streets of British cities, including London. Throughout this novel Trevor offers the reader an alternative vision of Irish migrant homelessness. Furthermore, the book reflects many other themes and ideas portrayed in the work of Healy, and McLiam Wilson, while simultaneously offering the

reader a new perspective, as it tells a familiar tale from a uniquely female position.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a rich and varied tradition of Irish writers and writing in England, particularly in London, but also in various other cities and towns. Irish writers have often gravitated towards London in particular, perhaps for obvious reasons as London boasted an infinitely more lively literary and publishing scene than any offered by an Irish city at the time. As far back as the eighteenth century, Irish writers, such as Oliver Goldsmith, endeavoured to establish themselves in the imperial and literary centre. Later, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers such as Wilde and Shaw enjoyed critical and public acclaim for their literary output in the city. Further into the twentieth century, this tradition of Irish writing in London continued, however the late twentieth century also saw the emergence of more marginalised Irish literary voices onto the London-Irish writing stage. Irish writers, including Robert McLiam Wilson, William Trevor and John Healy, depicted an alternative migrant reality of the Irish in London, giving a voice to the marginalised Irish immigrant. These writers drew attention to the plight of the socially excluded Irish migrant, the alcoholic, the vagrant, the down and out, often male, Irish figure.

Black and Asian Migrant Writing in Britain

The term Black and Asian is used throughout this project to encompass writers from Jamaica, Kenya, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In common with the history of Irish immigration to Britain, the settlement of Black and Asian migrants in Britain precedes the Second World War period, however this project is concerned with depictions of migrancy after this period. Thus, the history of Black and Asian migrant experience in

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Britain referred to in this context encompasses the post-Windrush era of settlement. In the aftermath of the Second World War immigration patterns to Britain changed substantially. In particular, there was a marked increase in immigrants from the commonwealth. During this period, large numbers of workers and their families from outside Europe began to settle in the United Kingdom. The majority of these immigrants came from the Caribbean and from India and Pakistan, the two separate states created by partition after British colonial rule in India came to an end in 1947. During the 1950s, in particular, Britain's Black and Asian immigrant population increased rapidly in size. The British Nationality Act of 1948 led to a sharp rise in the number of those emigrating from the West Indies to Britain. Under the terms of this legislation, all Commonwealth citizens were granted free entry into Britain. The symbolic starting point of this mass migration to Britain was the sailing of the SS *Empire Windrush* from Kingston, Jamaica, to Tilbury, Essex, in June 1948. On board were almost 500 West Indians intent on starting new lives in Britain. During the 1950s and 1960s immigrants from South Asia began to settle in Britain. Many of these immigrants came from Pakistan and East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh in 1972.[1]

One of the principal aims of the project is to gain insight into the experience of Black and Asian immigrant life in Britain as it is represented in fiction. The project explores contemporary Black and Asian fiction set in Britain that deals with themes of immigration, marginalisation, and hybridity, while also acknowledging the influence of earlier postcolonial authors in shaping this literature. The history of Black and Asian writing in Britain is a rich source of comparison, particularly the writing of Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipul. Contemporary Black and Asian writing that depicts hybrid and marginal

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[1] Source: The National Archives entry on citizenship,
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/brave_new_world/immigration.htm

migrant experience in Britain poses interesting questions of cultural identity that write back to earlier literary contexts. In addition, these texts ruminate on the formation of hybrid identities and how these are central to the experience of British Black and Asian migrants. The scholarship of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha and Mark Stein is referred to later in the project when discussing the depiction of cultural identity in British Black and Asian writing.

Literature Review: Authors, Texts and Literary Heritage

It must be acknowledged that the texts that form the foundation for the discussion of marginality and hybridity in this chapter contain echoes of themes explored by early British migrant authors such as V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon. These pioneering authors were among the first to give voice to the experiences and concerns of immigrant communities in British cities in the post-second world war period. Both writers introduced a wide readership to immigration and the plight of the migrant for the first time in the second half of the twentieth century. Contemporary novels of marginality continue to write back to iconic novels like Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. Nicola Allen emphasises the need for contemporary literary criticism to engage in a meaningful way with 'narratives that contain a previously marginalised or silenced perspective on history' (2008, x). Novels such as those written by Selvon and Naipaul in the post-Windrush era contain such narratives and are intrinsically important to a critical understanding of historical issues of migrant marginalisation. Furthermore, an awareness of and engagement with these texts can aid us in our understanding and analysis of contemporary novels of marginality. Both Naipaul and Selvon portray the immigrant's struggle to carve out a home for himself in England and these depictions

foreshadow the depiction of similar themes in subsequent novels by Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith, John Healy and Robert McLiam Wilson, particularly with regard to the theme of marginality. In particular, Naipaul's descriptions of the peculiar and profound sense of marginalisation and loneliness of the migrant reverberate in the fiction of contemporary chroniclers of the plight of the immigrant in England. In Naipaul's work there is a distinct sense not only of the loneliness and isolation of the recent immigrant, but also of the physical discomfort and fear that can often be associated with a position on the margins, and these descriptions are redolent of what Naipaul describes as 'that feeling of having been flung off the world', a feeling of being entirely without roots in the world (1967, 71). The depiction of that feeling of 'having been flung off the world' is certainly identifiable in migrant fiction, and it does not necessarily only apply to depictions of migrants from distant shores. It is equally present in texts of Irish immigrant experience in Britain, particularly in texts such as *The Grass Arena* and *Ripley Bogle*. The section that follows introduces the authors read across the breadth of the research project and gives an overview of their respective novels, underscoring key themes and intersections that will inform the discussion in the body of the dissertation.

Monica Ali – *Brick Lane* (2003)

Ali was born in Bangladesh and moved to the United Kingdom as a child. Her narrative is likewise centred on a representation of the concerns of a first-generation female Bengali immigrant. The novel considers the oppressive patterns that are perpetuated in a neo-colonial society. In this case, it is the dual oppressions of patriarchy and colonialism that the reader is asked to contemplate. The protagonist of Monica Ali's novel is Nazneen. The novel opens with Nazneen, at eighteen years old, being plucked from her small Bengali village and propelled into an arranged marriage with a man twice her age in London. The reader is immediately immersed in Nazneen's new life in London with her husband

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Chanu, and later with their two daughters, Shahana and Bibi. Throughout the narrative, Ali's confidential writing style creates a sense in the mind of the reader of being present within Nazneen's physical space. At the beginning of the novel, Nazneen can indeed be viewed as both a victim of patriarchal oppression and of the legacy of British imperialism in South Asia. As a young, largely uneducated Bengali woman, Nazneen finds herself living in the metropolitan centre, the heart of the former British Empire. She becomes acutely aware of her position of subaltern, completely without power and unable even to communicate with those around her: 'Nazneen could say two words in English: sorry and thank you.' (*Brick Lane*, 19) She is cast in the role of other, her position is one of profound isolation and marginalisation. She is all too aware of her relationship of opposition to those who she perceives as belonging to the metropolitan centre. However, as the narrative progresses, Nazneen comes to question the notion of belonging, eventually arriving at the realisation that she does not have to accept her position as predetermined outsider. In addition to a thorough consideration of the marginal position of its protagonist, the novel also engages on a discourse on the theme of cultural hybridity. The exploration of hybridity most effectively achieved through the depiction of the experiences of the character of Nazneen's daughter, Shahana. The differences between first and second generation immigrants are illustrated effectively through the depiction of Shahana's relationships with her parents. The conflict that arises between Chanu and his daughter makes the reader increasingly aware of the potentially irreconcilable differences that exist between manifestations of two vastly different cultures.

Diana Evans – *26A* (2005)

The Anglo-Nigerian novel *26A* is Diana Evans' first novel. Evans was born in the United

Kingdom in 1971, the daughter of an English father and Nigerian mother. She grew up in London and lived in Lagos for part of her childhood. The novel *26A* can be described as an Anglo-Nigerian narrative that tells the story of first and second generation Black-British migrant experience in London. It is set in Neasden, London and Nigeria in the latter half of the twentieth century and it tells the story of the Hunter family. Ida Hunter, the matriarch of the Hunter family, is Nigerian, while her husband, Archie, is English. Their four female children are English, but their mother nourishes their connections with their Nigerian heritage. At the heart of this novel are twin sisters Georgia and Bessie. The implications of their parents' unhappy marriage and the lack of cultural cohesion within their household combine to threaten the stability of the sisters' sense of belonging in the world. Place is extremely important in the novel, particularly the attic room shared by the twin sisters. This room offers the girls' temporary sanctuary away from domestic strife, making it possible for them to inhabit two worlds at once. As the twins grow up they continue to experience the world as a hybrid of two or more spaces. One of the twins, Georgia, begins to escape more frequently into a world of imagination. Ultimately, Georgia finds herself irrevocably lost and unable to find a way to negotiate human existence. The novel raises interesting questions about the impact of immigration on subsequent generations and examines the development of hybrid cultural identities amongst the children of migrants in Britain. Throughout the novel, Evans deconstructs perceived notions about cultural hybridity in an attempt to give an authentic version of contemporary migrant experience in Britain.

John Healy – *The Grass Arena* (1988)

The Grass Arena is a literary memoir written by London Irish author, John Healy. In his life narrative, John Healy recounts his experiences of poverty and marginalisation in

London in the latter half of the twentieth century. As a boy, Healy is subjected to brutality and violence at the hands of his father, while his peers persecute him for being Irish. From his early teens, Healy struggled with alcohol addiction, and later in life he lived rough on the streets of London and spent time in prison. *The Grass Arena* is Healy's memoir of fifteen years of homelessness and alcoholism in London. It is an example of a paradigmatic text that deftly negotiates the borderlands of Irish identity, experience and cultural memory. Throughout his memoir, Healy challenges his readers to reconsider their conceptions of "Irishness" and "home", while simultaneously contributing to a broadening of the scope of the genre of Irish migrant autobiography to include the concerns of second generation Irish migrants. Healy offers his reader a nuanced account of the second generation London Irish migrant's experience of what Bronwen Walter terms 'outsiders inside'. (2001) A recurring aporia for Healy is the reconciliation of his different selves, his Irish self and his British self. He is interested in determining the role of memory, both personal and collective, in shaping his 'London Irish' identity. *The Grass Arena* is a text that offers the reader an alternative means of viewing London, navigating the physical and psychological city through the eyes of a marginalised second generation migrant, while simultaneously exposing the reader to an alternative version of literary London, as Healy departs from the mainstream literary scene in that city. One of the significant themes that Healy addresses in *The Grass Arena*, linking it with the writing of other migrant authors, such as Robert McLiam Wilson and Tom Murphy, is violence. Having experienced the reality of being a homeless man, his depiction of the violence and despair of living rough on the streets of London is authoritative.

Hanif Kureishi – *The Black Album* (1995)

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Hanif Kureishi was born in London in 1954 to an English mother and a Pakistani father. His father emigrated from Pakistan shortly after the partition of India to study law. *The Black Album,* his second novel, is set in London in 1989 against a backdrop of multicultural tension, made manifest in the narrative through references to the fatwa against Salman Rushdie on the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and tells the story of college student Shahid Hasan and his struggle to overcome an identity crisis. As the central protagonist of the novel, Shahid represents one version of second-generation migrant identity in contemporary Britain. *The Black Album* is a coming of age novel that details Shahid's experiences with popular culture, London life, relationships and religion. Throughout the novel, Shahid encounters problems relating to marginality and hybridity. As the novel progresses, Shahid's Anglo-Pakistani identity becomes increasingly troublesome to him as he finds himself caught between two cultures that appear to be at odds with one another.

------------------ - *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)

Hanif Kureishi's first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, recounts the coming of age of its protagonist, Karim Amir and gives voice to the experiences and concerns of second generation south Asian immigrants. At the beginning of the novel Karim, the son of an English mother and Pakistani father, is in his late teens. The novel charts his development from this period into his twenties, a period of upheaval and self-discovery. However, it is the conflict that arises from the clash between traditional and contemporary values that is the real essence of the novel. It is interesting to examine the extent to which this clash is situated in the differences between Pakistani and British culture. Through the character of Karim, Kureishi depicts a version of cultural hybridity in contemporary Britain.

Andrea Levy – *Small Island* (2004)

Andrea Levy was born in London in 1956. Her father emigrated from Jamaica in 1948, sailing on the Empire Windrush ship, and her mother followed soon after. Levy describes herself as having 'grown up black in what was still a very white England' (Official author website). Her fourth novel, *Small Island,* is set in London in the period immediately succeeding the Second World War. *Small Island* is the story of Queenie Bligh, an Englishwoman whose husband has failed to return from active duty in the War, and her Jamaican lodgers, Gilbert Joseph and his wife Hortense. On one level, Levy's novel can be described as a story of Jamaican migration to England, because although *Small Island* has a number of protagonists, it is arguably the character of Hortense who captures the reader's imagination because we follow her throughout her migration from Jamaica to England and thus become involved in her journey. The novel writes back to the fiction of Selvon and Naipaul, depicting the intertwined lives of both British and Jamaican Londoners in the Windrush era. The narrative is steeped in the legacy of British imperialism and underscores the problems faced by first generation immigrants in post-second world war London. The most important themes of the novel include exclusion, discrimination, racism and hybrid identities.

Robert McLiam Wilson – *Ripley Bogle* (1989)

Robert McLiam Wilson was born in Belfast in 1966. He studied English at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge. *Ripley Bogle* is McLiam Wilson's debut novel. It is a fictional account of the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland and Irish immigrant experience in Cambridge and London, that is autobiographical in places. Published in 1989, *Ripley Bogle* narrates the eponymous protagonist's life from childhood to manhood. The novel opens in London, where Bogle finds himself homeless on the eve of his twenty-second birthday. Over the course of the next week, Bogle narrates the significant events of his

life to date, from traumatic childhood incidents such as the fear and violence of Internment Night in Belfast in the summer of 1971, to student life at Cambridge University, to homelessness and vagrancy on the streets of London. The novel dwells on the legacy of British colonialism in Northern Ireland, paying particular attention to depictions of violence and discrimination against Irish Catholics in Belfast in the 1970s. These depictions are woven into the narrative of Bogle's marginalised migrant existence as a homeless man on the streets of London to give an overall impression of a life that has been indelibly marked by the violence and degradation of colonialism.

Timothy Mo – *Sour Sweet* (1982)

Sour Sweet is a novel by Timothy Mo that offers an account of Chinese migrant experience to London in the 1960s. Mo was born in Hong Kong to a Chinese father and English mother. He moved to the United Kingdom when he was ten years old. The protagonists of his second novel, published in 1982, are Chen, his wife Lily and her sister Mui. The novel is set in contemporary London. The Chen family are recent immigrants to Britain and the novel details their endeavours to establish themselves in the challenging conditions of their adopted homeland. The narrative progresses from their arrival in London to their establishment of a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown and finally to Chen becoming a victim of a Chinese triad's violence. Throughout the novel, Mo highlights the stark contrasts that exist between British and Chinese culture and identity, while also exploring points of contact and intersection.

Zadie Smith – *White Teeth* (2000)

Zadie Smith was born in London in 1975 to an English father and Jamaican mother. She studied English at Cambridge, graduating in 1997. In her first novel, *White Teeth*, the

intertwined nature of migrant experience in contemporary British society is scrutinised. The novel was published in 2000 and its characters include first, second and third generation Black and South Asian migrants. Smith depicts the hybrid nature of cultural and personal identity through her multicultural protagonists. The narrative is woven from fragments of the past and present, a structural manifestation of Smith's preoccupation with the impact of history on contemporary life. The novel relates the story of two families, the Iqbals and the Jones, who have roots in England, Jamaica and Pakistan. It is set in Willesden, north west London and spans a time period that includes incidents from the nineteenth century, the Second World War and more contemporary events, bringing the plot up to the present day of the narrative, 1999. It begins with the first generation and follows both families into subsequent generations of migrant experience in Britain. Thus, it gives the reader an insight into the differences that exist between first and subsequent generation migrant experience. Smith pays particular attention to the depiction of hybrid identities amongst migrant groups in Britain. In addition, the novel explores the idea of repetition of patterns amongst generations of migrants in Britain, suggesting that inclusion and belonging remain elusive and out of reach for many, regardless of how long they or their families have been living in the country. In this way, Smith's novel exposes as a myth the idea that it is possible for the immigrant to leave the past behind and start afresh without being affected by the burdens of the past.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One: Tales of the Disaffected: Problems of Identity, Belonging and Racism in Contemporary British Migrant Literature

The initial chapter opens the discussion of two pivotal critical concepts upon which the research project is founded: Marginality and Hybridity. It reads novels of London-based migrant experience in order to get a sense of the extent to which contemporary postcolonial authors writing at the metropolitan centre view the position of the migrant as somehow liminal. It identifies the differences and similarities between depictions of first and subsequent generation immigrants, and seeks to establish whether migrant experience in London is predominantly characterised by marginalisation, hybridity or assimilation and belonging. It seeks to identify and critique literary depictions of problems of identity, belonging and racism in contemporary migrant writing. The overarching hypothesis put forward in this chapter is that the selected authors depict the postcolonial migrant as a marginal figure. The novels selected for this avenue of enquiry encompass Black, Asian and Irish diasporic experience. They include *The Grass Arena* by John Healy, *Ripley Bogle* by Robert McLiam Wilson, *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith and *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi.

Chapter Two: Symbolic Representations of Identity Formation Through a Cartography of Objects in Contemporary British Migrant Literature

In the second chapter of the dissertation there is a close reading of the symbology of objects and the significance of material culture in contemporary migrant literature. The

frame of reference for this discussion is set within the perimeters of an investigation into depictions of hybrid diaspora identities and the various ways in which material culture and inanimate objects are linked to their emergence and development. The degree to which hybrid and marginalised migrant identity can be related to the significance of objects in literature is scrutinised. It is argued that the lived experience of the migrant figure in contemporary British Black and Asian literature can be represented through a landscape of objects. In addition, there is an exploration of the applicability of the suggestion that it may be possible to map out the life of the immigrant in literature through a cartography of objects. Throughout the chapter there is a close reading of the symbolic significance of objects in novels including Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Diana Evans's *26a*, *Sour Sweet* by Timothy Mo, *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi. The chapter begins with close readings of these texts, and this is a departure point for an exegesis of the significance of quotidian objects in interpreting migrant experience in contemporary British Black, Asian and Irish fiction. The chapter draws on the scholarship of Stuart Hall with regard to cultural identity and on Bill Brown's work in the area of 'thing theory' as dual lenses through which to explore material culture and its role in identity formation. Furthermore, the argument posited throughout the chapter is interweaved with ideas gleaned from Gaston Bachelard's seminal text, *The Poetics of Space*. In the introduction to this chapter I explain the reasons why I feel a symbolic reading of objects in migrant fiction can help to enhance the reader's understanding of the lived experiences of British immigrants. The first section of the chapter explores the relationship between objects and individuals in selected works of migrant literary fiction. The second section of the chapter shifts the focus onto an analysis of the relationship between objects and space in migrant literary fiction.

Chapter Three: Mapping the City: Symbolic Locations, Intersections and the Postcolonial Flâneur/Flâneuse

This chapter sets out to identify the significance of space, objects, journeys and interactions within the cityscape. The novels in this chapter are read through the critical lenses of postcolonial studies and psychogeography. Taking the city of London as the archetypal postcolonial city, the chapter seeks to explore migrant experience at the heart of the former British Empire while also attempting to read the city as a psychogeographical space and to determine the place of the migrant in such a cultural and geographical landscape. The theoretical framework for the chapter is therefore an amalgam of theories borrowed from postcolonial studies and key concepts derived from the area of psychogeographical theory. The main focus of this chapter is an engagement with literary representations of London in migrant fiction as a transnational space in which myriad connections and intersections can occur between diaspora groups. Throughout the chapter there is a thorough examination of the distinct character of place and the nature of interactions with physical space in migrant literature. In this context, I argue that it is possible to identify symbolically resonant migrant spaces in postcolonial London that recur in these texts. If we trace the movements of the protagonists of the selection of contemporary migrant literature read across this project it is possible to argue that they are following in the footsteps of migrants who came before. Thus, it is clear that across the novels studied in this project there is a sense of shared space. The same areas and locations appear time and again. If we map the geographical area covered by many of these novels, we find that the protagonists often inhabit the same cityscapes.

Structurally, the chapter comprises three distinct sections. Section one explores the character of space and place. This opening section of the chapter seeks to determine the character of the city of London in the postcolonial era as it is depicted in migrant fiction. The writers in question explore the intricate connections between space, place, objects, emotion, and memory.

Section two traces the depiction of literary migrant journeys and how the cityscape of London is negotiated by the former imperial subject. Throughout this section there is a thorough exploration of disparate depictions of migrant journeys in London. The chapter asks if there is process of reverse colonisation occurring in these journeys. These journeys are read as somehow symbolic of the nature of immigrant interaction with an adopted homeland that cannot be separated or experienced in isolation from the legacy of its imperial history.

Finally, section three delineates the theme of community, loneliness, and the city in migrant fiction. In this concluding section the themes of community and loneliness are addressed, paying specific attention to depictions of loneliness and isolation that can often characterise migrant experience in the city.

Chapter Four: Writing Violent Spaces: Irish Migrancy on the Margins

This chapter seeks to further delineate ideas about migrant marginality mooted in the first chapter. It focuses on depictions of violence, social exclusion and dislocation in order to glean a sense of some of the more negative aspects of contemporary migrant experience. The chapter elucidates some of the ways in which literary texts of migrant marginalization can help to highlight many of the hidden or obscured ways in which violence can be

perpetrated against marginal groups in society. Both of the texts explored in this chapter depict some of the adverse elements of Irish migration to Britain. From these depictions there emerges a coherent vision of marginal and liminal experience amongst certain groups of Irish immigrants who encounter difficulties of assimilation in Britain. These depictions offer the reader an insight into the problems that arise from discrimination, racism and unsuccessful attempts at assimilation amongst migrant groups. The chapter also examines the intertwined nature of the relationship between migrant experiences of violence and the character of place. In this context, it is argued that the existence of violent spaces within the metropolis of London contributes to the creation of a sense of marginality and liminality amongst vulnerable migrant groups. It is argued that the depiction of such violent spaces in migrant literature acts as a physical backdrop to migrant marginalisation and suffering. These violent spaces can be viewed as zones of exclusion or exception, where violence against the marginalised migrant body is either sanctioned. The texts read in this chapter are *The Grass Arena* by John Healy, and *Felicia's Journey* by William Trevor. The discussion of violence in this chapter looks at the marginal migrant figure in literature in terms of the victim or scapegoat who exists mainly on the margins and/or outside the law. Both texts depict exceptional circumstances of exclusion amongst male and female Irish migrants in Britain and the ways in which this exclusion can lead to violence, degradation and homelessness. This discussion necessitates a strong reliance on theory. Throughout the chapter the texts are read with a critical perspective that is heavily informed by the work of René Girard and Giorgio Agamben. The primary Girard text that informs the critical discussion of violence and discrimination in these novels of migrant experience in this chapter is *The Scapegoat* (1986). This text is drawn upon to explore the dynamics of the relationship between the marginalised migrant and wider society. In addition, the theoretical cornerstone of the

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chapter is formed using substantial extracts from Giorgio Agamben's two seminal texts, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and *State of Exception*.

Chapter Five: Mapping Migrant Memory: Recollections of Things Past

This chapter considers the nature of memory and recollection in novels of contemporary migrant experience. The focus of the chapter lies in highlighting intersection points between memory and identity formation. These points of intersection and overlap are underscored as significant to an understanding of contemporary diasporic literature. The contention of the chapter is that the reflexive nature of the relationship between past and present in postcolonial literature remains a key concern for contemporary authors. It is therefore suggested that the nature of memory and the ways in which it contributes to perceptions of selfhood, nationhood and belonging are key themes in the texts read in this chapter. On the broadest level, the thing that connects all of the texts in this project is that they can all be characterised as postcolonial novels. I would suggest however, that the connections between these texts are infinitely more nuanced and embedded. In addition, as well as forming a network of dialectic exchange on the topic of contemporary migrant experience in London and its relationship to memory, all of these texts write back to earlier works of migrant literature. Thus, it is possible to identify a nexus of migrant memory literature through time and place. It can be argued, therefore, that to read a contemporary transnational novel is to traverse a literary landscape full of wormholes to other places, to listen to the timbre of other voices and to behold in the familiar the outlines of other selves. This chapter identifies numerous significant moments of intersection, in memory, space and time across the range of novels of migrant experience read throughout the project. These moments of intersection or overlap lead to the

establishment of discursive formations and create opportunities for the creation of a dialectic exchange on the notion of migrant experience in contemporary Britain. These overlaps, sites of convergence and confluence should not be overlooked or considered coincidental. For, on closer inspection, there is a palimpsestic pattern of reoccurrence and repetition, an echoing, a call and response to be gleaned when these texts are read together and in dialogue with one another.

Throughout the chapter, the legacy of imperialism and subsequent immigration to Britain from the former colonies is explored. Among the key questions addressed in this chapter are what is the nature of memory in migrant fiction, what is recalled and what is forgotten in immigrant narratives, how is the past edited and reframed to suit contemporary realities of British second-generation immigrant experience, and to what extent is it possible to speak of the interconnectedness of place, memory and migrant experience? The theoretical framework of the chapter is constructed using salient aspects of memory studies, trauma theory and postcolonial studies.

CHAPTER ONE

Tales of the Disaffected: Problems of Identity, Belonging and Racism in Contemporary British Migrant Literature

Introduction: Marginality or Hybridity

> I am having difficulties myself – we are all having difficulties in this country, this country which is new to us and old to us all at the same time. We are divided people, aren't we (Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*, Smith, 2001, 179).

This chapter establishes the centrality of the depiction of the dual themes of marginalised and hybrid experience in the literature of migrancy in Britain to this research project. The frame of reference for this chapter is an investigation into patterns of response to conditions of marginality, liminality and hybridity on the part of postcolonial prose authors in post Second World War migrant narratives. As the above quote from Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* indicates, such experience is often difficult or problematic and the assertion of the character Samad Iqbal that 'we are divided people' reflects the hybrid nature of migrant experience in contemporary Britain (2001, 179). Thus, it is clear that the myriad 'difficulties' encountered by immigrant groups in contemporary Britain transmute into dynamic and compelling subject matter for authors of prose fiction. This chapter contemplates the nature of those 'difficulties', paying particular attention to evocations of the figure of the migrant as a marginalised other in contemporary society,

and to depictions of migrant identity as hybrid. In this context, Britain, and more precisely London as a communal setting for these narratives, is conceived of as a postcolonial space with a palimpsestic quality, revealing in layers the intertwined stories of diverse immigrant settlement. Monica Ali in *Brick Lane*, Zadie Smith in *White Teeth*, John Healy in *The Grass Arena,* Robert McLiam Wilson in *Ripley Bogle,* and Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album*, have all engaged with the topic of cultural hybridity and migrant marginalisation in contemporary Britain, specifically in London. Read collectively, these five texts allow for the construction of a cross-textual narrative space that facilitates a dialogue between literary migrant figures.

A 'discursive formation', as Foucault has it, can be identified if we read these texts together and, more significantly, in dialogue with one another. Read as a body of work, it becomes possible to identify patterns, similarities and repetition of themes and ideas across these texts. Thus, the allusion to Foucault's notion of the discursive formation becomes apt, as the texts are seen as a body of work wherein 'one can identify a regularity' and observe 'correlations', emerging as an appropriate lens through which we can view what is happening between these texts (2004, 94). Foucault describes how the same or similar themes can be explored in different forms across a body of work such as contemporary migrant postcolonial literature. He notes that it is in this thematic repetition that we can observe the discursive formation. He suggests 'a regularity, an order, in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a reciprocal functioning' (Foucault, 1972, 37). He continues: 'Wherever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, wherever, between objects, types of statements, concepts or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will

say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation' (Foucault, 1972, 38) Such correlations occur within the texts detailed above in a number of compelling ways, not solely in the form of thematic repetitions, but also in modes such as overlapping settings, the recurrence of certain specific locales such as Buckingham Palace and the statue of Eros at Picadilly, being just one example.

Furthermore, this chapter explores the duality that exists within these texts between difference and belonging. On one hand, these novels present the reader with depictions of protagonists who exist in a locus of liminality, in positions on the margins of society that are often characterised by fear and can even sometimes be synonymous with being the victim of oppression, violence, victimisation, homelessness, degradation, and other negative experiences. This chapter thus seeks to explore how literature can shine a light on the societal problems encountered by the marginalised migrant figure. On the other hand, a liminal position can be seen as one that offers unique insight and knowledge. The condition of cultural hybridity depicted by many of these authors can offer the opportunity for subversion, rebellion and powerful opposition and resistance. Migrant groups represented in contemporary British and Irish fiction, including Black, Asian and Irish immigrants, can be re-imagined in a position of strength as members of a community of difference. Inherent within this position of united difference is subversive strength and power. Across these diverse narratives of migrant experience in Britain it is possible to identify a unifying thread, a universal experience of unbelonging and otherness, that evolves, particularly in subsequent generations, into a unique position of strength and power. There is a dialogue occurring between these texts: Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth* shares stories of discrimination and prejudice with Chanu in *Brick Lane*, while Shahid in *The Black Album* speaks of shared experiences of identity crises with Millat Iqbal in *White*

Teeth. It is thus possible to see how a narrative space is constructed across these texts in which a meeting of shared experiences takes place between these characters.

To begin the investigation into the differences in depiction in these narratives between marginality and hybridity, and the myriad ways in which the aforementioned authors deploy these concepts to examine contemporary British culture, it is first necessary to offer a coherent and comprehensive definition of each and to establish the correlations and deviations that exist therein. This theoretical groundwork will lay the foundation for the subsequent close reading of the selected texts. This is a structural convention that is observed in each chapter of the dissertation. The notion of marginality, as deployed throughout this and subsequent chapters, is explored in greater detail in the section that follows. The theme of marginality is central to the argument developed across the breadth of this project. Thus this chapter sets marginality up as a key critical frame for analysis of other themes explored throughout the project. The modes of marginality explored in this chapter are socio-political, economic, and educational. Furthermore, this chapter offers a critical analysis of the term hybridity that includes an acknowledgement of the centrality of Bhabha's theories on postcolonial modes of being. This is a second theme that will be deployed throughout the breadth of the research project.

Negotiating the Margins

It can be argued that there is a metonymical relationship between the migrant and the marginal figure in literature. The literary depiction of the postcolonial migrant as a marginal figure is both contemporary and historical. Some early postcolonial migrant

authors who have explored the marginalised migrant include Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipaul. The discussion of marginality in this chapter acknowledges the differences in literary depiction of the experiences of first versus subsequent generation immigrants. The exploration of marginality and the distinct ways in which it emerges and is experienced focuses on the contemporary novels listed above, but will always acknowledge and seek to be informed by an understanding of the literary heritage of the topic in novels such as Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival*.

Graham Huggan has offered the following interpretation of marginality: 'In contemporary cultural theory, marginality is often given a positive value, being seen less as a site of social exclusion or deprivation than as a locus of resistance to socially imposed standards and coercive norms.' Huggan sees marginality as a position that facilitates 'the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives'. He continues: 'marginality represents a challenge to the defining imperial "centre" or a transvaluation of the lived or remembered experience of oppression. The embrace of marginality is, above all, an oppositional discursive strategy that flies in the face of hierarchical social structures and hegemonic cultural codes. This strategy is self-empowering, not just because it takes strength from opposition, but because it conceptualises the transformation of the subject's relationship to the wider world.' (2001, 20-1) This is a particularly useful critical discussion point from which to embark. For Huggan, a position on the margins offers new perspectives, a view shared by many of the writers surveyed in this project. However, in spite of these new perspectives, it is clear that the writers referred to in this project identify clear distinctions in experience between first and subsequent generation migrants, with the former certainly

experiencing more of the negative aspects of migrancy. These negative aspects are often bound up in questions of racism and discrimination. As a result of racist discrimination in the post-second world war period, many first-generation migrants to Britain were denied access to aspects of social, cultural and economic life taken for granted by English natives. Black and Caribbean immigrants were too often discriminated against for the colour of their skin. As Paul Gilroy points out, this in turn created further problems for the new arrivals in areas such as housing and employment: 'People do not encounter racism in general or in the abstract, they feel the effects of its particular expressions: poor housing, unemployment, repatriation, violence or aggressive indifference' (2002, 149).

Diasporic writing foregrounds marginal experience at the former British colonial centre. In the postcolonial period, authors explore how collective identity, such as Black British, British Asian or London Irish can be potentially marginalising. A writer such as John Healy experiences his London Irish identity as marginalising because of the stereotypes and discriminatory ideas that have existed around Irish migration and settlement in the United Kingdom in the latter half of the twentieth century. (There is further discussion of these stereotypes in chapter four). For others, such as Hanif Kureishi, the marginalising experience is less to do with discrimination and more to do with a wish to escape the narrow, constrictive space of his British Asian identity. Kureishi's second generation British Asian protagonists in many of his novels share a wish to experience all that London has to offer, while simultaneously remaining connected to their identity and heritage. This phenomenon is arguably most notable in the novel *The Black Album*. The experience of being caught between two cultures proves problematic, as demonstrated in *The Black Album* for instance, when Shahid is compelled to choose between his 'London self' and his 'Muslim self'. His choice is limited and limiting because it is put to him that

there is only one mode of being in each world, and each of these modes is extreme in its own way. He finds he must choose between a very rigid, and for him non-representative fundamental version of Muslim manhood or a hedonistic but constrictive love affair with a non-Muslim western woman. This demonstrates how an attempt to live between two cultures can itself be marginalising. Thus, while the discussion of hybridity in this chapter centres on the depiction of the multifaceted construction of identities amongst diaspora groups, the treatment of marginalisation seeks to uncover the myriad ways in which this identity can be construed as problematic. There are two different approaches to this problem, based on the external and internal manifestations of marginality, and the two novelists cited above represent to some extent these two differing aspects. Healy is a writer who largely deals with the external forces that lead to the condition of marginality, such as racism, poverty and government neglect, whereas Kureishi's depiction is somewhat more nuanced as it deals with internal manifestations of marginality that stem from an internalisation of stereotypes, a dislocation from both cultures, a sense of belonging and unbelonging. Within such an individual, the imposition of a blanket sense of ethnicity or nationality can be marginalising in itself and can lead to fragmentation at the very core of selfhood. Collective identity is also problematic for such individuals, as this tends to be homogenous and hence restrictive. Thus, Kureishi, through his second-generation protagonists, explores the need for the creation not solely of more than one type of 'Englishness' but also of forms of 'Pakistani-ness', in order to allow for greater diversity and expression of cultural and individual identities. In a novel such as *The Black Album*, Kureishi provides a depiction of what an identity free of the constraints of marginality would look like in the figure of Shahid, a devout Muslim who attends the Mosque and is simultaneously passionate about popular music and sexual experimentation. Due to the narrowly defined Pakistani Muslim identity that is foisted

upon him, Shahid experiences his own identity as fundamentally split and is forced to choose between the two elements that constitute his essential self, leading him to become confused and conflicted around questions of cultural identity: "'I began to get terrible feelings....The thought of sleeping with Asian girls made me sick'" (1995, 10-11). The problems articulated by Kureishi in this passage find resonance with Bhabha's description of the 'splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject' (2004, 1509 ebook). Kureishi's emphatic message in *The Black Album* is that an insistence on rigidly defined conceptions of identity leads to a fracturing of individual identities: 'He had been taught much about what he didn't like; now he would embrace uncertainty. Maybe wisdom would come from what one didn't know, rather than from confidence. That's what he hoped' (1995, 227).

The distinct combination of difficulties with assimilation, lack of familiarity with cultural codes, and ignorance of political and social entitlements equates to the creation of a position on the margins of British society for certain groups in migrant literature. These problems are exacerbated by widespread prejudice and racism. British attitudes to first generation migrants from places such as Pakistan, Ireland, India, Africa and the West Indies are very much informed by the history of their colonization of those countries. These immigrants are viewed as familiar strangers, known and unknown at the same time. There is a historical relationship of dominance and submission, master and slave, dating back to the colonial period. In this context, it is important to investigate how contemporary authors depict the evolution of this relationship in the postcolonial period, particularly when the former subject seeks a home at the heart of the former master's home territory. There is much evidence in these texts to support the suggestion that the relationship maintains its historical dynamic. It is the case in many of these texts that first generation immigrants, no matter how long they have actually been in the country, remain

foreign, other and marginal. Within their communities they are often viewed with circumspection and even fear. This dynamic is explained to some extent if we make reference to Girard's theory of the scapegoat and how it can be applied to the figure of the marginalised migrant in literature. Girard's theory is analysed and deployed in greater detail in a later chapter, wherein the more extreme consequences of the mechanism in action are contemplated with regard to literary depictions of violence on the migrant body. However, for the purpose of the present discussion, it is necessary to provide a succinct account of Girard's conception of the scapegoat.

For Girard, one of the key identifying marks of the scapegoat that sets him apart from society is the fact that he is a foreigner: 'The victim is a person who comes from elsewhere, a well-known stranger' (1986, 32). In these texts, immigrants, particularly those of the first wave, regardless of how long they have been in the country, are often viewed by the host community as foreign and other, and can therefore be classed as what Girard terms scapegoats. An example of this phenomenon can be found in the case of John Healy's literary memoir, *The Grass Arena*. In spite of the fact that Healy was in fact born in London and lived in the same neighbourhood since birth, his peers still regard him as a foreigner: 'The locals had no time for foreigners, and although I was born in London and mixed and played with children of my own age, I was considered alien' (2008, 4). In this excerpt Healy depicts his lived experience of Girard's conception of the manifestation of victimhood amongst scapegoats. Victims are selected by society based on their difference or otherness. It is acceptable to perpetrate violence against such a person because they are seen as a threat to the greater good (Girard, 1986). Thus, Healy is a victim of violence and bullying at the hands his peers and even at the hands of their parents: 'I could hold my own with my own age group, but their elder brothers (sometimes

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by six or seven years) would verbally and physically attack me. Sometimes their mothers and fathers would make insulting remarks to me about immigrants and I had to smile and bear it or be prevented from playing with my friends, their sons. I became a bit timid and hesitant to speak or voice an opinion in their company' (2008, 4-5). The fact that Healy, a small boy, is viewed as a threat by his peers, and even by adults in his social milieu, can be explained to some extent by Girard, who notes that prejudice and fear of foreignness can be a fear on behalf of the native of sameness rather than difference: 'Despite what is said around us persecutors are never obsessed by difference but rather by its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference' (1986, 22). Thus, the victimisation and scapegoating of a little boy is, to follow Girard's logic, a fear based on the anxiety of the populace that the Irish in London as a group, embodied by Healy, will become too assimilated and too powerful. It is a fear of the loss of a position of authority, a position previously enforced through the imperial process. An almost identical example of the scapegoat mechanism in action and its marginalising effects can be found in Monica Ali's depiction of the character of Chanu in her novel *Brick Lane*. In the novel, Chanu, a Bengali immigrant employed in a local government office in London, recognises that same fear in a colleague:

> You see...it is the white underclass, like Wilkie, who are most afraid of people like me. To him, and people like him, we are the only thing standing in the way of them sliding totally to the bottom of the pile. As long as we are below them, then they are above something. If they see us rise then they are resentful because we have left our proper place. That is why you get the phenomenon of the National Front. They can play on those fears to create racial tensions, and give those people a superiority

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complex (Ali, 2003, 38).

The reference to the National Front in this excerpt resonates with Girard's discussion of the persecution of victims or scapegoats for their difference by societies characterised by fear and anxiety: 'Difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality' (1986, 21).

This discussion leads us to a contemplation of the socio-political and legal factors that tend to marginalise and oppress migrants and other liminal figures in society. These factors are analysed in the section that follows through close readings of contemporary migrant texts of marginalised experience.

Writing the Margins: Legal, Social and Political Marginality

As earlier alluded to, alienation and dislocation are themes at the heart of many of the narratives analysed throughout this chapter. In these texts the conditions of alienation and dislocation often come about as a result of legal, social and/or political marginality. These conditions are analysed in more detail throughout the section that follows. We will begin with the question of depictions of legal marginality in literature. The law-and-literature movement advocates an interdisciplinary approach to legal matters, underscoring the relevance of literary texts to the understanding and functioning of wider society. Its adherents search for legal insights in literary texts, criticism, and theory. Leading practitioners in the field include Richard Weisberg, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Dworkin, Stanley Fish and Ian Ward. A consideration of Ward's work in particular demonstrates the extent to which literature depicts the latent power of certain facets of the legal system to alienate disenfranchised minority groups. It tells us a great deal about how the law

impacts on the lived experience of the marginalised migrant in literature. As Ward contends, 'literature can use legal situations to sum up what it wants to convey, which is, essentially, the alienation of the human condition' (1995, 38). The alienation of the human condition is certainly a theme that preoccupies authors such as Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi, and John Healy. The reason for this condition of alienation is often bound up in issues of legal and social marginality, as succinctly discussed in Ward's scholarship. Aspects of Ward's work are particularly relevant to this study of novels of migrant marginalisation because many of these novels present a bleak picture of the legal and social position of those at the margins of contemporary society. These novels also present what Ward describes as 'a socio-political agenda' (1995, 38). A writer such as John Healy, for instance, is clearly writing from a defined political and social agenda by setting out to give the real and authentic version of what life is like on the streets of London. *The Grass Arena* is autobiographical and deeply insightful, but it is also political in the sense that Healy uses his personal experiences of state neglect and violence to offer an indictment of British society at the time. This links in with Liam Harte's discussion of the subversive potential of autobiography as a literary form. Harte refers to

> the radical uses of autobiography by marginalised subjects whose assertion of a personal narrative voice, which also speaks beyond itself, is a compelling means of cultural inscription. It is not just a matter of giving voice to grievance or setting the record straight. By situating personal accounts of pain and suffering within wider social and institutional contexts, these confessions critique larger cultural and political forces and so reconfigure the relations between self, nation and society in counter-hegemonic ways (2007, 12).

Although Harte is writing specifically about Irish autobiography that dealt with neglect

and abuse of children in state-run institutions, the sentiment of his argument remains relevant to Healy's descriptions of his experiences as an Irish immigrant at the mercy of the British state.

It is possible to identify a matrix of power, identity and law at play in many of the literary depictions of migrant experience in contemporary Britain explored in this project. A liminal societal position, such as that occupied by John Healy in *The Grass Arena* or Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*, is typically characterised, and in part created by, some or all of the following elements: lack of power and influence, disenfranchisement, eroded or insecure sense of identity (cultural, religious, ethnic, national, etc.,), lack of access to and understanding of the legal system, experience of illegal discrimination and/or victimisation on the grounds of minority status. It is the intermingling of these disparate signs of poor integration that places the marginalised migrant figure at the centre of a powerful and destructive nexus of social factors.

The nature of the matrix of power, identity and law depicted in Healy's *The Grass Arena* is particularly complex when it comes to the question of identity. It is perhaps Healy's firm self-identification as distinctly Irish, rather than English, British, or even 'London-Irish', that is the most significant factor in dictating his marginalised position. As a child, Healy spends a great deal of time with his family in rural Ireland, sometimes staying there without his parents for many months at a time. It is the feeling of homecoming coupled with the profound sense of belonging experienced by Healy during these sojourns in Ireland that leads to a subsequent exacerbation of his problems with regard to the complex relationship between identity, power, law, and belonging back in London. Returning to London after one of these idyllic holidays, Healy recalls how one of the salient external

signifiers of his identity as Irish, his accent, causes him to be singled out as different by an older English boy, and ridiculed before his peers: '"Top of the morning to you, Paddy", he said....All of the happiness went out of me...' (14). The power of the English boy in this excerpt to 'put Healy in his place', figuratively speaking, by simply ridiculing his Irish accent, must surely be read as profoundly symbolic of his marginalised position amongst his peers. Later in the narrative, Healy delineates the myriad ways in which he experienced this position of marginality. As an adult, Healy is, to extend the metaphor, 'put in his place' on a number of occasions throughout his life. These places manifest themselves as literal and figurative sites of state control. They are prison cells and army dormitories. For Healy, they are the physical embodiments of his identity as a legal outsider, the iron bars and brick walls that exclude him from mainstream British society. These spaces are discussed in more detail in chapter four.

The opportunity to exercise one's voice and rights in society is often dictated by factors to do with upbringing, education and social status. In the case of second generation immigrants, their ethnic background, coupled with the economic disadvantages that can often afflict migrant groups can lead to disenfranchisement and a sense of disconnection from the mechanisms of power in society. Thus, it can be argued that second generation immigrants experience the same or similar levels of political marginalisation as their parents. To facilitate a greater understanding of the reasons for this situation we can look to Louis Althusser's theories of State Apparatus. Specifically, Althusser identifies two distinct types of State Apparatus, namely Repressive and Ideological. He defines Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as 'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised institutions' (Althusser, 1970, 50). The institutions he refers to that are relevant in terms of this

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research project are political systems, educational systems and legal systems. He further explains that the Repressive State Apparatus functions by violence, whereas the Ideological State Apparatus functions by ideology. He explains the fact that 'the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology' (Althusser, 1970, 52, original parenthesis and emphasis). He continues to explain that 'in the same way, but inversely, it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. There is no such thing as purely ideological apparatus. (Althusser, 1970, 52, original emphasis).

The important point to highlight in the context of this critical approach is the fact that each of these apparatuses is designed for the express purpose of enforcing the status quo and is instrumental in keeping minority and disenfranchised groups in positions of disadvantage, and this is why Althusser's theories with regard to repressive state apparatuses are so germane to a critical exploration of the depiction of marginalised migrant groups in contemporary literature. It is the relationship between the repressive and ideological that is significant in this context, and Althusser argues that all state systems function by using a combination of both. Thus, we can see that political, educational and legal systems all function, to greater or lesser degrees, through repression. It is the repressive mechanisms that operate through these systems in order to oppress and marginalise the liminal migrant figure that are of particular significance here. From this perspective it is clear that the political marginalisation of migrant groups is a direct product of the functioning of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses, and is often

brought about through violence, be it symbolic or literal, against the migrant body. The depiction of these systems in operation in migrant literature is coherent and realistic in its portrayal of the shaping and perpetuation of racist attitudes in schools and their proliferation throughout other spaces in society such as universities, council offices, the armed forces, courtrooms, police stations. As we shall see later in this chapter, and in a later chapter that focuses on violence against the migrant body, the marginalisation of the migrant occurs in many different ways across society as a whole. Novels such as *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* offer dynamic portrayals of the political marginalisation of immigrant communities in contemporary Britain. This is particularly true of their depiction of the political positioning of second-generation migrants. Both Smith and Ali draw young second-generation characters who are politically alienated, voiceless and disaffected. Hence, in both novels, we witness the emergence of fringe groups who stand for a nuanced and highly complex set of values and political aims. Both groups, the Bengal Tigers in *Brick Lane* and KEVIN (or Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation) in *White Teeth*, are largely reactive and ultimately disorganised and splintered. They lack cohesion, are ill-informed at times and cannot agree on how best to further the interests of their members and the community they wish to represent.

In *Brick Lane*, the Bengal Tigers comprises a group of harassed and disenfranchised Bengali residents from the Tower Hamlets estate. Ali's portrayal of the liminal position of many Bengalis in this area of London has a firm basis in reality. As an ethnic group, British Bengalis tend to occupy a marginal position in London and beyond, often living in large numbers in socially and economically deprived areas, such as Ali portrays in her novel. Addressing a conference at Birbeck College, University of London, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak noted the marginalised position of Bengalis in the city. In the

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subsequent essay, entitled 'Postructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value', she observed that at that moment in time, July 1988, 'the places of Bengali concentration are populated by disenfranchised immigrant Bangladeshis' (Spivak in Collier and Geyer-Ryan, 1992, 220). There is almost a sense of ghettoization to be observed when looking at the statistics relating to Tower Hamlets alone. Official government statistics suggest that over half of Tower Hamlets' population are from non-white British ethnic groups. A third of these are Bangladeshi, of whom over a third are 15 years or less old. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2006 population estimates, fifty six per cent of the population in Tower Hamlets belonged to an ethnic group other than white British, thirty per cent are Bangladeshi, eight per cent are from other white backgrounds. The 2001 National Census recorded 153,893 people of Bangladeshi origin living in London and just over two fifths as living in Tower Hamlets. In general, Bangladeshis were also more likely to have large families. For London as a whole the percentage of Bangladeshi households with two or more dependent children was 57 per cent, more than three times the London average of 17 per cent.[2]

Thus, it is clear that Ali's portrayal of the Bengali Tigers reflects problems of disenfranchisement amongst minority groups in contemporary London. Their mobilisation into a political group is an attempted show of strength in the face of severe racist intimidation and violence from a group of local white residents. As Karim observes: 'Thing is, see, they is getting more sophisticated. They don't say race, they say culture, religion' (Ali, 2003, 241). Thus the Bengal Tigers movement is essentially an

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2 http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgsl/901-950/916_borough_statistics/ethnicity.aspx accessed 15 November 2013

attempt to respond to racism in a calm, considered, non-violent way, by organising themselves into a coherent political force. However, their marginal position is so entrenched that the attempt is ultimately unsuccessful. The lack of cohesion in the group and dissent in the ranks all contribute to the failure of the Bengal Tigers as a political group. Karim says: '"Few years ago....We was better organized....Now we're too busy fighting each other"' (Ali, 2003, 240). The group cannot decide on their objectives and are fractured from within. The group is too disconnected from the mainstream political process. The established political system's repression of minority groups is illustrated through the fact that the group receives no support from elected public representatives, either at local or national level. Thus, the racist intimidation of the Bengali Muslim community in Tower Hamlets is allowed to continue unchecked. The 'March Against the Mullahs' organised by the racist minority group takes place without any state sanction. The Bengali Muslim residents of Tower Hamlets are attacked in print through an insidious leafleting campaign. One of the leaflets is entitled 'Multicultural Murder' and its contents lead Chanu to abandon any small hope he still retained of an assimilated and successful future in Britain: 'He breathed hard. His tongue probed his cheeks, like a small rodent snouting blindly beneath a thick blanket. "From now on," he said, "all the money goes to the Home Fund. All of it." That night, for the first time since they were married, Nazneen watched him take down the Qur'an. He sat on the floor and he stayed with the Book for the rest of the evening' (Ali, 2003, 252). It is also interesting to note in this section of the novel that in spite of such vitriolic racist intimidation, no voice of condemnation is heard from state authorities. This silence can be interpreted as an example of what Althusser sees as a form of Repressive State Apparatus that is 'very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic' (1970, 53). The state failure to act against racist intimidation of a minority

group demonstrates the dislocation that exists between the marginalised and the elite.

Similarly in *White Teeth*, in response to a sense of dislocation, Millat joins KEVIN, Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation. This is a fundamental Islamic political group, whose members were previously involved in the organisation of a trip to Bradford to burn copies of *The Satanic Verses* as part of a protest against Rushdie's novel. One of the prominent members of KEVIN is a young man called Hifan who believes the British government imports marijuana into the country to 'subdue the black and Asian community, to lessen our powers' and rejects the formal English education system in favour of the teachings of the Qur'an (Smith, 2000, 296). The extent to which Hifan has become radicalised at such an early age is perhaps an indication of the gravity of the problem of political alienation of young second-generation immigrants in contemporary Britain. In the characters of both Hifan and Millat, Smith depicts members of a lost generation, alienated by their governments and preyed upon by radical elements in society. For his part, Millat joins KEVIN because he wants 'to make his mark' on England, to have his voice heard, to feel powerful and part of something: 'Because Millat was here to finish it. To revenge it. To turn that history around. He liked to think he had a different attitude, a second generation attitude. If Marcus Chalfen was going to write his name all over the world, Millat was going to write it BIGGER. There would be no misspelling *his* name in the history books. There'd be no forgetting the dates and times' (2000, 506). In this excerpt Millat sets himself up against the white, middle-class, highly-educated Marcus Chalfen, with whose son Millat attends school. That Millat sets himself up to overshadow and eclipse the name of Marcus Chalfen is highly significant, as it demonstrates Millat's belief that as a second-generation immigrant he can equal and even surpass the achievements of those who consider themselves 'truly British'. As a political

group, KEVIN's aim is to overthrow democracy in Britain, as it blames the democratic system for 'oppression, persecution, slaughter' (2000, 467). This is an interesting conceit on Smith's behalf as these are the very charges that are often laid at the feet of fundamental Islamic groups by western governments.

Linked to this idea, the legacy of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech haunts *White Teeth*. Millat's mother, Alsana Iqbal, recalls the violent intimidation and harassment her family experienced while living in Whitechapel, 'where that E-knock someoneoranother gave a speech that forced them into the basement while kids broke the windows with their steel-capped boots' (Smith, 2000, 62). Here is an explicit and stark example of political marginalisation, where minority groups are attacked as a direct result of racist hatred fomented by an elected public representative. Members of the non-immigrant community of Whitechapel, ring-led by Powell, literally act out the repressive and violent proclivities of the state against the collective figure of the foreigner or marked one - the scapegoat. The image of the Iqbal family 'running to the cellars while windows were smashed' is a visual metaphor for the physical repression of a state that forces its vulnerable minority groups into a corner, severely curtailing their physical right to inhabit certain areas (2000, 63). The violent nature of this example of marginality is typical of many of the experiences recounted in novels of migrant marginalisation and this topic is explored in more detail in chapter four. Furthermore, the vulnerability of a family such as the Iqbals in this example is also indicative of minority migrant experience in many of these texts. In part, this vulnerability arises from economic disadvantage, and this is a topic that is

discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

Writing Disadvantage: Economic Marginality and Migrant Narratives

It is clear that in all societies those in positions of economic disadvantage are marginalised in many ways, not just in an economic sense. The economic disadvantage is linked in general to problems relating to class and the inequalities that arise from class distinction, but it is important to analyse how economic marginality manifests itself in depictions of migrant experience. If we begin with an exploration of economic marginality, we see that this definition, when applied to the depiction of migrant figures in literature, leads us to understand the marginal figure as distinctly vulnerable or at risk in society. In this context, Pantazis has employed the notion of vulnerability to demonstrate that 'the poorest people in society suffer most, both from insecurities relating to crime and from situations including job loss, financial debt and illness' (cited in Pain & Smith, 2008, 38). Thus, it is clear that economic marginalisation leads to an array of other problems. Here we begin to see how the economically marginalised migrant figure can be seen as at risk and vulnerable. Hence, in novels such as *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth*, we see the depiction of characters who exist on the periphery of the mainstream economy. These characters often have no alternative but to work in the most menial and often degrading jobs, a plight

that has been illuminated most beautifully in the poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson:

> well mi dhu day wok an mi dhu nite wok
>
> mi dhu clean wok and mi dhu dutty wok
>
> dem seh dat black man is very lazy
>
> but if yu si how mi wok yu woodah seh mi crazy

('Inglan Is A Bitch', 2006, 39)

The poetry of Johnson encapsulates many of the social problems experienced by immigrants in Britain. Johnson was born in Jamaica in 1952 and came to England in 1963. His poetry depicts black working-class experience in London, but its concerns have a wider scope and can be applied to all working-class migrant groups living in modern Britain. His poem 'Inglan is a Bitch' demonstrates the difficult economic plight of the migrant and resonates with the depictions of economic marginality found in the texts read for this project. Low-paying jobs are just the beginning of the problem for such protagonists. In addition, due to the low paid nature of this kind of work, many of these characters are obliged to live in overcrowded and substandard accommodation. In short, these are characters who exist rather than live. The large-scale economic marginalisation of many immigrant and minority groups in Britain is illustrated in *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*. This is achieved through considered and nuanced depictions of a cottage textile industry. The Bengali women, Nazneen and Razia in *Brick Lane* and Alsana in *White Teeth*, take in piecemeal sewing work from local textile factories. As Chanu in *Brick Lane* explains to his children: 'Your mother is doing everything possible to facilitate our dream through the old and honourable craft of tailoring. And don't forget it was we who

invented all these weaves of cloth – muslin and damask and every damn thing' (Ali, 2003, 208). In both novels the women work hard and earn little money. In *Brick Lane*, Ali writes of Nazneen's meagre earning potential: 'If she worked fast, if she didn't make mistakes, she could earn as much as three pounds and fifty pence in an hour' (2003, 213). In the case of both women, the money that they earn from their piecemeal sewing work is undeclared income. Therefore, the women do not pay taxes, but in return they receive no health or social insurance and no pension, which in turn entrenches their position on the margins of the mainstream economy and society in general. In *Brick Lane*, Ali underscores the fact that the Bengali women are positioned at the lowest point of the chain of textile production in the United Kingdom. They possess the skills to produce the garments, yet remain far removed from the lucrative fruits of their labour. Textile production is a significant and indigenous industry in Bangladesh, and the women have come to England with excellent skills. However, the Bengali women employed in the industry in Ali's novel are economically exploited, in spite of the fact that the success of the industry relies on their skill and ability. Although the work offers the women more independence and autonomy, discussed in more detail later, the women earn a fraction of what they should and have no control over the means of production. They are exploited by the factory owners and also by the middlemen who bring them the work and take a share of their earnings.

While the Bengali women in *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth* work on their sewing machines at home, their husbands work outside the home. In *Brick Lane*, Chanu has a job with the local council and is confident about his career prospects. However, after being passed over for promotion in favour of less qualified and experienced colleagues on numerous occasions, Chanu becomes disillusioned and eventually resigns. His negative experience

leads to an eradication of all hope and ambition, and he decides to save money towards taking his family back to Bangladesh. He resolves to work solely for economic gain in future, taking a job as a taxi driver, a position for which he is profoundly overqualified: 'You see, all my life I have struggled. And for what? What good has it done? I have finished with all that. Now, I just take the money. I say thank you. I count it' (Ali, 2003, 214). From this moment on Chanu approaches his working life as little more than an *exercise in reverse colonialism*: 'You see, when the English went to our country, they did not go to stay. They went to make money, and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home. *Mentally. Just taking money out. And that is what I am doing now.* What else can you do?' (2003, 214). The adoption of this new cynical attitude in Chanu is a manifestation of the marginal treatment many former colonial subjects continue to experience at the hands of British state and society, often being relegated to working-class positions, regardless of education, qualifications or experience. Quite late in life, the once optimistic Chanu must acknowledge the enduring and immutable sense of difference that continues to be placed between him and native born English men and woman.

Comparably, Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth* feels demeaned and degraded by the work he must do in England. In the novel, Samad, an intellectual man, is deeply humiliated by his job as a waiter and fantasises about wearing a placard at work that reads:

I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER, MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA. WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH. I AM A MUSLIM BUT ALLAH HAS FORSAKEN ME OR I HAVE FORSAKEN ALLAH, I'M NOT SURE. I

HAVE A FRIEND – ARCHIE -AND OTHERS. I AM FORTY-NINE BUT
WOMEN STILL TURN IN THE STREET. SOMETIMES (Smith, 2000, 58).

In this excerpt it is clear that Samad feels that the role of waiter usurps his true identity.
As a way of combating this, Samad attempts to engage his customers in intelligent
conversation in order to prove that he is not just a waiter. This in turns leads to further
humiliation, as Samad is ridiculed by a colleague: 'I hear you trying to talk to the customer
about biology this, politics that – just serve the food, you idiot – you're a waiter, for fuck's
sake...'(Smith, 2000, 57). As a waiter, Samad feels his outward identity is perceived as
that of the stereotypical servile immigrant, lacking education and useful only in his
capacity as a servant to others. In contrast, Samad's true inner identity is shaped around
honour in his family heritage, a mixture of pride and trauma arising from his experiences
in the British Army in the Second World War, and vanity in his physical appearance. As
the years pass, this enforced dual identity has a deleterious effect on Samad, causing him
to lose confidence in both himself and his cultural heritage. The consequences of this
identity crisis are serious for Samad and his family. Perhaps the most serious
consequence is Samad's decision to separate his twin boys, Magid and Millat, by sending
one son to live in Bangladesh and keeping the other son in England with the family. Thus,
the Iqbal family is literally and figuratively torn apart by Samad's dual identity crisis, as
he attempts to project a side of his fractured identity onto each of his sons.

In addition to their literary depictions of the often degrading and menial employment
opportunities available to immigrants in the United Kingdom, Smith and Ali both allude
to housing problems in their novels. The often substandard and overcrowded living
conditions endured by immigrant groups in London are vividly described in both *Brick*

Lane and *White Teeth*. In *Brick Lane*, the family lives in a council flat in the Tower Hamlets estate. Many of the families living there are Bengali immigrants and the conditions they experience are degrading, unhealthy and sometimes even dangerous. As Chanu observes in the novel: 'Overcrowding is one of the worst problems in our community. Four or five Bangladeshis to one room. That's an official council statistic' (Ali, 2003, 330). Similarly, in *White Teeth*, Samad and Alsana Iqbal try to improve their family's living conditions by moving to a more desirable neighbourhood, but in order to achieve this goal they must work themselves to the brink of collapse:

> It had taken them a year to get there, a year of mercilessly hard graft to make the momentous move from the wrong side of Whitechapel to the wrong side of Willesden. A year's worth of Alsana banging away at the old Singer that sat in the kitchen, sewing together pieces of black plastic for a shop called Domination in Soho....A year's worth of Samad softly inclining his head at exactly the correct deferential angle, pencil in his left hand, listening to the appalling pronunciation of the British, Spanish, American, French, Australian... (Smith, 2000, 55).

Even when they do save enough money to facilitate the move, they can only afford to relocate their family to an area that Smith terms 'the wrong side of Willesden High Road', thus demonstrating that no matter how hard they try, they will always perceive their position in London as liminal.

It is apparent that economic marginality is conveyed in novels of migrant experience in various different ways, however one of the common threads that can be identified in this context is an emphasis on the fact that many of the characters feel they have little or no

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control over the ways in which they can make money. Frustration and anger with this dynamic is expressed in *White Teeth* when Smith writes about an encounter between Irie and a black woman in a shop that sells hair and beauty products to black women but is run by an Asian woman. The black woman whom Irie encounters in the shop asks the following loaded question: 'How we going to make it in this country if we don't make our own business?' (Smith, 2000, 281). The question resonates with the experiences of many of the characters in these texts, most of whom are forced to earn money in menial and sometimes degrading ways, and who are completely disconnected from the means of production. For instance, in the extract of *White Teeth* cited above Irie encounters the woman in the shop while she is attempting to buy some hair. The hair is being sold to the shop by a young Pakistani woman: '…that's some poor oppressed Pakistani woman who needs the cash for her kids' (2000, 283). The profoundly disempowered position of the young woman selling the hair is further underscored by the fact that she is financially exploited by the shop owner, who buys the hair for a low price and sells it on for a huge profit. The symbolic significance of the young immigrant who has not only lost ownership of a part of her own body but has also been economically exploited, is representative of wider economic disempowerment and disenfranchisement of minority groups in these texts. It finds resonance in depictions of myriad instances of social oppression and repression in minority migrant fiction, for instance in the sexual exploitation of a homeless Irish immigrant in the novel *Felicia's Journey* by William Trevor, explored in more detail in chapter four of this dissertation.

Educational Marginality

Economic and social marginalisation can limit access to education. Education is an

important element in determining the position of any individual in society. Lack of access to education can often condemn an individual to a life of poverty and deprivation. Historically, lack of equal access to education for every individual in society ultimately led to the establishment of firmly entrenched social hierarchies. For the most part education was a privilege granted only to the elite minority. In general that elite group was comprised of wealthy white males. Women, the poor and other minority groups were either denied all access to education, or only permitted to pursue their studies to a certain predetermined point. Thus, it can be argued that education was often wielded as a weapon of social control and oppression. In a contemporary context, it is apparent that racism and discrimination within schools continues to ensure that marginalise and minority groups do not have equal access to education.

To give a concrete contemporary example, according to a report published recently in *The Independent* (8 January, 2014), the number of children of school going age in the United Kingdom seeking help for racist bullying increased sharply in 2013. The newspaper article referred to widespread concern amongst equality campaigners that recent public debate, arising, in the main, from media coverage of the lifting of working restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, about immigration, is contributing to an escalation of problems relating to race relations in classrooms of schools across the United Kingdom. The report includes a statistic from the children's charity Childline, stating that

> more than 1,400 children and young people contacted ChildLine for counselling about racist bullying in 2013, up 69 per cent on the previous 12 months. (In 2011, just 802 children approached the charity seeking help for racist bullying.) Islamophobia is a particular issue in schools, according to the charity, with young

Muslims reporting that they are being called "terrorists" and "bombers" by classmates. Children who have poor English or a strong accent are often called "freshies" – an abusive term that highlights their struggle to fit in.

The article further cites a report carried out by ChildLine suggesting that the majority of the racist bullying affecting children was happening at school and many of those calling ChildLine for counselling said that teachers ignored the situation or made it worse with 'clumsy interventions'.

This real life example of racism in the educational system demonstrates the extent to which schools, colleges and universities can be sites of marginalisation. In *Ripley Bogle*, McLiam Wilson makes reference to this and attempts to turn the dynamic on its head. In common with Smith's portrayal of Millat in *White Teeth*, Ripley Bogle sets out to 'make his mark', the intended 'victim' in this instance being the British education system, exemplified by that colossus of traditional English power and learning, Cambridge University. Ultimately, McLiam Wilson depicts Bogle's entry to the university as a reverse colonisation, an Irish outsider's infiltration of a now crumbling last bastion of British dominance:

> To this intricate, insecure structure old Ripley Bogle posed a problem or two. The difficulty was that, spoilsport that I was, I feared no one's contempt or poor opinion. All these feeble folk feared my unflappability and foreigner's strength. My solitude and lofty disdain for favour seeking. My breath-taking pomposity and unconquerable self-belief devastated them utterly. From whence had I brought this assurance and power? The trim confidence that begets authority I hadn't been

to their school after all. Where did it come from? How could it be? (Mciam Wilson, 1989, 172).

Bogle goes on to outline the techniques used by those at Cambridge in their attempt to disarm him: 'Upon me they employed their last resort, their most complete weapon – inclusion. They tried to clip my clever little claws' (1989, 172). However, Bogle's experience of inclusion is certainly not typical across the other texts read in this project. For instance, in *White Teeth*, Smith highlights a number of examples of how the children of immigrants can be marginalised in the classroom. In particular, through the character of Samad Iqbal, Smith demonstrates how the English education system, in spite of its claims to multiculturalism, continues to privilege western customs and traditions. At a school governors meeting, Samad airs his grievances but is met with disdain: 'Mr Iqbal wishes to know why the Western education system privileges activity of the body over activity of the mind and soul... The Chairwoman wonders if this is quite relevant' (Smith, 2000, 127). In addition, Samad observes that his children's Islamic faith is also marginalised in the school setting, while Christianity is privileged: 'It is very simple. The Christian calendar has thirty-seven religious events. Thirty-seven. The Muslim calendar has nine. Only nine. Any they are squeezed out by this incredible rash of Christian festivals' (Smith, 2000, 129). The examples cited from the two texts demonstrate to some extent the depiction of marginalised migrant experience in the field of education. The section that follows moves the discussion away from marginalisation in order to consider

the theme of hybridity.

'Divided People': Hybridity and Migrant Identity

Salman Rushdie says of migrant experience in Britain, 'sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (1991, 15). Marginality does not always carry with it negative connotations. If we return to the dictionary definition of the term, we note that marginality can also mean 'characterised by the incorporation of habits and values from two divergent cultures and by incomplete assimilation in either' (Merriam Webster Dictionary). This definition offers the literary critic an insight into the cultural hybridity of the marginalised migrant figure in literature, a trait that can often lead to many positive outcomes. If marginality can denote a position of strength or weakness then the diasporic figure can be seen to inhabit two identities at once. This leads us to a discussion of the notion of cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity suggests what Rushdie so aptly describes as both straddling two cultures and falling between two stools. This also suggests the existence in migrants of more than one identity. The concept of dual identities draws upon DuBois's notion of the double consciousness. In an article entitled 'Strivings of the Negro People' published in *Atlantic Monthly* in August, 1897, DuBois articulated his concept of 'double consciousness' in order to explain the unique experience of inhabiting two or more selves: 'It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder' (The Atlantic Online). This section draws

on this notion as a means of exploring the myriad identities of contemporary migrant groups in Britain. It also deploys this notion in an endeavour to establish the differences in depiction in these texts between first and second generation migrant experience in Britain. The questions that seems most pertinent in this context all gravitate around the notion of assimilation and belonging/unbelonging. Do the second generation characters in these texts experience a sense of marginality or do they experience their hybrid identities as empowering? The characters I refer to in this context are Millat Iqbal in *White Teeth,* Shahid Hasan in *The Black Album* and Shahana Ahmed in *Brick Lane.*

In order to establish the framework for this discussion of cultural hybridity, it is also crucial to acknowledge the influence of Homi K. Bhabha's seminal text, *The Location of Culture.* Much of the discourse in this chapter is informed by Bhabha's delineation of the 'Third Space', the 'in-between space' that 'carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (1994, 56). Contemplation of the divided self and the nature of identity as fragmented is a central occupation of contemporary diasporic novelists. The instability of hybrid identities within the third space is a key consideration. Dual ethnicities and nationalities form the basis of identity construction in the novels read cross the breath of this project. Capacious terms such as Black British or London Irish offer linguistic manifestations of the dual, hybrid condition of the authors and their protagonists, but their essence requires intricate interrogation and deconstruction if they are to be deployed effectively.

Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity is central to the reading of texts of liminal migrant experience in this project. His observations about contemporary society are particularly relevant to the depictions of difference found in the surveyed texts. Bhabha observes that we 'find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce

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complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (1994, 462-3, Ebook). Bhabha sees manifestations of cultural hybridity in 'those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences' (463, Ebook).

A comprehensive definition of hybridity must not only involve an understanding of Bhabha's 'Third Space', but also take cognizance of many other factors. A working definition of the term hybridity would encompass an understanding of the dual nature of ethnicity, nationality and identity in contemporary culture. The notion of identity as 'single' is thus largely obsolete in the novels read across this project. In these novels, all experience and all identity is postcolonial, with all that entails, and thus composed of myriad forces and influences. Therefore, London, as the archetypical postcolonial metropolis is a hybrid space, an amalgam of influences and cultures informed by the legacy of Britain's imperial machinations. Thus, hybridity is formulated as a concept that changes universal experience. As McLeod notes, 'the concept of hybridity has proved very important for diaspora peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity. Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves...' (2000, 219).

Thus, the in-between quality of migrant experience in modern Great Britain, and more specifically London, is a key discourse throughout this chapter. In many instances, the characters in these novels experience London as a kind of interstitial space, a symbolic metropolitan bridge between two countries and two states of being. The collective experience of hybridity thus comes from this sense of inhabiting an 'imagined community'

of immigrants in London, with each distinct migrant group occupying a world that is an amalgam of dual nationality, ethnicity and culture (Anderson, 1991). This conception of London is a manifestation of Bhabha's notion of an 'in-between' space that provides 'the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity' (1994, 1). As a result of this hybrid mode of inhabiting the metropolis, migrants are uniquely placed to view the world in progressive and sometimes revolutionary ways. The position of liminality is thus recategorised as a seat of power and subversive potential. Migrant London can thus be re-imagined as a site for a new ideological imperial project, a form of reverse colonialism for a new era of multi-culturalism and hybrid identity. In the context of this new world order, it is important to acknowledge how the British imperial project, particularly its aftermath, changed not only the nations and peoples it colonized, but also altered irreversibly the nature of British society and culture at home. In the postcolonial era, one of the most significant changes was the reversal of colonial journeys, as the former natives of colonised countries began to settle in British cities such as London. It is the nature of these changes and how they manifest themselves in novels of London diaspora experience that is of most interest here, as London is framed it terms of a diaspora space, but also a space that is changed by the presence of migrant communities. Thus, London is reconstructed in diasporic terms. In this version of London, the 'experience and legacy of migration are altering the ways in which individuals think of their relation to place, and how they might "lay claim" to lands that are difficult to think of in terms of "home" or "belonging"' (McLeod, 2000, 214). This interpretation of the significance of cultural hybridity is particularly pertinent in the case of the second-generation characters depicted in these novels. In this context, hybridity is experienced as a position of strength and empowerment, representing as it does freedom from the constraints of rigid cultural forms often imposed upon first-

generation immigrants. Cultural hybridity facilitates ownership and control of identity formation.

The differences between first and second generation immigrants' experiences of cultural hybridity are illustrated effectively in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*, specifically through the depiction of the lives of the protagonist's children. Shahana is the adolescent daughter of the novel's protagonist Nazneen and her husband, Chanu. The conflict that arises between Chanu and his eldest daughter makes for uncomfortable reading as the reader becomes increasingly aware of potentially irreconcilable differences between the manifestations of two vastly different cultures competing for space in Shahana's self-conception. Her experiences find resonance in Stuart Hall's reminiscences about his own childhood conflicts with cultural hybridity. Hall has spoken of how he felt 'torn between this internal culture of my family and the friends and people that I knew outside whom I would never have dreamt of taking home' and how he felt he was 'the absolute cultural hybrid', 'a mongrel culturally' (Hall, 1995). Ali's themes also echo Hanif Kureishi's accounts of the conflicts he faced growing up in London in the 1960s, a time when he encountered racism on a daily basis because of his Pakistani heritage. For Kureishi, being Pakistani was something to be ashamed of: 'From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else. I read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water' (1986, 9).

Echoes of these kinds of conflicts with cultural identity resound in Ali's depiction of the character of Shahana. Like Kureishi, Shahana just wants to be like everyone else, so she demands that her mother buys her shampoo and English convenience foods, bringing her

into direct conflict with her father who strives in vain to foster in his daughter a love of Tagore and an appreciation of her cultural heritage. In her drawing of the character of Shahana, Ali portrays with sensitivity the concerns of a young British Asian woman in search of identity. The depiction, for example, of Shahana's sartorial shifts between jeans and shalwar kameez symbolises the wider conflicts between her home and public lives. As Stuart Hall has noted, 'identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (1996, 4). Certainly for Shahana it would appear that the construction of one unified identity would be an impossibility given the contrasts between her home and school lives. Ali's depiction of the couple's youngest daughter, Bibi, approaches the question of cultural hybridity from a more nuanced perspective. While her elder sister rails against the constraints placed upon her by heritage and tradition, Bibi strives for balance and compromise, often at the expense of her own comfort and peace of mind. She is depicted as an anxious child, constantly seeking to unite and appease those around her. She is often caught, in a figurative state of hybrid paralysis, between her older sister's embrace of western culture and values, and her father's vehement attempts at reinforcing the family's Bengali ethnicity. The anxiety and discomfort she experiences in this middle ground manifests itself in her physicality: 'Her brow was made broad to carry all her worries' (Ali, 2003, 188). At various points throughout the narrative her corporeal unease is underscored. Instances of this include descriptions of Bibi 'drawing circles with her feet', 'joining her plaits beneath her chin as if to stop her mouth from opening' and smiling for a family photograph 'as if there were a knife to her back' (2003, 178, 296).

A pertinent example of the dislocation that occurs between first and second generation

immigrants can be found in *Brick Lane* when the poetry of Tagore creates a chasm across which Bengali-born Chanu cannot reach his British born daughters: 'For five days he had been teaching his daughters to recite Golden Bengal. This evening they were to perform the entire poem' (2003, 179). Ostensibly, the performance should be redolent of national pride and a sense of connection with the past. Instead, it manifests itself as a painful and strained enactment of the problems of cultural alienation and displacement in a postcolonial context. For Tagore, as national poet, is elevated to the status of multifarious symbol for Chanu, embodying in his being and writing, the very essence of the intrinsic Bengali identity that should be cherished and protected by his children. But when Bibi recites the national anthem, written by the poet which her father has insisted the girls learn by heart, all meaning and beauty is lost:

> O Amar Shonar Bangla, ami tomay bhailobahsi
>
> Forever your skies, your air set my heart in tune
>
> As if it were a flute.
>
> In spring, oh mother mine, the fragrance from
>
> Your mango groves makes me wild with joy-
>
> Ah what thrill.

Her voice gave no hint of joy or thrill. It plodded nervously along, afraid that a sudden burst of intonation would derail the train of recall. (2003, 179).

For Bibi, there is a sense of unreality and inauthenticity between the words and the experience (Novak, 2008, 34). If Bibi does not understand the words, her older sister Shahana does not care to understand them, or any aspect of her cultural heritage. The

extent of her dislocation from her roots is evident in the following extract: 'Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking....When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care' (2003, 180). His daughter's ignorance of her nation's history leads Chanu to reflect on the harmful dislocation between past and present conceptions of country:

> "You see," said Chanu, still supine, holding his book above his face, "all these people here who look down at us as peasants know nothing of history." He sat up a little and cleared his throat. "In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. These are our roots. Do they teach these things in the school here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her....If you have a history, you see, you have a pride....A sense of history," he said. "That is what they are missing" (Ali, 2003, 185-6).

The declaration 'these are our roots' is crucial here as it explains the violence and trauma inherent in the imperial process and the legacy it carries of its victims, depriving them of a connection with and knowledge of their real history and national identity.

Parallels can be drawn between *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth* when it comes to the depiction of hybridity in subsequent generation immigrants. In *White Teeth*, Smith depicts Millat, the son of first generation Bangladeshi immigrants Samad and Alsana Iqbal, as a

poorly integrated and largely disenfranchised young man:

> He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in this country... (2000, 233-34).

The image of Millat as a young man with no face and no voice is particularly striking and revealing. It is clear that Millat has internalised all of the negative stereotypes and racially discriminatory myths about his ethnic and cultural identity and the result has been a complete erasure of his own individual identity. He is lost and confused. He turns in many different directions in the hope of discovering himself. He flirts with fundamental religion one minute, then the next minute he is playing the role of the thoroughly westernised playboy. As a symbol of the future of second-generation migrants in Britain, Millat does not evoke a great deal of hope, although, interestingly, it is through Millat that Smith makes her rallying call to the next generation to do what their parents could not and make their presence felt in Britain. Smith has Millat declare 'we need to make our mark in this bloody country' (2000, 295). Here, Smith turns on its head and takes ownership of Derrida's notion of 'the mark'. Derrida says that 'in the beginning was the mark, the trace of violence that has no origin except in another's violence' and 'when the violence of all

against all becomes the violence of all against one a victim is produced, which is likely to happen when a difference, a weakness, marks out a single member of the mêlée for destruction' (Mckenna, 1992, 69). This idea finds resonance in Girard's discussion of the scapegoat. Girard also refers to the mark of difference that singles the marginalised individual out for discrimination. However, in Smith's depiction of Millat there is the potential for the marginalised individual to avoid being marked out for discrimination. In this context we see how the depiction of the marginalised migrant figure as victim is transformed. This is perhaps a result of what Smith views as the unique and a powerful position enjoyed by the second-generation migrant in modern Britain. In the novel, Smith depicts Millat's vision of turning 'the mark' from a negative into a positive. Thus, the character of Millat demonstrates how second-generation immigrants can make a different future for themselves, a future that was simply not available to their parents. Smith demonstrates how they can do this by using the very mechanisms of state control that have oppressed their parents. She depicts a vision of how second-generation migrants can potentially reap the benefits of the education system, become involved in politics and ultimately become economically successful.

The advancement of successive generations of migrants in contemporary Britain is further explored in diasporic literature through the character of Shahid in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*. The character of Shahid shares Millat's vision of a community of second-generation migrants making its mark on British society. Shahid also goes through a period of self-discovery, a point at which he is unsure of his own identity. When he first moves to London from the Kentish suburbs he struggles to discern his own individual identity and is torn between the religious and the secular: 'He had never felt more invisible' (1995, 5). In this novel Kureishi uses the character of Riaz Al-Hussain to represent the lure of

fundamental religion to the young Shahid, while Deedee Osgood symbolises the decadence and hedonism of secular, London life. Significantly, Riaz is studying law. As a second-generation immigrant from Pakistan, Riaz recognises the importance of understanding the law, particularly for those in marginalised positions. Thus, he uses his knowledge to help others, offering legal advice to a marginalised group of Muslims in Leeds: 'For a long time I gave general and legal advice to the many poor and uneducated people in my district who came to me' (1995, 6). This depiction of a Pakistani migrant gaining mastery over the British legal system resonates with Shahid's recollection of his uncle's assertion that Pakistani immigrants had now assumed dominant positions in Britain: 'He'd say that the Pakistani's in England now had to do everything, win the sports, present the news and run the shops and businesses, as well as having to fuck the women' (1995, 6). It can be argued that this description of Pakistani immigrants re-envisions them as neo-colonisers. Although the idea of the contemporary immigrant as a neo-coloniser is not without its own problems, it is certainly an interesting new lens through which to view migrant experience. This vision of the place of migrants in contemporary Britain resounds in the characterisation of subsequent generation immigrants by Monica Ali and Zadie Smith. Collectively, these authors construct a literary vision of a new generation of empowered and powerful migrants.

For his part, Shahid seizes power and control in two distinct ways: through music and writing. The title of the novel, *The Black Album*, intimates the significance of music, specifically black music, in Shahid's coming of age process (for the novel can essentially be categorised as a kind of second-generation immigrant's bildungsroman). The title is a

reference to the Prince album released in 1994.[3] The album cover was entirely black and featured no text. The symbolism reflected Prince's desire to reconnect with a black audience. Kureishi's choice of title seems to refer to the importance of music in the construction of identity and the empowering of marginalised minority groups. Gilroy has written extensively about the significance of black music in this context. He refers to 'the power which black music has as a transmitter, not merely of black culture but of oppositional and anti-authoritarian values' (Gilroy, 1992, 176). Shahid's admiration of Prince underscores the significance of black musicians as role models for the marginalised, the oppressed, and the other. Explaining his love of Prince to Deedee Osgood, Shahid struggles to define the essence of his appeal - 'He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too' - and it is the in-betweeness, the hybridity, the not quite one but not quite the otherness that is so appealing to Shahid, because it so truly reflects his own identity, his own position in British society (Kureishi, 1995, 25). This hybrid identity characterises many of the depictions of second and subsequent generation migrants in the texts explored across the breadth of this chapter. Thus, it is clear that there are significant differences in terms of both identity and a sense of belonging amongst different generations of migrants in these texts. This leads us to the concluding section of this chapter, in which these key aspects of the argument are summarised.

Conclusion

'We are split people' (Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*, Smith, 2001, 179).

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[3] Of course the reference to *The Black Album* also brings to mind its diametric opposite in musical terms, *The White Album* by The Beatles, perhaps an attempt to reinforce the differences between black and white culture as manifested through icons of black and white music respectively.

This chapter has introduced and analysed two of the key concepts that are deployed throughout this research project. The opening section of the chapter outlined the concept of marginality and identifies the key modes of marginality that are depicted in the migrant texts surveyed in this project. These key elements are socio-political and legal, economic, and educational marginality. All of these factors influence and shape migrant experience, as depicted in this chapter, and are also influential in the discussion of other facets of migrancy discussed later in the project, such as the depiction of violence against the marginalized migrant body explored in chapter four. In addition, this chapter underscores the significance of the theory of cultural hybridity to any reading of contemporary migrant literature. The discussion of hybridity foregrounds the theoretical work of Homi K. Bhabha while also highlighting the differences that exist in literary evocations of first and subsequent generation migration to Britain.

The chapter is intended as a foundation for the examination in greater depth of themes related to marginality and hybridity in the literature of contemporary British migrant experience. In the next chapter, marginalized and hybrid migrant identities are explored through an analysis of the symbolism of objects in diasporic novels. In chapter three, there is an exploration of the dialectic between space and marginalized and hybrid migrant experience in contemporary writing. The victimization of minority marginalized migrant groups is analysed in chapter four, with particular emphasis on literary depictions of violence against the migrant body. Finally, in the concluding chapter there is an exposition of the central role of memory in a number of the texts read across the project, with specific reference to the role of hybrid identities in the construction and destruction of memory. Thus, it is clear that both marginality and hybridity are fundamental themes

that run throughout the body of this research project. Both of these themes are treated in more detail and applied specifically to a consideration of symbolic significance of objects in migrant literature in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Two

Symbolic Representations of Identity Formation Through a Cartography of Objects in Contemporary British Migrant Literature

Introduction

> You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree,
> you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place
> where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will
> not be moved (Ali, *Brick Lane*, 2003, 87).

This chapter deploys the dual themes of marginality and hybridity introduced in the preceding chapter with a view to analysing the dialectic between objects, material culture and identity formation at play in diasporic literature. Manifestations of hybrid and marginalised identity in novels of London migrant experience are discussed in greater detail than in the previous chapter. In particular, hybrid identity is scrutinised through a close reading of Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Black Album*, while problems of marginalised migrant identity are explored with reference to Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*. The other novels referred to in this chapter can be read through the dual thematic lenses of hybridity and marginality. The chapter underscores the important dynamic in place in all of these

texts between objects and space, setting up the more particularised discussion of place that occurs in chapter three.

Literary depictions of lived migrant experience in contemporary Britain offer the reader a unique perspective from which to view identity formation and the role of objects and material culture in shaping conceptions of selfhood. This chapter considers the nature of these perspectives in various narratives of diasporic experience. The writers considered in this chapter are Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali, Diana Evans, Timothy Mo, Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy. It is argued that each of these novelists depicts diaspora identities in contemporary Britain as liminal and fragmented, as well as susceptible to influence from material culture. The frame of reference for this discussion is set within the parameters of an investigation into depictions of marginalised and hybrid diaspora identities, building on the theoretical structure established in the previous chapter, and the various ways in which material culture and inanimate objects are linked to their emergence and development. The chapter draws on the scholarship of Stuart Hall with regard to cultural identity and on Bill Brown's work in the area of 'thing theory' as dual lenses through which to explore material culture and its role in identity formation. Furthermore, the argument posited throughout the chapter is interwoven with ideas gleaned from Gaston Bachelard's seminal text, *The Poetics of Space.*

Black and Asian writing that depicts migrant experience in Britain often offers the reader a view of reality that is created through a mapping of potent symbols of daily life. Unpicking the potential of objects to tell a story allows the reader to gain a new perspective on this area of literature. Mapping objects in a novel can be seen as a way of identifying the layers of realism constructed by an author. What kind of reality does a

specific collection of objects help to construct? Which particular objects are individual characters associated with and what, if anything, do these objects tell us about the characters? The lived experience of the migrant figure in contemporary British Black and Asian literature can be represented through a landscape of objects. It may be possible to map out the life of the immigrant in literature through a cartography of objects. It may prove illuminating to unpick the significance of objects in migrant literary fiction in order to shine a light on the lived experience of the immigrant.

This is an exercise that has been undertaken by, among others, Mark Stein. An example is Stein's response to V.S.Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. Stein draws attention to the immense symbolic significance of a single image from the novel that focuses on one inanimate object: 'In V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, a tinned milk label becomes an icon of English country life'(Stein, 2004, 45). Objects can also be viewed as media through which we can view or read history and heritage. This emphasis on objects draws upon the theory of semiotics and the work of Umberto Eco. According to Eco, 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it' (1979, 7). Thus, a seemingly innocuous object in a novel can signify something of great significance, for example, a feeling, a memory, a place, a concept. Therefore it is argued throughout this chapter that it is often the case in migrant fiction that objects often come to stand for something abstract and difficult to convey using words alone.

It is noteworthy that throughout the novels considered in this chapter, each author reveals the world of the everyday life of the migrant by taking an inventory of the objects that fill

its physical space and underscoring the significance attached to certain objects. Thus, it can be argued that contemporary British migrant authors tend to approach the topic of migrant experience and the formation of identity in terms of material culture. Objects and identity are closely associated here, leading to an opportunity to consider the relationship between people and things, between objects and the formation of self.

Stuart Hall has written extensively on the subject of cultural identity and literature. His work is highly relevant to the topic discussed in this chapter. Material objects are a critical component of culture. Our culture dictates our identity, and this is apparent in the novels discussed in this chapter. Hall asks important questions about cultural identity, including important issues such as the relationship between facets of diaspora experience and models of cultural identity. In addition, Hall questions: 'How are we to conceptualize or imagine identity, difference and belongingness, after diaspora? Since "cultural identity" carries so many overtones of essential unity, primordial oneness, indivisibility and sameness, how are we to "think" identities inscribed within relations of power and constructed across difference and disjuncture?' (1996, 545).

More specifically, Hall's questions can be applied to a number of texts read across the breath of this research project. One of the texts to which Hall's ideas are applicable is *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi. Hall's ideas resonate in particular with Kureishi's depiction of his protagonist Shahid's experiences with identity formation. In the novel, Kureishi asks how Shahid's experiences as a migrant figure in Britain affect his sense of cultural identity. In the novel Shahid questions his own identity and is torn between Western consumerist culture and Pakistani Islamic culture. In addition, there is a central question or debate at the heart of the novel about the importance and relevance of the

novel form itself. Edward Said sees the novel, as a literary genre, as 'immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences'. (1993, xii). He views the novel as 'the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history', an opinion that seems highly relevant with regard to Shahid's sense of his own identity and place in the world in *The Black Album* (Said, *2005, xiii*). This becomes even more significant when we consider the central significance of books, specifically novels, to Shahid in the narrative, and this links in well with Bill Brown's work on the power of objects to constitute more than the sum of their parts. As a critical lens through which to contemplate this relationship, 'thing theory' offers many interesting perspectives. The scholarship of Bill Brown in this area is particularly pertinent to this discussion. Brown stresses the importance of questions relating to 'thing theory' that probe the 'ideological and ideational effects of the material world and of transformations of it'. These questions 'ask not whether things are but what work they perform – questions in fact, not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular temporal and spatial context'. This is in order to demonstrate the power of objects, 'to show how they organise our private and public affection' (Brown, 2001, 7). This emphasis on the power of objects is certainly present in all of the novels considered in this chapter and the section that follows offers an interpretation of this depiction.

The Potency of Objects

It can be argued that objects assume heightened symbolic significance in Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Black Album*. This position is justified though a close reading of the novel through the critical lens of Bill Brown's work in the area of 'thing theory'. For Brown, thing theory facilitates a more nuanced engagement with the depiction of material culture

in literature. He notes how thing theory draws *attention to* the 'fluidity of objects', and how this in turn leads us to meditate on how 'the materials that make up the material object world' are transvalued 'into less and more than their familiar properties' (Brown, 1999, 3). The scholarship of Brown in this area offers the postcolonial literary critic a new perspective on the significance of objects in diasporic literature.

With regard to material culture, Brown states that 'one version of a new materialism asks how material culture impresses itself on the literary imagination. Another asks how literature itself works to imagine materiality; how it renders a life of things that is tangential to our narratives of modern production, distribution, and consumption'. He continues to say that 'human subjects and material objects constitute one another' (Brown,1999, 5). This contention is particularly interesting when applied to a reading of *The Black Album* and can be interpreted in a number of ways. For instance, throughout the *The Black Album* there is a particular emphasis placed upon the myriad ways in which objects influence the development of the protagonist, Shahid, and it can indeed be argued that 'human subjects and material objects constitute one another' in Kureishi's novel. In the opening section of the novel the reader is provided with an inventory of the objects that fill Shahid's bedsit. When asked what he has in his room, Shahid replies succinctly 'bed, table, a bunch of Prince records, and a ton of books'. (Kureishi, 1995, 18) These are the objects that shape Shahid's identity. It is clear *that he has* made a conscious effort to change his identity since moving to London from his family home in Kent. The contrast between his new mode of being and the one he embodied in his previous life is underscored by the stark differences between the description of Shahid's current dwelling

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place and the description of Shahid's family home:

> Their family house was an immaculate 1960s mansion, just outside the town, a caravanserai, as filled with people as a busy hotel. Papa had constantly redecorated it, the furniture was replaced every five years and new rooms were necessarily added. The kitchen always seemed to be in the front drive, awaiting disposal, though it appeared to Shahid no less 'innovative' than the new one. Papa hated anything 'old-fashioned', unless it charmed tourists. He wanted to tear down the old; he liked 'progress'. 'I only want the best,' he'd say, meaning the newest, the latest, and, somehow, the most ostentatious (Kureishi, 1995,9).

Kureishi's description of his room in London, and the lack of objects therein, is set up in stark contrast to the image of the plush interior of the family's middle class house in an affluent suburb. The room is almost devoid of material objects, and the objects that are present are notable for what they say about Kureishi's cultural affiliation and identification.

Throughout the *The Black Album*, books, newspapers and items of clothing are imbued with a heightened significance, with Kureishi placing emphasis on the ways in which they influence the novel's protagonist and dictate his sense of self and his actions. In particular, the value and significance attributed to books in Kureishi's novel should not be overlooked. At one important point in the novel, Shahid enters a bookshop: 'Seeing the piles of new volumes Shahid wanted to snatch them up, not knowing how he'd survived without them.' (1995, 112) The covetous response elicited in Shahid by the books signifies an appetite in the protagonist of which he had hitherto been unaware. The strong association that is created between Shahid and books is reminiscent of what Brown has

to say about subject-object dynamics. Brown suggests that more emphasis should be placed upon the relationships between specific objects and how they define cultural identities, or 'the way cultural values become objectified in specific material forms' and 'the way that people shape, code, and recode the material, object world'(1999, 1)

At various junctures in the novel, Kureishi suggests that objects can be read as potent symbols of migrant identity, highlighting, among other things, the disparities and contradictions between Eastern and Western identity. Kureishi deftly demonstrates the symbolic significance of clothing, the meaning we invest in our own clothes and the way people often judge one another based on their clothing. An example of Brown's notion of the 'potency' of objects can be found at the moment in the novel when Shahid first dons traditional Pakistani dress and finally wins the approval of his Islamic friend Chad (Kureishi, 1995, 7). It is as though Shahid's identity is instantly changed when he puts on the salwar kamiz: '"He watched as Shahid changed, for the first time, into 'national dress'. Chad looked him over before taking, from behind his back, a white cap. He fitted it on Shahid's head, stood off a moment, and embraced him. "Brother, you look magnificent"' (Kureishi, 1995, 131). After allowing himself to be clothed, almost ceremonially, in the traditional dress of salwar kamiz, Shahid makes a highly significant visit to a mosque, literally moving from a secular to a religious space. This is the first time in the narrative that the reader sees Shahid visiting the place of worship and it seems that the symbolic change of clothing brings about a momentous shift in his identity.

Earlier in the novel Shahid wears a leather jacket, an item of clothing that his English lover Dee especially admires. Whilst wearing the leather jacket, Shahid went to pubs and raves, took drugs and drank alcohol, had sex with Dee, and generally engaged in activities

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associated with western, secular culture. However, when he wears the salwar kamiz he engages in altogether different activities and begins to inhabit a very different state of mind: 'He prayed as best he could, hearing in his head Hat's exhortations and instructions; he asked God to grant him realization, understanding of himself and others, and tolerance. Feeling empty of passion and somewhat delivered and cleansed, he settled down with his notebook.' (Kureishi, 1995, 131) This demonstrates the veracity of Brown's theory of the subject object relationship and the way that objects, such as clothes, can constitute the very identity and mode of behaviour of the wearer. It is clear, therefore, that clothing acts as a signifier of identity in *The Black Album*. Further evidence of this can be gleaned through a close reading of the novel's opening paragraph. Here, Kureishi describes a man wearing a suit 'that was not fawn or much of any colour – it wasn't that kind of suit' (1995, 1). The reader instantly grasps the implication of this statement and hardly needs to be informed in the next paragraph that the man is the occupant of a bedsit in a lodging house filled with 'Africans, Irish people, Pakistanis and even a group of English students' in Kilburn, north-west London (1995,1). Kureishi makes the connection between clothing and class, between objects and our place in society. The object of clothing in question, a suit, is often associated with respectability and wealth, but in this instance the suit does not make this signification. It is not 'that kind of suit', implying that is perhaps of poor quality, possibly second-hand, maybe even dirty or ripped. Thus, through the signification of his shabby suit, the man's place in society has already been made clear to the reader through his association with this potent object. Kureishi deftly demonstrates the symbolic significance of clothing, the meaning we invest in our own clothes and the way people often judge one another based on their clothing.

In the novel, the only material possessions that Shahid cares about are his books and

records. The books are symbolic on a number of levels. They represent the potential for learning, gaining knowledge, and self-improvement. There is perhaps a suggestion that the migrant figure must immerse his or her self in books in the hope that education will open up new opportunities and eventually bring about equality and acceptance within the new society. The religious fundamentalist characters in Kureishi's novel view Shahid's collection of books, records and clothing as external signifiers of moral dissipation. To his Islamic fundamentalist friends, Shahid cannot be truly Pakistani until he rejects these objects that symbolise Western decadence. His collection of Prince records for instance, becomes almost an obsession for his Islamic friend, Chad, who has himself renounced Western culture in favour of Islam. Chad cannot come to terms with the extent of Shahid's attachment to his record collection and repeatedly attempts to convince his friend to surrender his music collection:

"'Gimme those Prince records!'

'Don't touch those, some are imports!'

Shahid found himself struggling with Chad" (Kureishi, 1995, 80).

The records thus become a physical manifestation of the struggle Shahid faces as a migrant attempting to find his true identity in a world where Islam is pitted as an enemy of Western popular culture.

One interpretation of *The Black Album* suggests that success for the migrant figure in late twentieth-century Britain is intrinsically linked to material wealth and the acquisition of goods. Consumer culture looms large in the consciousness of the migrant figure in Kureishi's novel, just as did in earlier migrant fiction, for example in Sam Selvon's *The*

Lonely Londoners: 'Always, from the first time he went to see Eros and the lights, that circus have a magnet for him, that circus represent life, that circus is the beginning and the ending of the world. Every time he go there, he have the same feeling like when he see it the first night, drink coca-cola, any time is Guinness time, Bovril…' (2006, 79). In *The Black Album* the protagonist, Shahid, rails against the version of migrant experience that is caught up with consumerism and material affluence. He rejects his family's preoccupation with financial gain and the acquisition of material goods. Kureishi's representation of the character of Karims's brother Chili is critical of the constructed Western identity that is composed entirely of superficial accessories: 'In Chili's hands were his car keys, Ray-Bans and Marlboros, without which he wouldn't leave his bathroom' (1985, 38). In this excerpt Kureishi creates an image of a migrant figure who has adopted a typically Western identity which is entirely based on external signifiers of wealth and success and has nothing to do with the inner life of the individual. The character Chili feels so insecure without the accoutrements of Western civilisation that he cannot be seen in public without them. It can be argued that the image of Chili constructing his identity behind the bathroom suggests that he feels compelled to create a mask to present to the outside world. Furthermore, it can be read as an image that suggests insecurity and a feeling of being ill at ease in the world.

The centrality of objects to the construction of identity in *The Black Album* demonstrates the veracity of Brown's theory of the power imbued in objects. The objects take on lives of their own and ultimately come to constitute the human beings with which they are associated in what can be described as a Marxian vision of the function of objects within capitalism. However, it is also clear that the objects that protagonists are associated with have the power to represent the hybrid nature of certain modes of migrant identity. In *The*

Black Album, it is clear that different items signify diverse aspects of Shahid's identity, thus corresponding to Bhabha's concept of the split that exists within migrant identities. Objects such as the shalwar kameez or the leather jacket are mere representations of different facets of Shahihd's self. In this context, Bhabha refers to 'binary, two-part identities'(1994, 1607, ebook). Thus, these objects can be seen as images, 'points of identification' that 'mark the site of an ambivalence' (Bhabha, 1994, 1607 ebook). Thus, objects as images in *The Black Album* are not always straight forward representations of the truth about Shahid's identity.

The Relationship Between Objects and Individuals

In migrant fiction the objects that characters carry with them from one country to another can act as signifiers in many different ways. The objects chosen for a journey, particularly a migration, seem important as they can contain hidden information about the hopes, aspirations and expectations of the traveller who carries them. For instance, in Andrea Levy's novel of Jamaican migration to England, *Small Island*, the character Hortense travels to England with an enormous, unwieldy trunk. Levy's novel is set in London in the period immediately succeeding the Second World War. *Small Island* is the story of Queenie Bligh, an English landlady, and her Jamaican lodgers, Gilbert Joseph and his wife Hortense. The novel deftly traces the beginning of a period of mass immigration to the United Kingdom from her existing and former colonies. It explores the legacy of the British imperial project and the problems of racism and prejudice encountered by early immigrants, while simultaneously painting a stark picture of the deprivations of everyday

life in post war London.

In the novel, the aforementioned trunk belonging to Hortense can be viewed as an object that embodies a number of elements of the immigrant experience and of the composition of migrant identity in the postcolonial era. The trunk becomes a thing of mystery and promises wonderful things to those who behold it. Because of its sheer enormity it is concluded that it must certainly contain all manner of appealing and exotic items from Jamaica:

> "You know what she have in that trunk?".
> "No, man."
> "Come, let us open it. Mango fetching a good price. You think she have rum? I know one of the boys give me half his wage to place him tongue in a guava"
> (Levy, 2004, 23).

Nonetheless, the contents of the trunk remain a mystery and Hortense is protective of her property. She is attached to it as through it were a thing of great value to be safeguarded and cherished: 'She rub the case like I bruise it', remarks Gilbert when he has to step over the trunk to get into his room (Levy, 2004, 25). Perhaps the reason why Hortense behaves this way towards the trunk is to do with the fact that it is filled not only with all of her worldly possessions but also with her long cherished dreams of making a successful life for herself in England. The trunk represents a vision of a new life, a life of independence, self-sufficiency and success: "'I have everything I will need in that trunk...'", Hortense tells Gilbert when she first arrives (Levy, 2004, 19). Bachelard sees sealed boxes, such as trunks or chests, as symbolic objects: 'These complex pieces that a

craftsman creates are very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding place' (1994, 81 original emphasis). For Bachelard, a closed box, such as Hortense's trunk, not only 'contains the things that are unforgettable' from the past, but also acts as a symbolic repository wherein 'the past, the present and a future are condensed' (1994, 84). Thus it can be argued that within the closed trunk, Hortense stores her entire self, her composite identity.

The theme of migrant self-sufficiency and adaptability recurs in a number of the novels in this project and is also closely linked to the symbology of objects. Practical objects that can be put to good use or employed to make money are particularly associated with the migrant in literature. But does this association contribute to the creation or propagation of a stereotypical and discriminatory myth of the archetypal resourceful, chameleon-like immigrant, or as Zadie Smith describes them, 'the blank people'? (2001, 465). If so, this is a dangerous stereotype that would seek to undermine the migrant figure, robbing him or her of a past replete with history, language, culture and heritage. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that migrant figures in literature are indeed often associated with such objects. An instance of such association can be found in Diana Evans's novel *26A*. At the heart of this novel are twin sisters Georgia and Bessie Hunter who live with their parents and two other sisters in Neasden, North West London. They are the children of the unhappy marriage of Ida and Aubrey Hunter. Their mother, Ida, is Nigerian, and their father is English. The implications of their parents' unhappy marriage and the lack of cultural cohesion within their household combine to threaten the stability of the sisters' sense of belonging in the world. Ultimately, Georgia finds herself irrevocably lost and unable to find a way to negotiate human existence. The novel raises interesting questions about the impact of immigration on subsequent generations and

examines the development of hybrid cultural identities amongst the children of migrants in Britain.

The novel make numerous associations between objects and the development of hybrid identities. For instance, the character Ida Hunter shops compulsively for everyday necessary items from the local shops when she learns that her husband has received an assignment that will send the family to live in Nigeria for three years. Her frantic acquisition of everyday household objects in preparation for a return to her homeland is interesting because it suggests an anxiety on her part as to the family's welfare in Africa. The four Hunter children were born in England and this is their first trip to Nigeria. Their mother is perhaps anxious that they will be deprived of the objects to which they have been accustomed in Britain and their constructed identities will thus be threatened: 'She kept shopping, every day...She bought wholesale. Ordinary things that were part of everyday life, like shampoo and bubble bath, soap bars and clothes and toys as if this were her last chance to get them. Didn't they sell soap there, or shampoo?' (Evans, 2005, 41). It can be argued that these objects have come to comprise Ida's reality in England and she is perhaps worried that without them, her family will not adapt to life in Nigeria. By bringing the objects associated with her life in England with her to Nigeria, Ida is attempting to transplant that reality to the family's new home. The attempt is unsuccessful, however, and the family's life changes significantly. Nonetheless, in Africa Ida gravitates towards the objects that she associates with her home life in England: '...she felt most at home sitting near a fridge, or a boiling kettle...' (2005, 51). Once again this image brings to mind Stein's idea of a single object constituting a whole culture. Stein argues that novels of migrant experience in Britain engage in a process of commodification of British identity. For Stein, this equates to 'the redefinition of

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Britishness and the modification of the image of Britain' (1994, 42). Thus, objects such as those acquired by Ida in the novel come to represent a new version of Britishness.

For the rest of the family, the absence of familiar objects leads to homesickness. For instance, on the occasion of the family's first Christmas abroad the children are disappointed and saddened by the lack of a tree and no ribbon around the presents. These small, commonplace objects are keenly missed because of what they symbolise. They are, as Stein has it, icons of British life', and without them, the family's British identity becomes unstable (1994, 45). However, after a while even the absence of such objects becomes unimportant to the family because 'home had a way of shifting, of changing shape and temperature. Home was homeless. It could exist anywhere, because its only substance was familiarity. If it was broken by long journeys or tornadoes it emerged again, reinvented itself with new décor, new idiosyncrasies of morning, noon and dusk, and old routines' (Levy, 2005, 54). The sense of the familiarity that symbolises home alluded to in this extract is often created by objects in this and other works of migrant fiction. There is a sense here that proximity to familiar objects provides a comforting sense of continuity with the past. In *26A*, for instance, the children observe that their father 'left for work in the mornings much the same way as he did in London, with a briefcase and a tie and Old Spice around his neck' (Evans, 2005, 54) Here is yet another instance in migrant literature of the strange made familiar as the essence of home transcends physical space.

As discussed with regard to Kureishi's depiction of migrant identity in *The Black Album*, it is clear that the objects with which individual characters are associated can frequently be read as material manifestations of hybrid migrant identity. For instance, in *26A*,

Aubrey and Ida Hunter each place items inside the marital home that can be seen to represent their disparate cultural heritage. In the hallway,

> Ida put an ebony carving of an old spirit woman with horns....Aubrey wasn't altogether convinced. He thought it looked mucky, like something off the rag and bone cart. In the dining room he lined the main wall with miniature watercolours of the English countryside....Ida put more heads all over the house....And finally, for the living room, Aubrey chose, very carefully, a large-scale tapestry of the Derbyshire dales. They were colliding silently, through geography (Evans, 2005, 37-8).

Contained within this eloquent depiction of clashing identities is a deft demonstration of how the objects and artefacts associated with one culture can conflict with those from another.

However, there are also a number of occasions within the novel where the opposite is true, where the two cultures sit happily side by side. An apposite instance of such cultural harmony can be found in a passage of the novel wherein Ida sews herself a patchwork dressing gown, interweaving fabrics brought with her from Nigeria with others purchased from a shop in London. The creation of the dressing gown can be re-imagined as a process of cultural blending and merging. Indeed, the dressing gown is vested with great power in the novel. Ida's eldest daughter, Bel, believes the garment 'made her mother shine, and probably fly' (2005, 40). The process of sewing the garment also grants Ida a new perspective on her place in the world: 'As she sewed one piece to another in cyclical patchwork, she came across a road. Not a strange road, with headlights or danger, but

one to take her back, to remind her of who she was and where she had come from' (2005. 40).

Another novel that explores the relationship between objects and lived migrant experience in Britain is *Sour Sweet* by Timothy Mo. The novel is set in contemporary London and relates the story of the Chen family, husband and wife Lily and Chen, their son, Man Kee, and Lily's sister, Mui. The Chen family are recent immigrants to Britain and the novel details their endeavours to establish themselves in the challenging conditions of their adopted homeland. Lily is highly proficient in the martial arts; however when she first comes to Britain her true identity seems to have been eclipsed by her role as mother and wife. As the novel progresses, both she and her sister Mui evolve into more independent, self-sufficient, women, arguably as a result of their exposure to English culture. Inanimate objects take on immense symbolic significance in the novel. The opening paragraph of the novel demonstrates the importance of the representation of migrant experience through a description of objects. The reader learns that the Chen family has been living in the United Kingdom for four years and in that time they have been all but forgotten in their homeland, remembered there only 'in the shape of the money order' Chen remitted to his father every month' (Mo, 1999, 5). The implied significance of the author's emphasis of the object over the man is telling. The money order, an inanimate object, becomes more important than the migrant figure in his or her own right. Furthermore, the object becomes the only remaining tangible link between the migrant figure's past and present lives.

In addition, it can be argued that one of the objects of richest symbolic significance in Mo's novel is the van that the family purchases from their neighbour. For Lily Chen, in

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particular, the van is the ultimate symbol of freedom, independence, and progress, and in the end, it is she who learns how to drive the van:

> Who was going to drive it? Now here was an embarrassing problem. On learning none of them could drive, the man who had sold them the van had kindly offered to give a few lessons. Chen was the obvious recipient. The girls did not wish to trespass on what was so obviously a male prerogative. Chen himself was keen to learn. The trouble was he had no aptitude, none at all. That much was made plain within fifteen minutes of the first lesson (Mo, 1999, 154).

Furthermore, the reader learns that when he got behind the wheel 'what was immediately noticeable was that Chen had almost disappeared from sight' (1999, 154). This description suggests that the machine has all but eradicated Chen's identity. When he is behind the wheel of the vehicle he becomes almost invisible.

In contrast, Lily's identity seems to take on a new, stronger dimension when she assumes the driver's seat: 'Lily suggested moving the van outside their house not by pushing but by driving it....Daring and reckless hardly described Lily adequately these days' (1999, 158). When Lily is driving the van she is described as 'vivacious' and as 'thoroughly enjoying herself' and it is interesting to note that these are among the first descriptions of that nature relating to Lily in the novel thus far (1999, 158). When she is mistress of the van, Lily seems to truly come to life and act as a young woman could perhaps be expected to act, that is, in a carefree and happy manner. Through her engagement with the van, a symbol of Western culture and modernity, Lily seems to break away from the legacy of her traditional Chinese upbringing and embrace a different way of life. Prior to this point

in the narrative Lily possesses what Elaine Ho so aptly characterises as 'a strong sense of herself as Chinese...grounded in her upbringing by her father, a martial arts champion....determined to assert his worth through his progeny, he subjected Lily from an early age to the punishing physical discipline demanded of a martial arts initiate. Her body is literally the bearer of this familial and patriarchal culture...' (2004, The Literary Encyclopaedia)

Furthermore, Ho reads Lily's father's strict martial arts training programme as a symbolic colonisation of the young woman's body. In this context, Lily's body becomes an object over which her father asserts total patriarchal dominance:

> At the age of five she began her instruction in Chinese boxing, under the tutelage of her father....Her father made no concessions to his pupil. He had the child squatting in a low crouch for an hour at a time with legs apart as far as they could stretch, using two daggers stuck in the ground as markers. On her head he balanced a full earthenware wine-jar....At the same time he lightly rapped Lily's shins with a bamboo staff. Tears would be pouring down the girl's face half-way through her ordeal, her thigh muscles apparently on fire, the pain in her shins almost a welcome distraction from the major agony' (Mo, 1999, 15-6).

Therefore, when an adult Lily uses her body independently to engage in activities such as driving a van, the symbolic significance is inverted. Her body is her own once again and she learns how to use it to exert control over inanimate objects, rather than attempting to dehumanise another person like her father did by treating Lily's body like an object to be

manipulated and controlled.

Furthermore, in relation to the significance of the van in the novel, the reader observes how Lily becomes the symbolic head of the family for the duration of time that she is behind the steering wheel of the vehicle. During these special periods of time, it is Lily alone *who* decides where the family will go and what they will do. An example of this is when she decides she will take her family to the seaside. She conceives the plan and carries it out from start to finish by herself. Mo writes: 'Within an hour of stepping over the newspapers and out the front door, they were looking at the English Channel. Lily had driven impeccably....On the road Lily had actually overtaken a couple of laggard vehicles with immense verve and...timing' (1999, 161).

Through the van Lily exerts a progressive and horizon-broadening influence upon her family. Each member of the family can see the potential the van has for opening up new possibilities, however it is Lily alone who possesses the skill and confidence to realise that potential. The two women in particular are strongly attached to the van. When Chen jokingly remarks that nobody would want to steal the van because it is a 'heap of tin', both women react strongly in defence of the object: 'The girls bristled. "What do you mean by that, Husband? *The old heap* as you can call it, brought us here and it will take us back." "Brother-in-law, don't be so proud," Mui rebuked him in her turn, "you should never be deceived by appearances"' (1999, 161). Lily's remark that the van 'brought us here and will take us back' is particularly laden with meaning, demonstrating as it does the immense potential of the van to take the family places they could never before have

reached.

For Chen himself, the object that appears to have most significance in the novel is one which he sets eyes on only once. It is a ship that he spies through a telescope on the family's trip to see the English Channel. Holding his infant son in his arms Chen beholds the ship and the reader gleans a rare insight into this character's inner life. He addresses his Son thus: 'Do you see the ship, son?...It is a special little ship for people like us, Son. It is very little and very old but that is only what strangers see. We know better, don't we Son, because it is the ship that will take us all back home when we are finished here. It will take you to your homeland, Son, which you have never seen.' (1999, 162) The ship represents the sense of impermanence that Chen feels about his life in England. It tells the reader that Chen is unwilling and perhaps unable to commit to a new life in England, unlike his wife who embraces new experiences and opportunities available in the new country, symbolised by her enthusiasm to learn to drive the van.

In the case of the novel's other main character, Mui, Lily's sister, the object of most symbolic significance is perhaps the television set in the Chens' living room. For the entire duration of her first few months spent in England, Mui is completely captivated by the television set. Her compulsive television watching strikes her sister Lily as a symptom of homesickness and depression. This may indeed be the case; however it later becomes apparent that Mui has been busy learning about her new homeland during all those hours of apparently passive television watching. The television has therefore performed an important educational function. It has taught Mui about many aspects of English culture and society. It can be seen as a major contributing factor to Mui's development of something of a hybrid identity. Of the three main characters, Mui is the one who is most

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receptive of English culture and makes the most effort to assimilate. The television set can therefore be seen as a facilitator for cultural assimilation.

Interestingly, however, later in the novel Mo inverts the symbolic significance of the television set. When the Chens open a Chinese takeaway restaurant Lily is perturbed by the gaze of the predominantly white English customers as they face her at the counter while waiting for their orders to be ready: 'Poised up there, staring down at the waiting customers, she was struck by a sense of the absurd. What must she look like to rows down there?' (1999, 100). To remedy this, Lily comes up with the idea of placing a television set in the room for the customers to watch. She decides to place the television at the opposite side of the room to the counter so that the customers must sit with their backs to her if they wish to watch the television set: 'The atmosphere in the front room was less like a church now; it had become more of a cinema. It was definitely less of a strain on all parties concerned. No more of those excruciating face-to-face intervals of waiting, with Lily and the customers scrupulously avoiding each others' eyes' (1999, 145). Crucially, however, the reader can now perceive that the television has become a symbolic barrier to understanding and integration between the migrant figure and the native English figure. It is a neutral, safe object for both parties and its presence in the room allows both parties to ignore one another without appearing rude or intolerant. It does not facilitate understanding or help to educate either party about the other's culture, as it did for Mui earlier in the novel. Lily does try to copy Mui's feat of educating herself about English culture through watching television, but to no avail: '...it didn't do Lily much good' (1999, 144). Symbolic objects in migrant literature can therefore be seen to either inhibit or facilitate understanding and integration depending on the context. The discussion now moves on to consider the important dynamic in place between such

symbolic objects and their place in and relationship with space and place.

Objects and Space

This section explores the dynamic that exists within migrant literature between metonymical objects and their positioning in space. The objects that comprise the landscape of the physical world in migrant literary fiction are frequently described as imposing and at times dangerous or menacing, leading to a sense of marginalisation within the setting of migrant literature in London. At moments of crisis or danger in particular, the physical world of objects and their spatial setting can appear to bear down on the literary migrant figure. The protagonist of Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* is one version of such a figure. The novel explores the progress and development of protagonist Nazneen, from teenage bride to self-sufficient mother of two daughters. Nazneen's journey, from the moment of her arrival in Britain as the result of an arranged marriage, to her eventual attainment of independence, is one version of the immigrant story of modern Britain. A search for personal space, intrusion into the private world of the individual, oppression of individual freedom and independent spirit are among the many complex themes that arise in *Brick Lane*. Nazneen experiences all of these things and in Monica Ali's treatment of these themes in the novel can perhaps be seen as a commentary on what it is to be at the mercy of others in a foreign land. The reader can identify myriad ways in which Nazneen's individual journey can be seen to mirror the journeys undertaken by many other Black and Asian immigrants to Britain as they embark upon a new life in a strange country. Told in a series of letters, the parallel story of Nazeen's sister Hasina punctuates the narrative. Hasina, who has remained in Bangladesh, is an eternal victim and her life is torn apart by the malignant forces that seem to gather around

her wherever she goes.

In *Brick Lane*, inanimate household objects loom large upon Nazneen's consciousness to the point of oppressing her sense of physical freedom within the domestic space. At times of personal crisis for Nazneen throughout the novel, Ali describes the physical world, the landscape of inanimate objects, as harsh and threatening. London, the strange city of Nazneen's mind, is conveyed as a world crammed with sharp-edged objects and potential hazards: 'The city shattered. Everything was in pieces. She knew it straight away, glimpsed it from the painful-white insides of the ambulance. Frantic neon signs. Headlights chasing the dark. An office block, cracked with light. These shards of the broken city' (Ali, 2004, 117). Here the image of a broken, fractured city provides the reader with a telling insight into how Nazneen cannot separate her personal life from the world that is going on outside of her. Although she has little or no contact with the outside world, with London, nonetheless in times of anguish, pain, or crisis, Nazneen describes how the physical city manifests her own private emotions through its shapes and structures.

In this section of the novel, a time of great pain for Nazneen, when her infant son is being rushed to hospital in an ambulance, Ali takes great pains to have Nazneen engage with her physical surroundings at the time when she would be least expected to notice the physical world around her. As she races through the London streets in the ambulance Nazneen takes time to note that the houses she sees resemble 'red-brick tombs' (2004, 117). At the moment of deepest catastrophe and tragedy in the novel, the point at which she learns of the death of her son, Nazneen fixates on the inanimate objects that happen to be lying around in the hospital room where her son had slept. She 'regarded the plastic

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cups by the sink, the towels and clothes playing *havoc* on the pull-down bed where she and Chanu took turns sleeping' (2004, 144). In this way it becomes clear that the physical world of objects becomes almost like a language, the words of which Nazneen picks up one by one, stringing them together until such time they comprise a coherent whole, a sentence with which she can make sense of the new realities of her life. Or, alternatively, these objects can be viewed as akin to places on a map with familiar names, Nazneen must learn to know the places in between, the strange, unfamiliar places, and to do this she must negotiate her way between the familiar ones, landmarks along the way, until she has made her way safely through the unknown spaces.

In the following section Ali describes the ways in which Nazneen came to know her new environment when she first arrived to as an immigrant from Bangladesh:

> When she had come [to England] she had learned first about loneliness, then about privacy, and finally she learned a new kind of community. The wife upstairs who used the lavatory in the night....The milkman's alarm clock that told Nazneen the gruelling hours her neighbour must keep. The woman on the other side whose bed thumped the wall when her boyfriends called. These were her unknown intimates' (Ali, 2004, 182).

In this passage three disparate objects are singled out for attention: a lavatory, an alarm clock, and a bed. These are the unremarkable, everyday objects that perform such an important role in helping Nazneen, symbol of wider migrant experience, assimilate into and make sense of her new environment. There are so many barriers to communication and understanding for a recent migrant to a new country, such as Nazneen, and Ali

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suggests that the migrant must come up with new and unusual means of understanding and adapting. Nazneen appears to symbolically grope around in the dark, feeling her way through the darkness with only objects such as the ones mentioned as her guide.

In her critical response to *Brick Lane*, Sara Upstone has written about Monica Ali's characterisation of Nazneen as 'the archetypal migrant figure', seeing her as an embodiment of 'a diasporic identity in which the place of settlement and the place called home are separated from each other, where one is always looking elsewhere: to both another place and another time.' (2008) This assessment of the role of Nazneen as a symbol of the wider migrant experience is a key idea and one which deserves further exploration. Ali's depiction of Nazneen's sense of being trapped within the physical confines of a repressive domestic space and oppressed by the objects that surround her can perhaps be seen as symbolic of the experience of many other migrants, particularly female Muslims. I will take this idea as a starting point for the following section. One of the most conspicuous objects of symbolic significance in the novel is the sewing machine. In this section I would like to explore in more depth the symbolic possibilities and significance of the sewing machine, linking it to other texts, in an attempt to establish what it may represent.

The sewing machine is of paramount importance to the development of the character of Nazneen in *Brick Lane*. Furthermore, it can be argued that it is employed by Ali as a symbol of hope, empowerment, independence, and creativity. The sewing machine is one of the only things in the domestic space of which Nazeen is truly mistress. She is adept at its use, while her husband can only sit by her side and play the role of assistant: 'He made himself available at her elbow, handing thread, passing scissors, dispensing

advice, making tea, folding garments' (2004, 207) while Nazneen 'mastered basting stitch, hemming, button-holing and gathering....Nazneen put in zips, flew through seams....Every spare piece of cloth in the house had been stitched together and taken apart and married to another....Spools of coloured thread sat on Chanu's books, bright flags signalling the way to knowledge.' (2004, 194-5) The beautiful image of coloured thread resting on books is also quite obviously a symbol of Nazneen's blossoming talent, the juxtaposition of Nazneen's thread with Chanu's books representing the fact that Nazneen has found her own medium for self-improvement.

It is clear that through the process of her of complete mastery of the sewing machine, Nazneen creates a true identity for herself. The sewing machine is used to make clothes for a local factory, providing Nazneen with an income and the opportunity to move outside the restrictive domestic space. Therefore the sewing machine represents creativity in a more practical sense that is it represents the act of creation as a means of supporting oneself. By making items to sell Nazneen becomes the agent of her own destiny and the act of creation itself becomes a profound act of feminine independence, an act that echoes the achievement of Celie in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* when she carved out a business and a new life for herself through the mastery of a sewing machine. Using their respective machines both women manage to create new economic and social realities for themselves. They can literally be seen to sew together the pieces of their own futures, a process that unfolds independently of the patriarchal oppression the women have been embroiled in up until this point. In *Brick Lane* Nazneen's engagement with those outside her immediate domestic environment leads to the development of her confidence in addition to the emergence of a more developed social and political consciousness, or what Geraldine Moane has described as a 'realization that experiences which were thought to

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be purely personal, such as those to do with sexuality, emotions and relationships, were actually shaped by the social and political forces of society' (2011, 2-3).

With further regard to the symbolic significance of the sewing machine in *Brick Lane*, it can also be seen as a metaphor for the potential for change and improvement in the circumstances of the migrant figure in Britain. In an article entitled 'The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*', Michael Perfect argues that the 'major concern of the novel is not the destabilization of stereotypes but the celebration of the potential for adaptation in both individuals and societies' (2008, 43). In *Brick Lane*, Ali demonstrates how inanimate objects can act as media through which this adaptation can occur. Nazneen allows the sewing machine to take her in a new direction, she sees it as a life-giving force, rather than an inanimate object. Indeed, Nazneen's approach to the sewing machine echoes Arjun Appadurai's philosophy of 'the social life of things', acknowledging that through use and activity, things can reveal their life force: '…we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven them' (Appadurai, 1988, 5). However, it is not always possible for adaptation to take place, and the objects alone cannot transform a situation, as evidenced by Chanu's interactions with the computer. The purchase of the computer seems like a positive step forward for Chanu, but he lacks the knowledge that would help him to utilise the machine to its fullest potential. In the end, the most constructive thing he can think of to do with the computer is to use it to look at photos of his home in Bangladesh. Through this symbolic act we can see that Chanu is using the technology to move backwards instead of forwards. There is a profound contrast in outlook between husband and wife at this juncture of the novel. The

sewing machine and the computer are purchased concurrently, but their respective symbolic potentials are interpreted in very different ways by their owners.

Tellingly, the second object that holds the power to arrest Nazneen's thoughts is the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the sole inanimate object in the entire flat towards which Nazneen displays any attachment. If, as shall be posited later in this chapter, the wardrobe can be viewed as the embodiment of all of Nazneen's fears and anxieties, then the Qur'an can be seen as its diametric opponent. Indeed, Nazneen is so attached to the Qur'an that she entreats her husband to construct a special shelf for its accommodation: 'Standing on the sofa to reach, she picked up the Holy Qur'an from the high shelf that Chanu, under duress, had specially built' (Ali, 2004, 20). The shelf is elevated, so much so that Nazneen cannot reach it, emphasising the symbolic significance of the book in Nazneen's mind. She sees it as being the one object in the flat that is removed from and separate to the daily degradations and oppressions she suffers in her domestic prison. At times of stress throughout the novel she takes the Qur'an down from its shelf to read the words aloud because 'the words calmed her stomach' (2004, 20). The Qur'an fulfils the role of comforter at times of disquiet and distress. Furthermore, the book represents Islam for Nazneen, and its physical presence in such an alien domestic space brings her peace of mind and restores her sense of self. As Jane Hiddleston has observed: 'Islam is a form or signifier, connoting identity and certainty' (2005, 66). As if to confirm this idea, Ali writes: 'She did not know what the words meant but the rhythm of them soothed her. Her breath came from down in her stomach. In and out. Smooth. Silent' (Ali, 2004, 21). The fact that Nazneen does not understand the words she recites serves to confirm the theory that it is the fact of Islam, and the fact of the presence of the Holy book in the flat, that is

important, as together they serve to reassure Nazneen as to her true identity.

Later in the novel there is a further insight into the significance of the Qur'an to be gleaned. Nazneen observes of her husband Chanu, a voracious reader, that 'of all the books that he held in his hand she had never once seen him with the Holy Qur'an' (2004, 41). This observation is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the language used in this excerpt is illuminating. Chanu is described as holding books in his hands, rather than reading them, thus emphasising the transitory nature of his relationship with them. He cannot possess or control them in the same way that he can Nazneen. Not for the first time in the narrative, Nazneen is likened to an inanimate object. Hence, in this section of the novel there is a recognition of the perceived similarities between Nazneen and the books. Nazneen can relate to the books because she too has been handled, passed from one hand to another, for most of her life. Secondly, this observation alerts the reader to a growing awareness on Nazneen's part of the possibility of constructing her own identity, separate to that of her husband. The Qur'an, untouched by Chanu's hands, becomes something truly sacred to Nazneen, something that is free of the taint of patriarchy associated with every other object in the flat.

Throughout the novel it is possible to identify numerous passages containing descriptions of objects that litter the domestic space. It is particularly interesting to note both the language Ali uses to describe the objects and how she describes Nazneen's interactions with them. The following passage is illuminating in this sense: 'She walked around the room picking up any object, without knowing what it was or where she put it. When the floor was clear she began rearranging the things she had moved, grouping them promiscuously, deranging as she arranged' (2004, 331). This passage comes at an

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important moment in the novel, the point at which Nazneen re-enters her own life after a breakdown. It marks a turning point in her development and the changes that are about to occur are symbolised by her moving around of the objects that monopolise her personal space. The objects themselves are described as insignificant ('any object') ; it is her physical interaction with them that is significant. She picks them up, she takes charge of them, she moves them around; she is testing her power and agency here, practising her new found independence by asserting her dominance over these inanimate objects and in the process reclaiming her physical space.

Of all the inanimate objects that fill the domestic space in *Brick Lane*, one item in particular underscores the veracity of Brown's notion of the potency of the object to affect the subject. The symbolic significance of the wardrobe in *Brick Lane* should not be overlooked and deserves closer examination, not least because Gaston Bachelard has devoted a section to its contemplation in his seminal work, *The Poetics of Space* (1994, 78-81). 'Wardrobes', writes Bachelard, 'are veritable organs of the secret psychological life....They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy' (78). As a representation of the 'secret psychological life' of Nazneen, the wardrobe embodies her sense of living a cloistered, dislocated and marginalised life. At one particularly compelling juncture of the narrative Ali describes the physical power that the wardrobe exerts over her protagonist, when she writes that Nazneen often tried to take refuge from her unhappy domestic situation in the bedroom. Ali describes how Nazneen would 'sit in the bedroom until the wardrobe drove her out', thus showing the reader that the wardrobe confronts Nazneen with her inner psychological turmoil. (2003, 84). The wardrobe is a symbolic embodiment of Nazneen's inner life, containing all of her subsumed dreams and ambitions. Its physical presence in

the bedroom means that she can find no refuge, there is nowhere to hide from the truth of her miserable emotional condition. The forces of oppression that haunt Nazneen and make her a prisoner in her own home are all contained within the bedroom and the wardrobe asks Nazneen to confront the reality of her misery. (2003, 184). To open the wardrobe, then, is a painful experience, but one that Nazneen needs to realise if she is to move forward. As Bachelard remarks: [But] the real wardrobe is not an everyday piece of furniture. It is not opened every day, and so, like a heart that confides in no one, the key is not on the door' (1994, 79). Thus, the wardrobe can be seen to symbolise the inner emotional life of Nazneen and the sequestered nature of that inner life. The wardrobe, on several occasions throughout the novel, assumes anthropomorphic qualities. It becomes as much of a bully and a tyrant as Nazneen's husband, and at times its presence seems to trouble her as much as that of her husband's. In addition, it is telling that the wardrobe is the place used to store Nazneen's husband Chanu's certificates from myriad courses and training programmes that ultimately did nothing to advance his career or facilitate his successful integration into British society. The certificates 'were waiting in the bottom of the wardrobe until someone had the energy to hang them' (2003, 185). The wardrobe is therefore not only a symbol of Nazneen's marginalised position, but also a repository for Chanu's own dreams and a burial site for the ambition and hope he brought with him as a migrant to England. In light of his failure to realise his ambitions, in spite of his vast array of educational qualifications, Chanu is also depicted as a victim of oppression. Mark Stein has described the immigrant condition as 'a succession of rebirths and a series of transplantations' but opines that 'education seems to present a way out of this predicament'(2004, 159-60). This theory of the liberating potential of education seems to

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be up for debate in *Brick Lane*.

Throughout *Brick Lane* Ali uses metaphors and similes to make comparisons or highlight differences between Bengali and British culture. Two examples have been discussed by Jane Hiddleston in answer to a response to the novel by a reviewer, Natasha Walter. In her review of the novel Walter criticised Ali's use of the image of Nazneen's mother's appearance in which she is described as looking as though she 'had been ripening like a mango on a tree'. Hiddleston responded to this criticism by acknowledging that the 'imagery seems somewhat stereotypical and contrived, taking obvious, stock signifiers of an exotic Eastern culture and using them to caricature the community of "foreign" characters evoked'. However, Hiddleston goes on to opine that what Ali is actually doing here is 'drawing attention to Western assumptions and stereotypes, or at least the ways in which popular images serve to organize and shape our perception of Asian culture' (2005, 61).

Furthermore, Hiddleston observes, 'the reader is forced to consider the implications of and effects of common stereotypes or rhetorical tropes', Ali creates 'images stemming from Bengali culture and thought' (2005, 61). I would wholeheartedly agree with this assessment and further add that the images in question, and more precisely the objects, are key to unlocking the symbolic significance of representations of immigrant experience in this and other migrant novels. Ali deliberately chooses obvious images that refer to objects such as the coconut, or in other examples, a mango, a wardrobe, a sewing machine, the Qur'an, Findus Beef Burgers, precisely because they are familiar objects that are laden with significance and possible associations for the reader. Ali uses images of objects to convey ideas and experiences, and in this context the description of familiar

objects can prove very effective as a literary device because the objects can then be manipulated or changed to become unfamiliar or take on new meaning.

In both *Sour Sweet* and *Brick Lane* inanimate objects represent possibility and in each novel it is the women, rather than the men, who learn to manipulate that potential in order to improve the situation of their families as migrants to a new land. Objects can therefore be seen to hold the potential to grant freedom and independence to the marginalised or oppressed migrant figure in literature. This potential can be exploited in objects in a way that it simply cannot in people. The migrants represented in these novels do not receive assistance from those around them, for the most part, and are therefore forced to use whatever resources they can lay their hands on in order to begin the process of building a future for themselves in their new environment. This is also the case in earlier literary representations of migration to Great Britain. The examples noted from the novels of Monica Ali and Timothy Mo echo earlier depictions of similar realities in migrant fiction by writers such as Sam Selvon and V.S.Naipaul.

In *The Mimic Men*, for instance, Naipaul delights in furnishing the reader with potent images of the physical world of the recently arrived immigrant. Cramped spaces and gloomy vistas abound in this novel, providing a vivid backdrop to a story that describes the hardships encountered by the stranger in a strange land:

> And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the

forlornness of the city and of the people who live in it (Naipaul, 2002, 5).

A similar statement could be made about Sam Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners*, although Selvon dwells more on a description of how poverty dictates the reality of the physical world occupied by the immigrant. Both authors describe the two very different physical worlds that migrants occupy in London. One is the internal space, the other the external. Naipaul continually returns to descriptions of the English weather and landscape, contrasting the beauty and possibility of snow, for example, with the stifling pokiness of a lodging-house room. In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul describes one such boarding house, 'a working-class Kilburn house of grey, almost black, brick in which I had a two-room flat sharing lavatory and bathroom with everybody else' (1987, 138). Monica Ali's later image of London's 'red-brick tombs' could have been constructed to describe such a house (2003, 117).

One of the main characters in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses Aloetta, also inhabits such a room in such a house. He describes himself as being 'lock up in that small room, with London and life on the outside'. Writing on this subject, Susheila Nasta notes that 'Moses lives in a dark world of bleak interiors' (Nasta in Selvon, 2006, xv). His physical surroundings strongly influence the way he feels about his life in London. Moses sees his room as a kind of prison, a place where he could lie dead unnoticed for a long time until someone happened to call: '…look how people does dead and nobody don't know nothing until the milk bottles start to pile up in front of the door. Supposing one day I keel off here in this room? I don't take regular milk – I would stay here until one of the boys dropped round' (2006, 126-7). Moses is describing what Naipaul refers to as 'the swiftness and secrecy of a London death (2002, 4). In Moses' description the reader

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can once again take note of the significance of recurring images of innocuous objects in literary representation of migrant experience, in this instance milk bottles become symbolic of the anonymity and isolation of the migrant who has no sense of community or belonging. There is no sense of being a part of something bigger than the individual lived experience for someone like Moses. He is alone, overlooked, ignored and neglected by the society around him. In one passage of the novel Moses discusses this problem in stark terms:

> Looking at things in general life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell....Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk. It ain't have no sort of family life for us here (Selvon, 2006, 126).

In this section of the novel Selvon eloquently imagines the experiences of the immigrant figure in London, emphasising as he does the symbolic significance of objects and the physical environment.

Rooms and their contents feature prominently in many of the works of migrant literary fiction under consideration across the breadth of this chapter. Indeed, it can be argued that they are the physical spaces that constitute the world of the migrant figure and thus their contents are of immense significance. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard asserts that it is possible to 'read a room' or 'read a house' in literature 'since both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy'

(1994, 38). Throughout *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard privileges interior over exterior space. He sees the home as a refuge and a retreat from the outside world. But what if the house you live in does not offer you these escapes? For many of the migrant literary figures under consideration in this study, the homes they occupy offer little refuge or comfort. Many of them chiefly occupy exterior spaces, often the city itself becomes their home. But does the city offer any places of retreat, or 'nests', to borrow from Bachelard? When characters in migrant fiction are described in the home, the houses in which they dwell are often small, cramped, and ill-suited to the needs of their inhabitants. However, if we look at these houses from the perspective of Bachelard we see that even 'the humblest dwelling has beauty' (1994, 4). He continues: 'For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word' (1994, 4). Bachelard sees the most important function of the house as the provision of a safe place to daydream: '...the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace' (1994, 6). This seems to be the salient feature of the houses, or rooms, that feature in many of the works under consideration in this chapter. The domestic spaces are humble enough, yet they offer limitless potential and opportunity for dreaming and imagining. Therefore, in *The Black Album*, for example, the physical deprivations of Shahid's living arrangements in London are offset by the freedom given to his artistic sensibilities to soar where formerly they had been stifled by his middle class suburban existence.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha muses on those events which occur in between cultures. The spaces in which these events occur are referred to as 'the liminal', places which are on the border or threshold of one or more cultures. Bhabha's discussion of the liminal once again brings to mind Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, and in particular, the flat

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occupied by Nazneen and her family in the Tower Hamlets estate in London. It can be argued that the flat represents a salient example of that referred to by Bhabha as 'the liminal' for it is neither one thing nor the other. It is definitely not Bangladesh but it is not quite London either. It is a place on the margins and the blocks of flats themselves become a metaphor for the experiences of ethnic and economic minorities in Great Britain, belonging but not belonging at the same time, standing apart but not unnoticed, the conspicuous grey edifices make their mark on society without necessarily achieving assimilation into the surrounding landscape. The flat inhabited by Nazneen and her family is a physical amalgam of Bangladesh and London, with the Qu'ran, Nazneen's most prized position, occupying pride of price in the flat and engaged in a silent, inert conflict with the shiny black lacquered wardrobes and china cabinet filled with mute and motionless ceramic animals. In this way, Bangladesh and London are shaken up and blended together to create a third space, a hybrid of two cultures and two locations. However, what is created through this process referred to as 'hybridization' by Bhabha does not appear to be a comfortable or homely place for any of those who inhabit it.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter there has been an in-depth consideration of the relationship between material culture, symbolic objects and identity formation in contemporary migrant literature. The chapter set out to explore how aspects of migrant experience can be illuminated through the symbolism of objects in the work of Zadie Smith, Diana Evans, Andrea Levy, Timothy Mo, Monica Ali, and Hanif Kureishi in the hope that a narrow focus on the symbolic significance of objects in migrant fiction may in turn help to

provide a deeper insight into lived migrant experience and identity formation.

This idea is also relevant to the other novels under consideration in this chapter. In *Brick Lane*, Ali develops the character of Nazneen as a symbol of migrant experience. It is apparent that Nazneen's experience of being trapped within the physical confines of a flat and oppressed by the objects within the domestic space can perhaps be seen as symbolic of the experience of many other migrants, particularly female Muslims. In both *Small Island* by Andrea Levy and *26A* by Diana Evans, the authors explore how the objects that migrants carry with them from one place to another can help to shape their reality. Finally, in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*, the Chen's experiences, and in particular, their symbolic interaction with the objects that surround them, can be seen as representative of one version of migrant experience. Older novels which sought to fictionalise the experience of immigration to Britain, such as those by V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon, also used images of symbolically significant objects to demonstrate aspects of migrant experience and this topic can therefore be traced back to the very origins of British Black and Asian literature. The discussion of objects in this chapter leads into the exploration of London as a migrant city in the chapter that follows, where the focus shifts from interior to exterior space.

Chapter Three

Mapping the City: Symbolic Locations, Intersections and the Postcolonial Flâneur/Flâneuse

Introduction

Throughout this chapter there is a discussion of the depiction of London as a postcolonial city in contemporary diasporic literature. In particular, the discussion focuses on the notion of the city of London as a hybrid migrant space that can be read to unveil layers of meaning. Theories of urban geography 'seek to make the city legible to us in some way or another', this can be achieved 'through the production of a poem, a piece of art or a song designed to stimulate new understandings of the city' (Hubbard, 2006, 14). Representations of London life abound in contemporary British migrant fiction. Some are bleak, some conjure up images of an urban idyll, others are frenetic and disturbed. Yet all of these fictional representations of London seem to follow in the footsteps of those aforementioned urban geographers, who toil to 'make the city legible to us', to make it possible for us to find a way to read the city and understand something of its structure, protagonists, and plot.

Place is central to any narrative, not just to a migrant narrative. Thus the city of London, as a setting for postcolonial literature, is invested with an intrinsic significance. According to Michel de Certeau all narratives are grounded in the centrality of place and movement through space. For de Certeau, 'every story is a travel story – a spatial practice' (1984,

115). Movement and journeys through London are central to mapping the migrant cityscape. The following de Certeau quote can thus be borrowed and applied specifically to migrant journeys across London: 'Their story begins at ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series....Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together' (1984, 97). Drawing on this theoretical framework, this chapter puts forward the argument that migrant narratives set in London are indeed grounded in the centrality of the city itself, and that the city represents disparate elements of migrant identity, depending on perspective.

In this context, the city of London is central to the argument advanced in this chapter. The contention throughout the chapter, and indeed across the breadth of the entire research project, is that London, as a postcolonial, transnational, diasporic space can be imagined in terms of Foucault's formulation of a 'heterotopia'. These are places that are 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (Foucault, 1986, 3-4). The idea of the version of London presented in diasporic fiction as a kind of 'counter-site' is a stimulating one. This offers the critical reader an opportunity to reimagine London in terms of the various imaginary and disparate but intertwined visions presented in migrant literature. For Foucault, 'the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (1986, 6). Thus, London can act as an imaginary homeland wherein competing and contested identities can co-exist and

flourish.

Another critical foundation for the chapter's central thesis is the concept of London as an imaginary homeland and a transnational space. John Clement Ball argues that the one thing that can be said of 'all postcolonial narratives set wholly or partly in London is that their characters…appropriate and imaginatively reinvent the city as a function of their individual and communal experiences of arriving, dwelling, walking, working, interacting, observing, responding and describing' (2004, 10). This is certainly a pertinent comment with regard to the texts surveyed in this chapter. This appropriation and reinvention of the city in the postcolonial era is central to the exploration of cultural hybridity in all of these texts. With further reference to Clement Ball, it is also apparent that the process of reinvention and reimagination has a palimpsestic quality. As Clement Ball notes: 'their responses and reinventions are conditioned by images of home: the colony or ex-colony from which they arrived and which they continue to remember and imaginatively inhabit….London not only includes the people of empire but, as it becomes subsumed into their postcolonial consciousnesses, it becomes overlaid with and complexly linked to faraway landscapes and cultures' (2004, 10-11).

The final critical frame for this chapter is constructed by drawing on a number of psychogeographic ideas. The foundation of these ideas is rooted primarily in Guy Debord's definition of psychogeography as 'the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord in Bauder and Engel-Di Mauro, 2008, 23). Furthermore, the approach to psychogeography taken by a thinker such as Merlin Coverely is particularly suited to the analysis in this project, as Coverely does not adhere rigidly to Debord's

model, but rather broadens the scope to include urban wandering, the figure of the mental traveller and the flâneur (2010, 10-11). These are concepts and figures that can be reimagined in the context of a critique of the relationship between the postcolonial migrant and the city of London. A consideration of gendered mappings of the city is also important. The theories put forward by Debord and Coverely do not take cognisance of possible differences between male and female perspectives on interactions with the city. The scholarship of Janet Wolff is therefore drawn upon to address this deficiency (1985). In particular, Wolff's contention that modern metropolitan literature largely neglects the experiences of women in favour of a masculine mapping of the city offers a new perspective on the figure of the flâneuse in contemporary migrant literature set in London.

The novels to be considered in this chapter are *Small Island* by Andrea Levy, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi, and *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. To seek to determine the shape and size of the city in these novels is to engage in an exercise in perspective. The city expands and contracts in accordance with the perspective of the individual character in question and is subject to fluctuation according to the scope or narrowness of their personal relationship with the city. For these writers, the city is never static, its character is never firmly established and known, and it is never the same city to more than one person at a time. Each character in these novels has their own personal relationship with London, and these relationships are never fixed but are subject to change at any moment. Furthermore, the city of London is not alone the landscape of and backdrop to these novels, it is itself a character in the text, akin to the role it plays in the work of Peter Ackroyd [4], who revealed in an interview,

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[4] See for instance the novel *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *London: The Biography* (2000)

'London has always provided the landscape for my imagination. It becomes a character - a living being - within each of my books' (1998). Indeed, Will Self believes that Ackroyd practises a kind of 'phrenology of London', as he 'feels up the bumps of the city, and so defines its character and proclivities' (2007, 11). This also seems like an apt assessment of the treatment of the city of London as a character in the novels of the authors mentioned above, and one that shall be explored further in this chapter.

Some of the themes explored by these novelists include navigation of the city, and the significance of landmarks, signs, and other geographical signifiers in mentally mapping the city. One of the first steps towards making a home in a city is coming to terms with it geographically and learning how to navigate its complex network of streets. The migrants in these novels tackle this task with varying degrees of success and failure. Others do not even try to get grips with the physical city, confining themselves instead to an insular existence within the walls of a domestic space. These characters tend to occupy one tiny portion of London but they cannot be said to truly live in or inhabit London in any meaningful way. For instance, the character of Darcus, a Jamaican immigrant, in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is an example of such an individual: 'Darcus had come over to England fourteen years earlier and spent the whole of that period in the far corner of the living room, watching television' (2001, 30-1). Smith describes Darcus's experience of London in terms of three things, 'the dole, the armchair and British television' (2001, 31). These three elements of life in England then can be seen as the landmarks that help Darcus to navigate his London experience. His is a liminal and marginal existence. His dislocation from London society cements his disempowered position as a migrant, but it is clear that is just one version of migrant experience, as his situation is very much at odds

with many of the other migrant characters in the novel.

Thus, in migrant fiction, the scope and size of the physical city of London fluctuates drastically from individual to individual. Darcus's conception of London seems to bear little resemblance to that of one of his migrant literary antecedents, Sir Galahad in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, for whom Piccadilly Circus and the statue of Eros was London. Here was a migrant character that embraced the awesome physicality of the city and made its streets his home. These elements of the character of Sir Galahad resonate in Hanif Kureishi's depiction of his protagonists' relationships with London in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. Karim and Shahid claim the streets of London as their own. Theirs is very much an exterior London life, a way of being in and relating to the city that spurns the staid, restrictive monotony of suburban domesticity. Both characters relate to the city of London in a manner that verges on the prurient; the city is an object of desire for them when they are grounded in the suburbs as adolescents, it is something for which they yearn and when they finally get there they want to experience all the delights it has to offer. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Karim exclaims 'so this was London at last, and nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day. London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually to walk through all of them' (1990, 126). Karim learns how to navigate the city with ease and his is a confident and exciting relationship with the city, in stark contrast to the relationship his father had with the city when he was a young man, newly arrived from Pakistan. To his father, 'London, the Old Kent Road, was a freezing shock….it was wet and foggy; people called you "Sunny Jim", there was never enough to eat, and Dad never took to dripping on toast' (1990, 24). The following section will examine the distinct character of place in migrant

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literature.

The Character of Place: Psychogeography and Negotiation of the Metropolis

A neutral place. The chances of finding one these days are slim....The sheer *quantity* of shit that must be wiped off the slate if we are to start again as new. Race. Land. Ownership. Faith. Theft. Blood. And more blood. And more. And not only must the *place* be neutral, but the messenger who takes you to the place, and the messenger who sends the messenger. There are no people or places like that left in North London (Smith, 2000, 457-8).

Depending on individual perspective then, London can assume very different characters or personalities. This is an idea that coheres with central concepts taken from those working in the area of psychogeography. As Will Self explains, 'some see psychogeography as concerned with the personality of place itself' (2007, 11). While Merlin Coverley sees 'London as the most resonant of all psychogeographical locations' (2010, 15). Psychogeographical ideas, therefore, may prove relevant to this exploration of literary representations of the relationship between London and the migrant. To what extent do our physical surroundings influence our emotional responses and behaviour? Psychogeography emphasises the connection between place and psychology. London is the setting for significant literary explorations of migration from Britain's former colonies. This chapter seeks to apply salient concepts from the field of psychogeography to the study of literary representations of migrant experience in the postcolonial metropolitan centre. The character of the city of London in the postcolonial era is a key

consideration when exploring literary representations of migrant experience in contemporary Britain. The writers in question explore the intricate connections between space, place, objects, emotion, and memory, and superimpose these themes onto fundamental explorations of postcolonial experience in contemporary Britain.

The term psychogeography is a complex one and can be difficult to define. It is a concept that requires a certain amount of unpacking and contextualisation. Guy Debord is credited with the development of the theory of psychogeography in the 1950s, as part of his involvement in the Situationist International movement.[5] Writing a definition of the term in 1955, Debord observed:

> Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of

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[5] The Situationist International movement was a revolutionary alliance of European avant-garde artists, writers and poets formed at a conference in Italy in 1957. The movement developed a critique of capitalism based on a mixture of Marxism and surrealism. Leading figure of the movement Guy Debord identified consumer society as the Society of the Spectacle in his influential 1967 book of that title.

discovery (Coverley, 2010, 88-9).

Elaborating on this definition, Merlin Coverley notes:

> Psychogeography becomes for Debord the point where psychology and geography collide. Gone are the romantic notions of an artistic practice; here we have an experiment to be conducted under scientific conditions and whose results are to be rigorously analysed. The emotional and behavioural impact of urban space upon individual consciousness is to be carefully monitored and recorded, its results used to promote the construction of a new urban environment that both reflects and facilitates the desires of the inhabitants of this future city, the transformation of which is to be conducted by those people skilled in psychogeographical techniques (2010, 89).

In his short introduction to psychogeography, Merlin Coverley endeavours to provide an accessible introduction to and overview of major psychogeographical ideas. Throughout this study, Coverley largely focuses on the ways in which psychogeographic themes and concerns have manifested themselves in specifically literary contexts (Clements, 2008). Coverley discusses the figure of the flâneur, a figure he describes as a 'wanderer in the modern city' (2010, 60). He underscores what he sees as the most important feature of the flâneur, 'the way in which he makes the street his home' (2010, 65). This is a central idea in the study of psychogeography, drawing attention as it does to the importance of the relationship between the individual and the streetscapes and cityscapes he or she inhabits. The journeys undertaken by individuals can be both physical and mental. In terms of physical journeys, psychogeography views 'the very act of walking' as

'subversive' (2010, 77).

In his work in this area Will Self has also emphasised the importance of walking as a subversive act and a way of engaging more thoroughly with the geographical environment. In his 2007 collaboration with Ralph Steadman, Self holds up for scrutiny 'the manner in which the contemporary world warps the relationship between psyche and place' (2007, 11). He sees London as possessing its 'own enduring personification' (2007, 11). This idea ties in well with Debord's theory of how a city can be divided into zones on the basis of the emotional responses each zone provokes. He describes 'the sudden change of ambience in the street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres....the appealing or repelling character of certain places' (Coverley, 2010, 89-90).

It is not difficult to envisage how psychogeographical ideas can be used as a prism through which to explore migrant fiction. Furthermore, a psychogeographical reading of migrant literature may mean that new layers of meaning and significance can be revealed. As noted earlier, Merlin Coverley sees London as 'the most resonant of all psychogeographical locations' (2010, 15). How does this description apply to the London depicted in the migrant literary texts in question in this study? Coverley cites Defoe's depiction of London as 'an unknowable labyrinth' (2010, 15). Does this description adequately convey the perception of the city formed by the migrant figures in these novels? It can be argued that the city is a labyrinth that can nonetheless be mapped and made knowable. Through mapping, ways can be found through, across, under the city. However, Coverley further sees the city as 'a dreamscape in which nothing is as it seems

and which can only be navigated by those possessing secret knowledge' (2010, 17).

This idea is interesting when considering the figure of the migrant who lacks this 'secret knowledge', who in fact lacks even the most basic information that could help to make sense of the city and its secrets. An example of such a figure is found in the character of Nazneen in the novel *Brick Lane*, for instance. As a young, largely uneducated Bengali woman, Nazneen finds herself living in the metropolitan centre, the heart of the former British Empire. She becomes acutely aware of her position of subaltern, completely without power and unable even to communicate with those around her: 'Nazneen could say two words in English: sorry and thank you' (2003, 19). She is cast in the role of other, her position is one of profound isolation and marginalisation. She is all too aware of her relationship of opposition to those who she perceives as belonging to the metropolitan centre. When she first comes to live in England Nazneen cannot speak English and is therefore disempowered, relying almost entirely on her husband for the most basic access to everyday tasks such as shopping. She embodies the figure of the typical marginalised Bengali wife described by the character of Mrs Azad in the novel: 'Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English ... they go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons...' (Ali, 2003, 93).

However, depictions of second and subsequent generation migrants make it possible to see how the secrets of the city can be decoded. In these novels we can uncover a new type of flâneur, the migrant or postcolonial flâneur, a second or subsequent generation immigrant who has a confident and adventurous relationship with the city. The postcolonial flâneur builds new relationships with the city that were perhaps not possible

for earlier generations of immigrants and in doing so sets down roots while further getting to know the character of the city.

The character of London is held up for scrutiny in several of the novels under discussion in this chapter. This character is often represented as fragmented and evolving. Different areas of the city are represented as having diverse personalities. In *White Teeth*, for instance, each grid of the map of London has its idiosyncrasies. Frequently, these differences in character are closely tied to the economic prosperity or depression of the area in question. Smith highlights this reality through her portrayal of the Iqbals' struggle to move to a more upmarket area of London. When the Iqbals' finally accomplish their goal of moving from East to North-West London they view it as a momentous step up. Alsana reflects: '…it was a nice area; she couldn't deny it as she stormed towards the high road, avoiding trees where previously, in Whitechapel, she avoided flung-out mattresses and the homeless…..' (2001, 62)

As Alsana walks along the streets of Willesden she easily sums up the personality and nature of the area, gleaning all the information she needs from visual clues, topographical manifestations of the character of place: 'Mali's kebabs, Mr Cheungs, Raj's, Malkovich Bakeries – she read the new, unfamiliar signs as she passed. She was shrewd. She saw what this was. "Liberal? Hosh-kosh nonsense!" No one was more liberal than anyone else anywhere anyway. It was only that here, in Willesden, there was just not enough of any one thing to gang up against any other thing and send it running to the cellars while windows were smashed' (2001, 63).

Elsewhere in the novel Smith describes 'the sickly fluorescence of the city', a description that attempts to characterise the sense of artificiality that can be associated with the city

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(2001, 42). Throughout the novel, Smith attributes various different characteristics to the city, arguing that the character of a given place can often determine the happiness or otherwise of the novel's protagonists. For the character of Clara, for example, place is of supreme importance. She marries Archie to escape 'the listless reality of life in a ground-floor flat in Lambeth' (2001, 45). When Archie takes her to their new house in Willesden Green for the first time, she wonders to herself about the character of this unfamiliar area of London:

> What kind of a place was this?....Travelling in the front passenger seat of the removal van, she'd seen the high road and it had been ugly and poor and familiar...but then at the turn of a corner suddenly roads had exploded in greenery, beautiful oaks, the houses got taller, wider and   more detached, she could see parks, she could see libraries....It was a   lottery   driving   along   like   that, looking out, not knowing whether one was about to settle down for life amongst the trees or amidst the shit (Smith, 2001, 47).

As evidenced in this extract, the character or personality of a given area is powerful and can even be invested with the potential power to dictate how a life will be lived.

The character and nature of place is something that is also of interest to Gaston Bachelard, although his focus in mainly on internal spaces. Bachelard's insightful ruminations on the poetics of space can be applied to the study the significance of place and space in migrant fiction. In particular, his ideas about the importance of the physical spaces we occupy to our emotional wellbeing are of interest. Bachelard emphasises the special place our first home occupies in our memories and our imaginations. This is interesting when applied

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to the migrant figure in literature as there is often no chance for this person to return to the childhood home and this represents a significant loss. However, Bachelard says that we can continue to inhabit the houses of our childhood in dreams and in our imaginations. He observes: 'To inhabit oneirically the house we were born in means more than to inhabit it in our memory; it means living in this house that is gone, the way we used to dream in it' (1994, 16). The migrant figure can therefore, in a manner of speaking, inhabit two different places at once. While occupying a room, flat, or house in London, the migrant can continue to 'oneirically' inhabit the childhood house in the homeland.

For a character such as Samad Iqbal in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, for example, the public spaces he occupies offer little succour. The majority of his time is spent working in a West End Indian restaurant, 'from six in the evening until three in the morning; and then everyday was spent asleep' (2001, 55). In this and many other works of migrant literature, public places such as restaurants, cafes, bars, and parks take the place of houses, becoming the closest things to home a migrant can find. This idea is supported by Bachelard when he asserts 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home...the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter' (1994, 5).

With regard to postcolonial literatures, Innes flags as significant Bhabha's celebration of 'the hybridity of postcolonial cultures, seeing their embrace of European as well as indigenous traditions as a positive advantage which allows their writers and critics to understand and critique the West as both insiders and outsiders' (2007, 12). The exploration of London's cultural hybridity is certainly a key feature of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. However, it could also be argued that in the novel Ali depicts what could be

described as a kind of false or affected hybridity that is to be detected in contemporary British society. This is a cultural hybridity that has been hijacked by capitalism and exploited for profit. Ali traces its development in the environs around Brick Lane in London from the time that Nazneen first arrives there as a teenager through the years that she raises her daughters in the area. During this time the reader witnesses the changes that occur in the locale through Nazneen's eyes. In evidence is a growing awareness of the commercial potential of the allure of what to a Londoner's eyes appear exotic but to Nazneen's eyes appear ordinary: 'In between the Bangladeshi restaurants were little shops that sold clothes and bags and trinkets. Their customers were young men in sawn-off trousers and sandals and girls in T-shirts that strained across their chests and exposed their belly buttons' (Ali, 2003, 253). In the first section of the novel, Nazneen is largely confined to the home, however as the novel progresses she begins to move beyond the confines of the domestic. Her journeys and explorations help to give her a clearer sense of her place in the world. The next section of this chapter will explore the significance of female migrant journeys in literature.

Mapping the Female Migrant City: Transcending Boundaries of Space and Gender

Janet Wolff contends that the central figure of the flâneur in modern literature is very often male and the figure of the flâneuse is all but invisible. Wolff reads the literature of modernity, tracing the history of the industrial revolution and what she terms 'the subsequent separation of spheres' and the 'increasing restriction of women to the private sphere of the home' (1985, 37). In contemporary migrant literature the notion of separate spheres for men and women is often still applicable in spite of developments in equality

in wider society since the nineteenth century, as in many of the novels the men go out to work while the women remain in the home. Thus, the private, domestic sphere can be considered a female space, while the public, exterior city can be regarded as a male space. When transgressions of these boundaries occur in migrant novels it is therefore important to unpack their significance.

Wolff argues that the 'fleeting, ephemeral, impersonal nature of encounters in the urban environment' shapes the city-dweller and influences his/her world-view (1985, 38). As a result, she argues, it is possible to talk about the existence of a 'metropolitan personality', an idea that was first mooted by Georg Simmel. If we can speak of a metropolitan personality it follows that we can also discuss the notion of a distinctly *female* migrant metropolitan personality. The portrayal of the female migrant metropolitan personality is most vivid in Ali's *Brick Lane* and Smith's *White Teeth*. For instance, in chapter three of *Brick Lane*, there is an extended description of a walk taken by Nazneen through the streets of the neighbourhood around Brick Lane, east London. The act of walking outside, unaccompanied by her husband Chanu is in itself a subversive action for Nazneen. It is described as a symbolic moment for the novel's protagonist. Prior to this Nazneen had only ever left the house with Chanu, who had made it clear that he did not approve of her leaving the house alone: '"Why should you go out?" said Chanu. "If you go out, ten people will say, '"I saw her walking on the street."'" And I will look like a fool....And anyway, if you were in Bangladesh you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizon"' (Ali, 2003, 45). When Nazneen rebels against this patriarchal edict and decides to literally broaden her horizons, by physically exploring her new environment, she takes the first small step towards inhabiting the city

in her own right:

> Nazneen walked. She walked to the end of Brick Lane and turned right. Four
> blocks down she crossed the road...and took a side street. She turned down the
> first right, and then went left. From there she took every second right and every
> second left until she realised she was leaving herself a trail....now she slowed
> down and looked around her...began to be aware of herself ...without a white
> face, without a destination (2003, 55,6).

Thus, it can be argued that Nazneen symbolises the postcolonial migrant flâneuse who
seeks to transcend restrictive social and cultural norms through the subversive and
empowering act of walking the city. By walking through the city, Nazneen discovers that
it is possible for her to come to terms with the physicality of the place on her own terms.
It empowers her and helps her to see that it may be possible to make a home in the city in
her own way, without patriarchal interference or control.

This is a theme that is also explored in Smith's *White Teeth* through the character of Irie
Jones. In chapter fifteen of the novel, Irie makes a late night journey across London, from
north to south, as she runs away from home to stay with her grandmother. There, in her
grandmother's basement flat, she embarks upon the really important journey of her young
life. This becomes a profound mental journey, a trip back in time through her history and
that of her family. Without physically travelling any further than the opposite end of a
compass in her home city, Irie travels very far on a journey of self-discovery. Irie learns
so much about her Jamaican heritage that the surroundings of her grandmother's flat begin

to take on imaginary dimensions. When she looks out the window she sees

> sugar, sugar, sugar, and next door was nothing but tobacco and she
> presumptuously fancied that the smell of plantain sent her back to somewhere,
> somewhere quite fictional, for she'd never been there....She laid claim - her
> version of the past - aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail. So *this* was
> where she came from. This all *belonged* to her, her birthright, like a pair of pearl
> earrings or a post office bond. X marks the spot, and Irie put an X on everything
> she found, collecting bits and bobs (birth certificates, maps, army reports, news
> articles) and storing them under the sofa, so that as if by osmosis the richness of
> them would pass through the fabric while she was sleeping and seep right into her
> (Smith, 2001, 400).

Throughout the novel Smith focuses on the important connections between place and
memory. She asks the reader to consider how a memory can almost take physical form,
how a familiar place can manifest itself as a memory:

> Irie stepped out into streets she'd known her whole life, along a route she'd walked
> a million times over. If someone asked her just then what memory was, what the
> *purest definition* of memory was, she would say this: the street you were on when
> you first jumped in a pile of dead leaves (2001, 458).

Here, the quality and nature of memory and memory formation is uniquely linked to a
concrete place. In essence, the memory becomes the place and the place becomes the
memory, an idea that is explored in much more detail in chapter five. Elsewhere in the

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novel, Smith represents Irie's figurative journey across class and cultural borders. As Irie begins to interact with the Chalfens, a middle-class, white family, she realises that she is leaving one realm and entering another:

> When Irie stepped over the threshold of the Chalfen house, she felt an illicit thrill, like a Jew munching a sausage or a Hindu grabbing a Big Mac. She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else's uniform or somebody else's skin (2001, 328).

Irie's journeys through London are significant in distinct ways to those of Nazneen and in many ways they serve to illustrate the differences between first and second generation female interactions with the city of London.

London as a Diaspora Space: Repetitions and Intersections

> He went to Picadilly and sat for an hour on the steps of Eros....He had never felt more invisible; somehow this wasn't the "real" London (Kureishi, 1995, 5).

> Always, from the first time he went there to see Eros and the lights, that circus have a magnet for him, that circus represent life, that circus is the beginning and the ending of the world (Selvon, 2006, 79).

Disparate journeys around, across, and beyond London are depicted in the migrant literary fiction surveyed in this chapter. These journeys take many different forms and can be understood to symbolise different aspects of migrant experience in London. Some of

these journeys see the protagonists going nowhere, but simply circling around and around in one place and covering the same ground over and over again. This idea is depicted in *White Teeth* when Zadie Smith remarks: 'immigrants have always been particularly prone to repetition - it's something to do with that experience of moving from West to East or East to West or from island to island. Even when you arrive you're still going back and forth; your children are going round and round.' (2001, 161) Thus, when the protagonists of the novels considered in this section make their journeys across London we can visualise the repetition that Smith describes in a different way as we imagine these characters retracing the steps of their migrant forebears, inhabiting the city of their forefathers in new and distinct ways while at the same time, through the repetition of their journeys, sharing a translocal diasporic space. These patterns of movement though and interaction with the city create links between generations of immigrants, thus intertwining their narratives. This idea brings to mind the work of Michel de Certeau, who says that stories 'traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories' (1984, 115). The notion of an itinerary of migrant stories is an appealing one, especially when we come to a closer inspection of the intersection of narratives.

Smith muses on the intersection of migrant stories through space and journeys in *White Teeth*. In a section of the novel where Samad Iqbal and his two sons embark on separate journeys across London at exactly the same time, Smith writes:

Unbeknownst to all involved, ancient ley-lines run underneath these two journeys or, to put it in the modern parlance, this is a re-run. We have been here before. This is like watching TV in Bombay or Kingston or Dhaka, watching the same

old British sitcoms spewed out to the old colonies in one tedious, eternal loop (2001, 161).

In Smith's novel the idea of repetition is significant. There is a sense that history has dictated the life of this family and they are doomed to repeat the mistakes of those who came before them. The family seems unable to move forward, in spite of all their comings and goings, they remain static and unchanging. They are indeed on a journey but the road does not lead anywhere new, rather it brings them back around until they are once again confronted with their history and the demons from their past.

Smith sees this cyclical journey as typical of migrant experience and exposes as a myth the idea that it is possible for the immigrant to leave the past behind and start afresh in London. She denies that migrants are so-called 'blank people', capable of continually re-inventing themselves:

> Because we often imagine that immigrants are constantly on the move, footloose, able to change course at any moment, able to employ their legendary resourcefulness at every turn. We have been told of the resourcefulness of Mr Schmutters, or the footloosity of Mr Banajii, who sail into Ellis Island or Dover or Calais and step into their foreign lands as blank people, free of any kind of baggage, happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this greeanandpleasantliberatedlandofthefree (2001, 465).

However, Smith's immigrants are not like this. Magid and Millat, for instance, are fatally

weighed down by their family history and the burdens of the father. They are 'unable to waver from their course or in any way change their separate, dangerous trajectories. They seem to make no progress (2001, 465).

In stark contrast to Smith's portrayal of migrant experience in London, Hanif Kureishi depicts a city that offers a very different prospect to the migrant dweller. The protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim Amir, seems to represent a different way of living in the city for migrants and their descendants. He is a young man, the son of an immigrant, who is determined to move forward and break from the ties of history and tradition. His relationship with the city of London stands in stark contrast to that of Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*. Where Samad sees the city as an enemy to be mastered and defeated, Karim sees London as a friend to be embraced or even a woman to be seduced. Kureishi describes his protagonist as coming 'from the South London suburbs and going somewhere' (1990, 3). Karim's self-confidence is reflected in his assured navigation of the city, and this is contrasted with his father's failure to ever come to terms with the physical city. Of a journey to a party with his father Karim observes:

> It wasn't far, about four miles, to the Kays', but Dad would never have got there without me. I knew all the streets and every bus route. Dad had been in Britain since 1950 – over twenty years – and for fifteen of those years he'd lived in the South London suburbs. Yet still he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat and asked questions like, "Is Dover in Kent?" (1990, 7).

Karim has the confidence that his father lacks and is not afraid to lay claim to the city as his own home town. This demonstrates the potential for an increase in confidence and

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belonging amongst subsequent generation migrants.

Throughout the novel Kureishi paints a hopeful and optimistic picture of the relationship between the migrant and the city of London. Even those who initially lack the resources to make their way in the city eventually manage to find some way to belong, as seen in the character of Changez. In an article entitled 'A Bang and a Whimper', Anita Kumar situates Kureishi's writing in a new, more self-assured genre of migrant fiction. She describes Kureishi's writing as exhibiting 'an almost pugnacious sense of belonging' (Kumar, 2001, 117). Indeed, at times throughout the novel it is possible to trace a preoccupation with the idea of man's mastery of place. Karim emits an oozing sense of ownership over the spaces he occupies in the city. At times, Karim feels like he owns the city. He is 'utterly at home in London, comfortable in his diasporic condition' (Webber, 1997, 122).

In a number of sections of *White Teeth*, Smith depicts the children of immigrants as confident travellers through the vast and confusing metropolis. A pertinent example of this confidence is the journey across London undertaken by the three children, Millat, Magid, and Irie on a charitable errand from school to bring food to the elderly. Smith notes, as 'almost-ten-year-olds', 'the children knew the city' and this in itself seems remarkable (2001, 168, 174). The children take the number 52 bus from Willesden west 'through Kensal Rise, to Portobello, to Knightsbridge, and watch the many colours shade off into the bright white lights of town' (2001, 164). The young children are confident and self-assured as they undertake this journey, so much so that they are unperturbed by a racist comment made by a fellow bus passenger: "'If you ask me", said one disgruntled OAP to another, "they should all go back to their own...". But this, the oldest sentence in

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the world, found itself stifled by the ringing of bells and the stamping of feet, until it retreated under the seats with the chewing gum' (2001, 163). The children's confidence protects them, and they carry on with their journey. However, when they reach their destination, the house of an elderly war veteran, they are confronted head-on with deeply ingrained prejudice. The man, Mr Hamilton, refutes the boys' history, refusing to accept the fact that their father fought on the side of the British army during the Second World War: '"I'm afraid you must be mistaken", said Mr Hamilton, genteel as ever. "There were certainly no wogs as I remember - though you're probably not allowed to say that these days are you? But no...no Pakistanis...what would we have fed them? No, no"...' (2001, 172). The children leave Mr Hamilton's house upset and angry, their journey across London has led to a painful revelation of the prejudice lurking in not-so-distant corners of their home city. Smith describes them fleeing from this place of prejudice and racism, 'tripping over themselves, running to get to a green space, to get to one of the lungs of the city, some place where free breathing was possible' (2001, 174). This section of the novel demonstrates the fact that there are different versions of history, depending on perspective, an idea that is explored in more detail in chapter five of the dissertation.

This is not the only section of the novel where Smith emphasises the salutary properties and refuge-offering potential of the city's green spaces. In one section of the novel the character Alsana ruminates on the importance of residing in an area with close proximity a park: 'Alsana had a deep-seated belief that living near green spaces was morally beneficial to the young...' (2001, 62). Green spaces can act as safe, neutral spaces for characters in Smith's novel, and the same can be said about the interaction between characters and public places in other works of migrant literary fiction. Public places can often be appealing to these marginalised figures precisely because they are places that are

open to everybody. There is no discrimination or elitism around gaining entry to a public park, a museum, or a national monument, for instance. They are places that belong to everyone and where everybody has a right to feel at home.

Many of the characters are drawn to public places that are historically or culturally significant. These are places that perhaps symbolise the grandeur of what can be termed the 'British Dream': memorials, statues, great houses, palaces. The statue of Eros at Piccadilly Circus and Buckingham Palace are two examples of such places that recur in a number of the novels. In Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane,* the protagonists make journeys across London to see Buckingham Palace. For the characters involved, both outsiders in the city in different ways, the Palace is somewhere they have seen images of and known about for a long time, it is another example of the familiar stranger in migrant literature. Even though they have never physically been there before, they know what it looks like and are aware of its history. They are drawn to it above many other places that they could potentially visit in London precisely because it is a place that inhabits the public consciousness and therefore seems reassuringly familiar in a strange city. The journeys the characters have made to bring them to this exact spot, standing outside the gates and beholding the Palace, have been both physical and mental journeys. Each individual character has been changed as a result of the journey. They now live in England and can look upon the real physical bulk of Buckingham Palace: 'Many people looked back at the palace, as if they were waiting for it to do something. Nazneen looked back at the building. It was big and white and, as far as she could see, extraordinary only in its size. The railings she found impressive but the house was only

big. Its face was very plain' (Ali, 2003, 292).

Across the novels studied in this project there is a sense of shared space. The same areas and locations appear time and again. If we map the geographical area covered by many of these novels, we find that the protagonists often inhabit the same cityscapes. Much of this area falls within the geographical confines of North West London and is administered by the Tower Hamlets Council. If you visit the website of the Tower Hamlets Council you will find a link to the Victoria Park Memoryscape, a fascinating project that maps the physical urban landscape of the city park to footsteps of historical figures and events. Can we speak of the existence of memoryscapes in the novels studied here? Are there recurring geographical spaces of symbolic significance in these novels? Can we map migrant experience in terms of the memory spaces negotiated in these novels? This idea stems from the recurrence of certain iconic London locations across the novels, for instance Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, certain train stations, neighbourhoods such as Neasden and Whitechapel.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, a foundational text that is written back to by many of the contemporary novelists read in this project, we see through the character Galahad the centrality of such places:

> Always, from the first time he went there to see Eros and the lights, that circus have a magnet for him, that circus represent life, that circus is the beginning and the ending of the world. Every time he go there, he have the same feeling like when he see it the first night, drink coca-cola, any time is Guinness time, Bovril and the fireworks, a million flashing lights, gay laughter, the wide doors of

theatres, the huge posters, everready batteries, rich people going into tall hotels, people going to the theatre, people sitting and standing and walking and talking and laughing and buses and cars and Galahad Esquire, in all this, standing there in the big city, in London. Oh Lord (Selvon, 2006, 79).

Therefore, in can be construed that places such as Picadilly Circus become the centre of migrant experience, physical foundations on which cultural and existential edifices are built by neo-colonial Londoners who seek to colonise the city in a reverse of the old imperial dynamic. The relationship between imagination, memory and place comes to the fore within this paradigm. Iconic locales assume immense status as sights of neocolonisation. The immigrant claims such spaces for his own and future generations. Thus, it is not a surprise when Hanif Kureishi, writing *The Black Album* almost forty years later, uses the same iconic space as a marker or radial point for the genesis of his young protagonist's journey towards self, ethnic and cultural awareness. At the beginning of the novel, Shahid, the son of a Pakistani immigrant who has recently moved to London in order to attend third level college, goes to Picadilly Circus, hoping to connect with and capture the essence of London: 'He went to Picadilly and sat for an hour on the steps of Eros....He had never felt more invisible; somehow this wasn't the "real" London' (1995, 5).

The grand, public face of London represented by monuments and palaces is one version of life in the city, one example of a public space, while the houses, rooms, and flats inhabited by the city's migrant population is another version, another manifestation of lived domestic experience. How can the spaces in between these two physical realities be mapped? For the migrant figure in literature, there are many different Londons. When

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they visit a building such as Buckingham Palace they engage in a form of what Merlin Coverley terms 'mental travel' as well as physically moving around the city (2010, 68). Therefore, for the migrant, there is the lived city and the imagined city. When migrants move from one to the other there is a collision of sorts. For instance, in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, there is a momentous shift in the life of the protagonist Nazneen that occurs as a direct result of a journey of exploration through areas of the city with which she was previously unacquainted. As she walks beyond familiar streets she finds herself instantly lost, wandering through a strange and sometimes frightening landscape of the unknown. As the streetscape changes she finds she does not possess the language to read it. She also gains a new and much more intense perspective on the city as before she viewed it from above and at a distance, looking at the city from the vantage point of the window of her high-rise flat. This brings to mind an observation made by Coverley in which he notes that:

> the simple act of walking can take on a subversive hue, abolishing the distancing and voyeuristic perspective of those who view the city from above. This dual perspective is built-in within the structure of the modern city and is what psychogeography seeks to overturn, restoring the primacy of the street. For the totalising gaze of the voyeur sees the city as a homogenous whole, an anonymous urban space that sees no place for individual or separate identities and which erases or suppresses the personal and the local (2010, 106).

In another section of *White Teeth*, Millat embarks upon a journey fuelled by hatred and misunderstanding when he boards a train to Bradford to join a protest against Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. It is anger, not curiosity about the wider world around him,

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which motivates Millat to make the journey. Millat and his friends have not even read the book against which they are prepared to travel hundreds of miles to protest:

> "You read it?" asked Ranil, as they whizzed past Finsbury Park.
>
> There was a general pause.
>
> Millat said, "I haven't exackly read it exackly - but I know all about that shit, yeah?" To be more precise, Millat hadn't read it. Millat knew nothing about the writer, nothing about the book... (2001, 233).

Millat is uninformed about the nature of the book but this does not prevent him from reacting with anger. The journey is thus made in an attempt to release some of the anger and frustration he feels within in his own life.

This journey does not bring the boys anywhere or anything new, it simply circles around old hatred and old prejudices and does nothing to advance the boys' understanding of their religion or the wider world around them. It alienates them further from society and from the city of London itself as it sets them apart from the community in which they live. The sense of community and camaraderie between migrants living in London is often explored as a theme in the migrant fiction under discussion in this chapter. A number of the novels explore, and some challenge, the perceived notion that the city brings people together in supportive community groupings along ethnic and racial lines. The sense of a communal experience is certainly reflected in the social arrangement amongst the immigrants in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. An example of this is when 'the boys' congregate in Moses' flat and when Moses goes out of his way to meet strangers from the airport because they have just arrived in London and do not know their way

around. It is also evident in the behaviour of Gilbert in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, when he speaks to and is friendly with every black man he meets in London. When Gilbert's wife Hortense asks if him he knows any of these people he replies 'No, but I know they are from home' (Levy, 2004, 463). Later he confides in the reader, 'I did not tell her that some days I was so pleased to see a black face I felt to run and hug the familiar stranger' (2004, 463). The loneliness of the migrant in the city is conveyed effectively in this extract. In Levy's conception of migrant experience in London each individual is absorbed in his or her own reality, and although they may be having similar experiences, they do so individually and not in communion.

V.S. Naipaul's descriptions of the peculiar and profound loneliness of the city dweller reverberate in the fiction of contemporary chroniclers of the plight of the immigrant in England. In *The Mimic Men*, first published in 1967, V.S. Naipaul described London as a 'conglomeration of private cells', a description that could easily slot into Monica Ali's 2003 novel *Brick Lane* to describe the flats of Tower Hamlets that form the backdrop to a story of immigrant isolation and marginalisation. In this way Naipaul can be seen as something of an oracle, a founding father of contemporary migrant storytelling, foretelling as he did the ghettoisation of immigrants in London. Echoes of Naipaul's work can be heard in the writing of a number of contemporary chroniclers of immigrant life in England, for example in Timothy Mo's novel, *Sour Sweet*. Mo, like Naipaul before him, documents the unique immigrant experience of feeling like an outsider, that sense of falling between two cultures and belonging to neither. This is another example of how the dual themes of marginality and hybridity recur throughout the texts explored in this

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project.

In *Sour Sweet*, Mo is particularly successful in describing the connection between time and place, and how, at certain times, we cannot find our place in either. He describes the initial period of arrival for the immigrant as an in-between time lived in an intermediate space. He adeptly describes the period of adjustment and resettlement, a time when the new immigrant feels that he or she is neither one thing nor the other. 'The Chens had been living in the UK for four years, which was long enough to have lost their place in the society from which they had emigrated but not long enough to feel comfortable in the new' (Mo, 1999, 1). Here we can see Timothy Mo writing back to Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. In Mo's novel the Chen's realise, as did Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, that they no longer belong at home, 'they were no longer missed' (Mo, 1999, 1). Yet, the Chens, like Ralph Singh before them, are not welcomed or accepted by their new country either. Mo deftly describes that acute awareness of unbelonging experienced by the immigrant, and the sense of commonality of cause it can engender between fellow immigrants, regardless of their country of origin:

> Chen was still an interloper....Chen knew, felt it in his bones, could sense it between his shoulder blades as he walked past emptying public houses on his day off; in the shrinking of his scalp as he heard bottles rolling in the gutter; in a descending silence at a dark bus stop and its subsequent lifting; in an unspoken complicity between himself and others like him, not necessarily of his race (Mo, 1999, 1).

In this section of the novel there is a sense not only of the loneliness and isolation of the

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recent immigrant, but also of the physical discomfort and fear that can often be associated with a position on the margins, and these descriptions are redolent of what Naipaul describes as 'that feeling of having been flung off the world', a feeling of being entirely without roots in the world (2002, 71).

However, Naipaul also identifies the possibilities that come with this feeling of having no place, no history, and no roots. According to his vision, the possibilities for invention and reinvention are boundless. In this context the immigrant is given the opportunity to create a new reality, free from the legacy of history, tradition, and family values. There is nothing to tether the immigrant to a fixed reality. As Naipaul has Singh remark at one point in the novel: 'In London I had no guide. There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character' (2002, 19).

The idea of the 'familiar stranger', as cited above in an excerpt from Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, seems an important one in the migrant fiction of London. In literary depictions the city often appears to hold the power to make the strange seem familiar, and, conversely, it can also conspire to make the familiar seem strange. This is an idea that will be explored further in the subsequent chapter on memory, taking into account the extent to which the conditions of marginality and hybridity shape the migrant experience of the city.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored literary evocations of the relationship between the migrant and

the city of London. It has endeavoured to illuminate the significance of literary representations of public, private, and imagined migrant experience in the former colonial metropolitan centre. Postcolonial readings of migrant fiction often seek to explore the interactions between former colonial subjects and the former centres of imperial power. Can postcolonial migrants ever feel truly at home in such a city? Each of the authors of the novels discussed in this chapter responds to this question in a different way. Many authors have concluded that second and subsequent generation migrants have found it easier to navigate the city and have embraced there place in it with exuberance and confidence.

This chapter has also introduced ideas from the area of psychogeography. In particular, the figure of the migrant or postcolonial flâneur and its female equivalent have been explored in order to illuminate the character of place and the disparate ways in which individuals engage with the city. It has been argued that it is necessary to consider gendered readings of the city in contemporary accounts of migrant experience in Britain. In addition, this chapter has explored and challenged the perceived notion that the city brings people together in supportive community groupings along ethnic and racial lines. In many of the novels, migrant characters are in fact isolated and marginalised, unable to find a place to truly belong in the vast city. It is clear that contemporary authors have much to say about the interactions between Black and Asian migrants with the city of London. Their visions do not always provide readers with one clear picture of migrant life in London, rather they clearly convey the myriad ways in which it is possible for the migrant to interact with and navigate the metropolis. Following on from this exploration, the next chapter examines one facet of that interaction with the metropolis, namely the

experience of discrimination and violence amongst certain minority groups.

Chapter Four

Writing Violent Spaces: Irish Migrancy on the Margins

Introduction

In this chapter there is a close reading of two texts that depict adverse aspects of Irish migration to Britain arising from discrimination, racism and unsuccessful attempts at assimilation. The intertwined nature of the relationship between migrant experience and inhabited space suggests the need to explore the character of place in terms of the perceptions of the migrants who inhabit such space. In order to do this I have selected two prose narratives that depict Irish migration to England in negative terms. This is not to suggest that the condition of Irish migrancy in Britain is predominantly negative, but for the sake of this argument there is a concentration on literary depictions of liminal existence amongst Irish immigrants who encounter difficulties of assimilation within the society of settlement. The two texts have been chosen because they represent one strand in the overarching weave of the narrative of Irish migrant experience in Britain, a strand that is interesting and significant in terms of the broader study of diasporic literature.

It can be argued that the experiences of the Irish as a migrant group in Great Britain are distinct and unique in terms of the wider experiences of post-imperial immigrants to the country. The physical proximity of the two countries is perhaps an obvious reason for this unique set of factors. It is arguably this closeness, and the intertwined histories that have

perhaps been the inevitable outcome, that has led to a sense of the Irish in Britain being regarded as familiar strangers. The fact that emigration from Ireland to England has been commonplace since the beginning of the nineteenth century means that there has been an Irish migrant presence in Britain for a substantial period of that shared history. Foster regards emigration as 'the great fact of Irish social history from the early nineteenth century' while acknowledging the impact of the phenomenon on settler societies, such as England, as well as on Ireland itself: 'There was, in a very real sense, an Ireland abroad. It is slowly being realised how important this was for the social and economic history of nineteenth-century Britain' (1989, 345). Thus, it is clear that Irish migration to England was instrumental in shaping aspects of British economic and social life, and that the Irish were often seen as a threat at home. The threat posed by the Irish in Britain arguably came from the fact that many of those who settled there were from the lower classes. As Foster observes, the Irish were seen as 'a threatening underclass rather than a colonized subrace' (1993, 192). The history of Irish migration to England has also shaped perceptions of Irishness, a factor that is important when it comes to considering literary depictions of Irish migration to Britain. The economic hardships faced by the Irish working and lower classes from the nineteenth century, and earlier, right up until the present day, have also played a crucial role in determining the reception of and attitudes towards the Irish in Britain. Class, Foster notes, was a central preoccupation in 'constructing an alien identity for the Irish' in Britain (1993, 193). The impact of class on the perception of Irishness in Britain is important for this study because it helps to explain some of the negative attitudes towards Irish people depicted in a number of the narratives under consideration in this study.

The legacy of the Great Famine of the nineteenth century and the resulting exponential

rise in emigration rates from Ireland to English cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and London is also a factor to be considered with regard to this unique experience. An estimated two million people emigrated from Ireland in the decade from 1845 to 1855, a substantial number of whom settled in Great Britain. This is reflected in the notable difference between the number of Irish-born people living in Britain recorded in the decade between 1841 and 1851. In 1841, the census figures show 419,256 Irish-born people in Britain, while the number rises to 733,866 in 1851 (Foster, 1989, 355). The next great wave of Irish immigration to Britain came in the mid-twentieth century. According to Foster, by 1946-51 over 80 per cent of Irish emigrants went to the United Kingdom (1989, 356-7).

This chapter thus argues that the Irish immigrant in England can be conceived of in terms of the familiar stranger and this means that a unique duality arises, wherein the Irish immigrant embodies both the other and a known quantity simultaneously. Both *The Grass Arena* by John Healy and *Felicia's Journey* by William Trevor depict exceptional circumstances of exclusion amongst male and female Irish migrants in Britain and the ways in which this exclusion can lead to violence, degradation and homelessness. Their narratives give voice to the hardships and neglect suffered by a minority group at particular moments and in specific modes related to a unique set of circumstances arising from the perception of certain versions of Irishness as negative. These narratives draw attention to the nature and modality of instances of Irish migrant marginalisation in space and time, while also responding to the problematic persistence of negative conceptions of Irishness in Britain. Through their depictions and constructions of versions of stereotypical Irish figures such as the alcoholic, the vagrant, and the prostitute, these narratives probe the nature of a particular thread of Irish migrant experience. In these

depictions of the negative aspects of Irish migration to Britain, the landscape of England is re-envisaged as a space in which transgressions, both literal and figurative, against the exceptional figure of the marginalised Irish migrant body, are sanctioned, thus transforming certain pockets of England into violent spaces.

The nature, timing, and exceptional circumstances of the sanctioning of transgressions against the migrant body are explored with reference to both *The Grass Arena* and *Felicia's Journey*. In specific terms, in the narrative of *The Grass Arena*, this sanctioning takes the form of Healy being cast as *Homo Sacer* or Bare Life in terms of his vagrancy, his enforced membership of the armed forces, and his exploitation as a medical guinea pig by the medical profession. Similarly, in Trevor's novel *Felicia's Journey*, the protagonist, Felicia, is also a manifestation of Agamben's conception of *Homo Sacer* when she is preyed upon because of her vulnerable predicament as a pregnant unmarried girl with no money in an unfamiliar environment. Later in the text, it can be argued that Felicia embodies the role of *Homo Sacer* as Bare Life, a figure who can be abused and killed, when the predator Mr Hilditch coerces her into aborting her unborn child and ultimately attempts to murder her. Finally, when her destitution compels her to prostitute her body, Felicia is once again cast in the role of *Homo Sacer*, when her body is abused with impunity.

An important facet of the argument herein is the notion of the existence of violent spaces within the metropolis. It is argued that the idea of violent spaces within the context of the aforementioned texts is one that offers a novel and stimulating perspective on the postcolonial migrant city. Fundamentally, the discussion of violent spaces in this chapter

presupposes the existence of different versions of one place. Thus, if we imagine the map of London, we must visualise a layered surface, a sort of conceptualised 3D map on which various levels of lived experience are built. Particular points on the map can be deconstructed in order to reveal rich layers of lived reality. The history of Irish migrant settlement in the Fulham area of London, for example, presents a different version of history and lends a distinct character to the physical place, than that offered by the history of Fulham Palace, the home of the Bishop of London.

The nature of place is not stable, and violent spaces can emerge at any point on the known map of a city like London. The topographical surface of the cityscape is thus perforated with violent spaces. There are a number of ways in which the perpetration of violence against the marginalised or vulnerable migrant body can be demonstrated as being intrinsically linked to place in narratives of Irish marginalised migrant experience in Britain. The focus for this chapter is the link between violence and the public, state-controlled realm, and also the connection between violence and space. The contention is that such places can be viewed as zones of exclusion or exception, where violence against the marginalised migrant body is either sanctioned, tolerated or overlooked. Not only are the places transformed, but the migrant figure herself is changed and transported with the context of this shifting paradigm of existence. Known spaces are transformed into violent spaces, migrant bodies shift from citizen to homo sacer, and as they shift they move from public spaces into states of exception.

The contention of the argument presented in this chapter is that both Healy and Trevor present the reader with a unique and valuable literary vision of the lived experience of a

particular subset of the Irish diaspora in Britain and each author individually offers valuable insights into the challenges of integration. Chief among these problems is the violence that arises from poor integration, marginalisation, and an existence beyond the boundaries of mainstream society. Continuing on from the discussion of London as a postcolonial and psychogeographichal city, this chapter explores the notion of place in terms of negative experience, considering the existence of violent spaces and zones of exclusion and victimisation within the metropolis. One of the aims of the chapter is to probe the relationship between marginal migrant inhabitation of the city and literary evocations of instances of violence, discrimination and racism that occur within these spaces. The discussion of violence in this chapter looks at the marginal migrant figure in literature in terms of the victim or scapegoat who exists mainly on the margins and/or outside the law. Finally, it is clear that the nature and mode of the violence and threat of violence depicted in the two texts is not uniform. In order to gain a clearer sense of the modality of this violence it is helpful to consider Slavoj Zizek's model of two distinct types of violence. Zizek divides violence into distinct categories: objective and subjective (2008, 1-2). He goes on to explain that subjective and objective violence cannot be viewed from the same perspective: 'Subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the "normal", peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this "normal" state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent' (2008, 2). Both categories of violence are present in the surveyed texts.

Throughout the chapter the two key texts are analysed and deconstructed through the lenses of theories expounded by René Girard and Giorgio Agamben. The deployment of

aspects of these theories facilitates a nuanced development of the chapter's principle argument. The foundation of this argument is constructed from a consideration of the fictive depiction of the relationship between marginal migrant experience in England and instances of violence, discrimination and racism that occur within these spaces. The foundation for the discussion of violence in this context is a critical conception of the exceptional Irish marginal migrant figure as victim or scapegoat who exists mainly on the margins and/or outside the law.

This discussion begins with a critique and application of the scholarship of René Girard and Giorgio Agamben. The primary Girard text on which this analysis is based is *The Scapegoat* (1986). The relationship between the literary depiction of the marginalised migrant and wider society is questioned and scrutinised with the aid of Girard's engaging theories on the subject of the dynamic between society and its scapegoats. Furthermore, the chapter uses as its theoretical keystone the body of work developed by Giorgio Agamben across his two seminal texts, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and *State of Exception*. Through these critical lenses, it is argued that the marginalised migrant bodies in the surveyed literature are depicted as symbolic sites of violence, degradation, and state control, and that the symbology of violence on the marginal body represents a vehement condemnation of racist, prejudicial, and at times inhuman treatment of those regarded as other by the powerful agents of hegemonic state control. The opening section of the chapter is thus intended as an analysis of the key elements of these theoretical keystones and an explanation as to their relevance to the thematic analysis of the selected

texts.

It is possible to identify in each of these texts a number of significant factors that contribute to the creation of marginalised positions within society. While Healy's narrative is non-fiction, his account of these factors mirrors myriad aspects of Trevor's fictional version of the same societal position. Both writers depict the processes by which individuals become Homo Sacer due to a variety of contributing factors. Arguably, the most salient of these factors are political marginalisation and economic disadvantage. In the first instance, both authors identify the political factors that contribute to marginality and disenfranchisement amongst a small section of the Irish migrant population of Britain. It is therefore important to establish, with the aid of Agamben, the nature of the political forces that place particular individuals and specific minority groups outside the law and into a position of disenfranchisement and marginality.

If we apply Agamben's principles to the case of the history of the place of Irish immigrants in Britain it is indeed possible to identify specific forces and moments of crisis that led to the Irish being considered a minority group to be treated with hostility, prejudice and even fear. Considering the historical and political relationship between Britain and Ireland, it is certainly possible to argue that such forces were significant. As stated previously, the nineteenth century can be identified as a pivotal moment in the moulding of Anglo-Irish relations, a period that would prove instrumental in dictating the nature and reception of Irish settlement in Britain for many years to come. The legacy of the Great Famine looms large in this context, not least because of the resulting spike in emigration from Ireland to England, but also in terms of how Irishness was perceived in the wake of the catastrophe and how the unfavourable depiction of the Irish by

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Providentialist politicians had a negative impact on the reception of migrants. British domestic political concerns with regard to the Irish at the time of the Great Famine are reflected in Chief Secretary of the Treasury Sir Charles Trevelyan's infamous remark that the Famine was 'the judgement of God on an indolent and unself-reliant people' (Hart, 1960). Furthermore, a concern to uphold and protect traditionally English markers of identity such as Protestantism certainly seems to have been a factor in determining the reception of Irish immigrants in the wake of the Great Famine.

However, it is also very important to acknowledge the nuanced and complex nature of the relationship between Ireland and England, both before and after the Great Famine. There were many factors involved in shaping this relationship, as Foster observes in detail in *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (1993). In this collection of essays, Foster explains how this complex relationship was built on issues such as emigration and education, among others, and that these social problems 'may have affected Irish history no less decisively than the more obvious cataclysms of rebellion and sacrifice' (1993, xi). Foster argues that contemporary Ireland was 'shaped by what happened between Ireland and Britain', thus underscoring the centrality of the relationship to the very essence of Irish nationality and identity (xii). Hence, it is clear that the complex and nuanced relationship between Ireland and England is relevant to our consideration of the literary depiction of Irish migrancy in Britain. It can be argued early on in the history of Irish migrant settlement in Britain a relationship of opposition was established between the English and the Irish, and it was their perceived difference to the English that made the Irish as a nationality so undesirable, threatening and alien. In the nineteenth century the idea of the impoverished Irish Catholic was set up in opposition to the ideal of the prosperous English Protestant. This was in part due to the issue of class,

particularly as a majority of the Irish who settled in Britain in the nineteenth century did so out of economic necessity.

Foster observes how English attitudes towards the Irish changed during this period and they began to be seen in a negative light. He traces this shift in attitude by examining the contents of Punch, the satirical English magazine established in 1841. Foster notes that in its early days *Punch* could be 'resolutely pro-Irish', but this 'was not to last' (Foster, 1993, 174). By the mid 1840s, Foster notes that a change in attitude was to be perceived between the pages of *Punch*. He argues that 'events in Ireland from this time conspired to change the Irish image, and *Punch's* attitude. One was the polarization of Irish politics, with the rise of an extreme-nationalist wing which challenged O'Connel's supremacy: the so-called Young Ireland movement....The open endorsement of violent tactics by the Young Ireland leaders was the final straw, leading to one of Punch's first and most famous anti-Irish cartoons: "Young Ireland in Business for Himself"'(Foster, 1993, 175-6). Foster observes that the publication of this cartoon marked the beginning of a period during which *Punch* depicted Irish subjects as 'dangerous Irishmen'(1993, 176). He continues by positing a theory that the rise in numbers of Irish emigrants settling in England was to blame for this shift in attitude: 'From the early forties there had been squibs about "Irish tranquillity" in urban slum areas like St. Giles, and police apathy about it. From 1845, with an avalanche of starving Irish emigrants landing up in British cities, the attitude hardened' (Foster, 1993, 176). For its part, *Punch* acknowledged the driving force behind this rise in immigration, but its attitude towards the Great Famine was, according to Foster, ambiguous. At times *Punch* implied that the Irish were 'spongers' in 'squibs about the fortunate Irish, being let off the income tax' (Foster, 1993, 178). While at other times *Punch* appeared sympathetic and willing to help, for instance by offering

suggestions for 'how to cure Ireland'. (Foster, 1993, 178). Finally, Foster notes, by 1848, 'open scepticism about Irish suffering was expressed in Punch' (1993, 180). By the 1860s, Foster observes: 'Given Punch's eye for a current debate, and its brilliance at conflating two news stories into a memorable image, it was perhaps inevitable that the Irish Other should quickly appear in a chilling neo-Darwinian mode: "A creature manifestly between the Gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages; the lowest species of the Irish Yahoo"'(Foster, 1993, 184).

Moving on from the development of the Anglo-Irish relationship in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century was also influential in shaping attitudes towards the Irish in Britain and the depiction of Irish migrancy in contemporary fiction. The revolutionary period, beginning with the 1916 Rising and ending with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, was also a crucial factor in shaping perceptions of Irishness in Britain. The notion of Irish identity being grounded in violence continued during this period, linking back to other periods of violence in the nation's history, such as the 1798 Rebellion and the Young Ireland and Fenian movements. In addition, the period after the War of Indpendence was a tumultuous era in Irish history that also informed British attitudes and perceptions. Independent Ireland was plagued by Civil War, and later by poverty and economic hardship. The economic problems led to further emigration to Britain, reaching a crescendo in the 1950s. Thus, the Irish who settled in Britain were often viewed as impoverished, lower- class individuals who perhaps also had a propensity for violence. Social problems in Ireland, exacerbated by the stranglehold of the Catholic Church, often forced people to emigrate. Many of the Irish people who arrived in Britain

had gone there specifically to escape such problems, including pregnancy out of wedlock.

Finally, the legacy of the Northern Irish troubles cannot be overlooked when considering the nature of the perception of Irishness in Britain. In particular, the extent to which perceptions of Irish people were shaped in response to Irish republican terrorism against British targets during this period is important in this context. The novel *Felicia's Journey* is set in the early 1990s, while the memoir *The Grass Arena* spans some four decades, from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. Thus, both narratives are set against, among other things, a backdrop of the I.R.A. bombing campaign in Britain. Of course it is important to acknowledge that a time period spanning four decades features many other important social and political aspects, such as economic deprivation and the illegality of abortion, but the focus here is on the existence of perceptions of Irishness as other. That is not to say, however, that these aforementioned social and political aspects are not relevant.

Furthermore, aspects of the legacy of Britain's colonial project in Ireland were influential in shaping attitudes of British people towards the Irish as a race and can be identified as the single most important factor in determining how Irish migrants would be treated in 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s English cities, the time period and locale most relevant to this particular study. Both texts respond to this legacy, and Harte sees the key theme of *Felicia's Journey* as 'the complex and debilitating legacies of Britain's protracted history of colonialism in Ireland' (2012, 412). This is also a theme explored by Healy in *The Grass Arena*. With regard to the significance of the legacy of the colonial project in shaping British perceptions of Irishness, it is clear that impressions of Irish people as other, set up in opposition to British people, were forged in the collective consciousness of the Victorians and seem to have been passed down to through subsequent generations.

Irish immigrants who arrived in London from the mid-twentieth century up until relatively recently were greeted with prejudice, although Foster argues that this was not on the grounds of race but rather of class (1993, 192). The infamous signs that were displayed in lodging houses and other premises prohibiting Irish people from entry may have been influenced by widespread prejudice against Irish people, but this prejudice was more complex than it appeared, according to Foster. The apparently racist cartoons depicting Irish people as apelike creatures that were published in Victorian magazines such as *Punch*, were, according to Foster, manifestations of class tensions: '…their representation of all working-class types was dark and brutish; all enemies, especially class enemies, tended to the monster' (Foster, 1993, 192).

Thus, it is clear that the relationship between violence and racism in the Anglo-Irish dynamic is more complex than it initially appears. To help clarify this relationship, it my proof illuminating to ponder Žižek's discussion of the nature and root of racist violence (2009). Žižek sees language as the root of divisions in society. He highlights the fact that the words 'reason' and 'race' have the same root in Latin (ratio), suggesting that it is significant. 'Language', he argues, 'not primitive egotistic interest, is the first and greatest divider' (2009, 55-6). He continues: '…it is because of language that we and our neighbours [can] live in different worlds even when we live on the same street. What this means is that verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence' (2009, 56-7). At this point, Žižek proffers the example of anti-Semitic pogroms as representative of all racist violence. It can be argued that this analogy is indeed applicable to the racism directed toward first and subsequent generation Irish migrants to Britain, particularly in the post-second world war period. Žižek says of the perpetrators of anti-Semitic pogroms that what they react to 'is not the immediate

reality of Jews, but to the image/figure of the "Jew" which circulates and has been constructed in their tradition' (2009, 56-7). If we replace the word Jew with the word Irishman in the previous sentence, we could perhaps begin to account for the prejudiced and racist reception of the Irish immigrant population in England from the 1950s onwards. It was not necessarily, as Žižek argues, the individual Irish woman who moved into an east London street who was particularly objectionable to the residents, but rather the figure/image of the stock Irishman that already lived in the imaginations of many Londoners, thanks to cultural-belief shaping factors such as Tenniel's *Punch* cartoons of 'ape-like Paddies' (Foster, 1988, 363).

These beliefs and prejudices with regard to the Irish were also informed by the history of Irish settlement in Britain, particularly in the wake of the Great Famine. According to Foster, London had an Irish community of 178,000 by 1861 (1988, 362). Furthermore, he states that the Irish 'invariably took over the poorest areas of cities, monopolized unskilled and menial jobs, and contributed to the ethos of squalor, rowdiness, drunkenness, violence and vagrancy recorded by many observers. "Irish" slums were graphically illustrated in the "Builder", typhus was known as the "Irish fever" (1988, 363). With such negative opinions of their antecedents in wide circulation, it is perhaps of little wonder that the second wave of Irish immigrants who sought to make their homes in London and beyond found themselves confronted with walls of prejudice and discrimination.

Thus, in texts of marginal Irish migrant experience, it is important to take account of the impact of prejudice and discrimination on the depiction of the reception of Irish protagonists. Historical perceptions of Irish identity have endured in certain instances, and the idea of Irishness as somehow inferior to Britishness persists in a number of these

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narratives. Thus, if we apply Agamben's thoughts on *Homo Sacer* to British perceptions of Irish people we can find some pertinent insights into the dynamic that exists in texts of marginalised Irish experience in Britain. According to Agamben, *Homo Sacer* is discriminated against on the basis of little or no empirical evidence. Thus, *Homo Sacer* can be described as any individual who is judged to have committed a crime and is considered to be a 'bad or impure man' (Agamben, 1995, 71). Therefore, it can be argued that in the eyes of many British people in the Victorian period and arguably into the twentieth century, the figure of the Irish immigrant is judged similarly, not to have committed a crime per se, although arguably he is considered with suspicion as one who is likely to break the law, but rather he is pre-judged as a consequence of that which is perceived as his innately 'bad or impure' nature, and these prejudices have largely been shaped by political factors arising from the historical relationship between Britain and Ireland (Agamben, 1995, 71).

A pertinent example of the prejudicial attitudes encountered by Irish immigrants to Britain in the post Second World War era can be found in the work of another Irish writer who set his most famous early plays in England. Speaking of his real life inspiration for the play *A Whistle in the Dark*, Tom Murphy described his experiences of migration to England and the personality of the places a young Irish immigrant typically frequented: '...I of course gravitated to places where my brothers were including areas which had become predominantly Irish ghettos. There was an extraordinary cult of violence in those places that I still don't understand' (Grene, 2002, 96). In the play Murphy explores the marginal position of certain groups of Irish migrants to Britain, while seeking to shed light on the causality and implications of this locus of unbelonging. In spite of their attempts to assimilate, the Irish men know that they will always be viewed as other. The

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themes explored in *A Whistle in the Dark* find resonance in other genres of literature, for instance in literary memoir.

The thread of Murphy's exploration of the culture of violence amongst, and sometimes towards, Irish migrants in Britain is picked up by John Healy in his memoir *The Grass Arena*. In his life-narrative, Healy seeks to find an answer to Murphy's question: What was the reason for this 'extraordinary cult of violence'?. This seems an important question and it is certainly one that preoccupies Healy. In the interview cited above, Murphy identifies some contributing factors, such as excessive alcohol consumption and the novelty of having access to disposable income, and these are certainly pertinent factors in Healy's case. However, it can be argued that it is in the nuances of the depiction of Irish migrant experience in Britain in the text of this play and also in the narrative of Healy's life, that we can come closer to a possible root cause of the evolution of such a culture of violence. When the brothers in *A Whistle in the Dark* and John Healy in *The Grass Arena* discuss their sense of belonging or not belonging in a place, the theme of marginality comes to the fore. Thus, it seems logical to propose that this culture of violence is intrinsically linked with manifestations of feelings of rootlessness and a sense of failing to integrate with wider society. This in turn leads to anger, an impotent anger that finds its expression through violence. A culture of violence develops, and the physical expression of anger becomes a way to assert authority and build a new identity. A theoretical explanation for such manifestations of violence can be found in the work of Rene Girard and his conception of the scapegoat. The section that follows analyses Girard's theory and considers how it can be applied in various ways to the study of

marginalized experience.

Rene Girard The Scapegoat

René Girard's theory of the 'Scapegoat' can be deployed in order to further our understanding of the literary depiction of victimisation and marginalisation of migrant figures. The aspects of Girard's work that are most relevant to this study are those which seek to elucidate the ways in which certain individuals or groups of people come to be singled out and victimised in any given society. According to Girard, 'persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society' (1989, 15). This conviction allows vulnerable or minority individuals or groups to be placed outside of the law and subjected to violence, such as in the case of Healy's representation of homeless Irish immigrants to Britain, whereby discrimination against them is justified by the perceived threat to British nationalism, culture, religion or any other factors which place them in a state of difference or otherness.

Related to this idea, Girard contends that minority groups of every description are much more likely to be chosen as victims or scapegoats. For instance, Girard states that 'ethnic and religious minorities tend to polarize the majorities against themselves. In this we see one of the criteria by which victims are selected, which, though relative to the individual society, is transcultural in principle. There are very few societies that do not subject their minorities, all the poorly integrated or merely distinct groups, to certain forms of discrimination and even persecution' (1989, 17-8). Girard also notes that economic factors can play a part in the selection of victims or scapegoats: 'The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution. This is easy to see in

relation to those at the bottom of the social ladder' (1989, 18). Furthermore, Girard illustrates the fact that 'the more signs of a victim an individual bears, the more likely he is to attract disaster' (1989, 26). Thus, in a text such as *The Grass Arena*, it is possible to identify the forces that combine to place a figure such as John Healy in the role of victim or scapegoat, namely his poverty and his membership of an ethnic and religious minority, while in the case of the protagonist of *Felicia's Journey* the vulnerability of a young pregnant girl is a third contributing factor.

In his discussion of scapegoating and violence, Girard stresses that violence is a relationship: 'While we may more readily think of the kind of anonymous violence that muggers inflict on their victims in inner cities, in fact many acts of violence take place between people who have known each other, and perhaps who have lived closely with one another, for a long period of time' (Kirwan on Girard, 2004, 42). In John Healy's *The Grass Arena*, it is interesting to note that some of the worst violence perpetrated against the homeless is not at the hands of wider society but at the hands of fellow homeless and marginalized people. A murder of a homeless alcoholic man is committed by his friend and drinking partner in the park. Here, the park acts as a violent space, a place where the normal laws and rules that govern society do not apply. This also ties in with Girard's discussion of the monstrous:

> ...one of the distorting effects of violence is to make the combatants seem monstrous to one another. This is the extreme case of undifferentiation, because a monster is a creature in which human and animal qualities are mixed. As we are only too aware, in a prolonged conflict each side can lose sight of the humanity of the other. Either the enemy are regarded as less than human, therefore bestial,

or they are regarded as supremely evil, and demonised (Girard in Kirwan, 2004, 47).

The individual members of the community are no longer viewed as human beings, but are grouped together and assigned a collective identity that is associated with cruelty and evil. Similarly, the homeless men and women in John Healy's *The Grass Arena* are seen as 'winos' by wider society, and are stripped of their humanity and individual identities. In his encounters with the representatives of the sovereign, the police and juridical system, Healy experiences brutality, intimidation, violence, discrimination, and victimization. His rights are compromised by the fact that he is not a functioning member of what is regarded as law abiding, mainstream society. In Healy's alcoholic and therefore enfeebled state, he does not have the resources or strength to defend himself, and thus becomes a helpless victim of the state of exception, a condition that is explored in more detail later in this chapter. The violence perpetrated against Healy's physical self is deemed acceptable by the sovereign state. He is physically assaulted by police officers and prison guards, and this treatment is condoned by a legal system that views him as beyond the pale. Healy is without rights and powerless to retaliate. In the state of exception, Healy and his companions attempt to stay invisible in order to protect themselves. They restrict themselves to the physical spaces abandoned or avoided by mainstream citizens in their attempt to avoid confrontation with the agents of the sovereign state.

Girard defines scapegoating as a 'mechanism of persecution' through which 'collective anguish and frustration' finds 'vicarious appeasement' in 'victims' selected by 'virtue of being poorly integrated minorities' (1986, 39). The victim is a scapegoat and the term scapegoat 'indicates both the innocence of the victims, the collective polarization in

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opposition to them, and the collective end result of that polarization' (1986, 39). Furthermore, Girard observes that the victim is 'a person who comes from elsewhere' and is often a member of an ethnic and/or religious minority:

> Ethnic and religious minorities tend to polarize the majorities against themselves. In this we see one of the criteria by which victims are selected, which, though relative to the individual society, is transcultural in principle. There are few societies that do not subject their minorities, all the poorly integrated or merely distinct groups, to certain forms of discrimination and even persecution (1986, 17-18).

The subjection of minorities and poorly integrated groups to discrimination and even persecution is a theme that recurs in contemporary migrant literature and it therefore seems apt to apply Girard's theories to a number of these literary works.

Many of the texts surveyed in this project depict marginalised individuals who experience different forms of persecution and discrimination at the hands of society and can therefore be seen as scapegoats. The focus on the individual in these texts is important as it fits in with Girard's conception of scapegoating as society ganging up on small groups or individuals. According to Girard, 'persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society' (1986, 15). Thus, the individual is set up in opposition to the whole of society and a power so great is placed upon him that he comes to be thought of as something other than human. The fact that the individual is small and

powerless when pitted against a whole society is overlooked and ignored.

Furthermore, Girard sees 'the crowd' as representative of all societies. Thus, he argues that all societies have a proclivity towards violence and persecution: 'The crowd by definition seeks action....It therefore looks for an accessible cause that will appease its appetite for violence. Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, for they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it' (1986, 16). The crowd, or society, does not attempt to get to the heart of the real problems threatening the social order, rather it looks around for an easy target on which to focus its collective dissatisfaction, frustration and anger with the problems it encounters. In addition, Girard argues that scapegoats or surrogate victims tend to be marginalised figures or social pariahs, people who often exist on the fringes of mainstream society and are vulnerable to persecution. Those who are already marginalised and vulnerable thus present themselves as convenient scapegoats to disaffected societies. Girard underscores the fact that scapegoats are usually chosen because they exhibit some sign or mark of difference. This can be their foreignness or a number of other differentiating factors, or, as Girard has it, abnormalities:

> In any area of existence or behaviour abnormality may function as the criterion for selecting those to be persecuted. For example there is such a thing as social abnormality; here the average defines the norm. The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution. This is easy to see in relation to those at the bottom of the social ladder (1986, 18).

Thus, the poor and the disenfranchised are most likely to be placed in the role of victim

or scapegoat. Once again these principles tie in well with the texts in this study, many of which depict protagonists who are not only marginalised on the grounds of ethnicity and foreignness, but also suffer a dual marginality in the sense that they are economically underprivileged and thus suffer myriad related problems such as lack of access to education, poor housing, disconnection from politics, amongst others. In the section that follows there is an overview of how Giorgio Agamben's philosopy of *Homo Sacer and Bare Life* can facilitate an understanding of the depiction of such problems.

Homo Sacer, Bare Life and the Condition of Marginalised Migrancy

This section delineates and scrutinises salient aspects of Giorgio Agamben's philosophy of Homo Sacer and Bare Life that can be deployed as analytical tools for the deconstruction of the depiction of aspects of Irish diasporic experience in novels of migrant experience. The synopsis of Agamben's work identifies the fundamental theoretical cornerstones for the analysis presented in this chapter. The chapter then goes on to apply these principles of Agamben's philosophy, along with those of Girard, to the interpretation of literary depictions of violence and marginalisation in the selected texts. Fundamentally, Agamben sees modern individuals as captive in state systems that exert control over their 'bare' or 'naked' lives, or what the Greeks termed zoé, natural life or 'the simple fact of living common to all living beings' (1995, 1). State control is characterised by violence and the inter-relation between laws and violence. Agamben sees violence and law as being ineluctably intertwined.

Deploying Agamben's theories on the violence implicit in the rule of sovereign states in

the context of British state treatment of vulnerable migrant groups, it is possible to identify the violent nature of the relationship between the marginalised figure and the state to which she belongs and does not belong simultaneously. As a figure outside of the law, a marginalised figure, such as a homeless person, is subject to violent treatment in what Agamben terms the 'state of exception'. According to Agamben, the 'State of Exception' is a 'no-man's-land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life', or the living being (2003, 1). It can be argued that marginalised migrant figures in literature can be viewed as embodiments of Agamben's vision of *'Homo Sacer'*, sacred man or accursed man, 'who may be killed and yet not be sacrificed' (1998, 11). Violence can be perpetrated against the body of *Homo Sacer* without consequence to or punishment of the perpetrator. According to Agamben, in general, the perpetrator is the state itself, or its agents, thus inverting the commonly perceived notion of state as protector of citizen. In the 'state of exception', the normal rules and laws do not apply, so crimes against the body are not considered crimes at all.

Homo Sacer is thus outside the law and does not have recourse to its protections. Crimes committed against *Homo Sacer* in the 'state of exception' go unpunished. Agamben further acknowledges the intertwined nature of the relationship between sovereign control and law. Those who are outside of the law are thus seen as being outside of state control and are no longer considered to belong to society. Therefore, religious minorities, the poor, and any other poorly integrated group in society, as a result of their perceived difference, are, as Agamben would have it, banned or placed in the state of exception. They become marginalised figures who are forced to reposition themselves outside the boundaries of that sector of society operating under the rule of law. As Catherine Alexander notes: 'Violence and harassment that are specific to certain groups...are a

significant dimension of oppression and have been labelled "systemic violence". Those who feel at risk may experience particular spaces as threatening, and the resulting restrictions, segregations and isolation play an important role in maintaining the social and spatial order of the city' (Alexander in Pain & Smith, 2008).

John Healy as *Homo Sacer* in 'The State of Exception' of *The Grass Arena*

For John Healy, the experience of Irish migrancy in London is one characterised by violence and fear: '...how do you talk about love after a life spent relating to others through violence, aggression and fear?' (Healy, 2008, 255). Throughout his memoir, Healy summarises his life experiences as belonging within a nexus of violence and exclusion. Healy's depiction of violent spaces centre for the most part around London, with Ireland figuring as a kind of geographical counterpoint, a safe haven left of centre of the violent metropolis. Ireland is described as tranquil and safe: 'There's a sort of calmness that seems to come out of the grass and the ditches and the mossy banks. Lonely mists that suddenly spread over the fields give an old feeling, cosy and warm' (Healy, 2008, 8). In comparison, on returning to London from rural Ireland, 'The noise from the London traffic seemed very loud and for a while the fumes seemed choking' (2008, 67). Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that critical reactions to the text have focused on the alternative vision of London that it offers. In his afterword to the 2008 edition of *The Grass Arena*, Colin MacCabe writes: 'By the time I finished reading this extraordinary document I saw the streets of my native city – which until then I had thought so familiar – from a new angle and with a different light that revealed a whole society of which I had only ever seen isolated individuals....[the book] reveals a subculture that no ordinary researcher could penetrate...'(Healy, 2008, 253). MacCabe adds: 'As you read this

memorable account of a life, it becomes clear how the grass arena, for its inhabitants, comes to be a more satisfactory version of the city that surrounds it' (Healy, 2008, 257). MacCabe's comments find resonance in the work of Arjun Appadurai. In *Modernity At Large*, Appadurai discusses the psychology behind the formation of neighbourhoods and communities. If the public places inhabited by London's homeless citizens, including migrants and their descendants, can be seen as alternative neighbourhoods or communities, Appadurai's comments become quite relevant. Particularly apposite is his notion that 'neighbourhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighbourhoods' (Appadurai, 2010, 182-3). This idea of different versions of the city, especially settled and unsettled places set up in opposition to one another, is extremely interesting, and it is linked to an area that has been explored in previous chapters, and one that I would like to revisit and develop further in this context. It is an idea that also links in with concepts surrounding imagined places and communities.

Healy's is a narrative steeped in violence. At every turn and throughout each phase of his life, Healy's attempts to relate to those around him and navigate his way through social interactions result in violence. His earliest memory, as related on the first page of his memoir, is a lamentable account of a violent assault perpetrated against a six years old Healy by his father: 'His eyes turned back in his head as he punched me in the face, knocking me to the ground. The pain and the shock made me cry. He dragged me back to my feet, shouting all the while that I was a tyrant' (Healy, 2008, 2). Healy describes his futile attempts to avoid his father's rage and violence, '...whatever I did or said, he would tell me to shut my mouth' (2008, 1). This sense of frustration, of censorship and of impotent wretchedness experienced by Healy in his earliest interactions with a figure of

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authority presages his struggle with state control and judicial authority in adulthood. His subsequent interchanges with authority are, in the main, marred by abuse and violence, as though Healy is destined to repeatedly relive the trauma of his childhood.

From early childhood Healy is aware of his otherness. As the son of Irish immigrants, he is acutely conscious of being different to the other children in his area, Kentish Town in London: 'Our neighbours on both side were Londoners and, being immigrants, we were treated as lepers....It was a tough area of London. The locals had not time for foreigners, and although I was born in London and mixed and played with children of my own age, I was considered alien' (2008, 4). A pattern of otherness, exclusion, and victimisation is established from childhood. Healy cannot find a place where he belongs and is safe. Not only is his father violent towards him, he also deliberately excludes his son from family life and makes him feel that he is different and other: 'Sometimes my father would leave me locked out in the yard whenever he felt I was "asking too many bloody questions". "Kids should be seen and not heard," he would shout as he bolted the scullery door. It made me miserable because it took away your importance to be locked out in the yard' (2008, 2). Healy's expulsion from the family home can be viewed as kind of reverse imprisonment. It is a punishment, and although he is locked out rather than in, he is placed in a symbolic prison, a state of exception, where he is at the mercy of society.

Interestingly, the notion of a symbolic prison recurs in Healy's account of his childhood. When describing his time in a nursery as a child, Healy describes the place as a virtual jail from which he cannot escape. The nursery as prison becomes a symbol for Healy's

entire childhood, a hell from which there is no exit route:

> I was put in a nursery situated on top of a block of flats. One entered from the balcony through an iron gate. I didn't like it...and wanted to go home. One day I managed to open the door and was found wandering the streets by the police....Some time passed and I broke out again! After that a lock and chain were put on the gate, so you could not escape your childhood' (2008, 4-5).

When Healy is excluded from the safety, protection and acceptance of the family unit, he seeks solace, acceptance, and companionship amongst the neighbourhood children. However, here he encounters other dominant, authoritarian figures, who use Healy's otherness as the son of immigrants to stigmatise and exclude him from the society of his peers:

> I could hold my own with my own age group, but their elder brothers (sometimes by six or seven years) would verbally and physically attack me. Sometimes their mothers and fathers would make insulting remarks to me about immigrants, and I had to smile and bear it or be prevented from playing with my friends, their sons. I became a bit timid and hesitant to speak or voice an opinion in their company (2008, 4-5).

While still a boy, Healy must learn to cope with prejudice and abuse at the hands of those in positions of dominance. As Tony Murray notes:

> Because he grew up in a tough working-class neighbourhood, Healy had to learn

to defend himself physically as well as verbally from an early age. In the immediate post-war years in London, such encounters often had an anti-Irish or anti-Catholic dimension. The vast majority of Irish migrants who came to London at this time were Roman Catholics. They were concerned to raise their children in the faith and did so even within mixed marriages. In a technically Protestant (if largely non-practising) country, this marked the second-generation Irish children with a cultural signifier distinctly at odds with their peers (2012, 155).

As a child, Healy cannot defend himself and the impact of such unjust treatment manifests itself through alterations in his personality and physicality.

Though naturally intelligent and outgoing, Healy begins to adapt his behaviour in order to survive. In particular, the repeated acts of violence and transgression against Healy's body, both in childhood and adulthood, seem to bring about a severing or split in Healy's identity and individuality. His body becomes a burden, from a young age he is blighted with pain in his neck, shoulders, and back as a result of regular beatings from the older neighbourhood boys. He becomes hunched over, a physical manifestation of his actual and symbolic beatings at the hands of authoritative figures. The history and legacy of his victim-hood is, to borrow from Jeanette Winterson, 'written on the body...a secret code only visible in certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille' (1996, 89). Yet, as his memoir demonstrates, he manages to retain something of himself, an inner life, a keen intellect and an amazing capacity to appreciate the small moments of beauty in the world, an essential self that is invulnerable to the forces of destruction his physical being encounters. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that Healy's childhood had a highly

detrimental effect upon him and set patterns of exclusion, violence and dysfunction that would be repeated into adulthood.

As an adult, John Healy continues to occupy a marginal position in society. His dependence on alcohol eventually means that he can no longer work and therefore becomes homeless. Having experienced the reality of being a homeless man, John Healy's narrative voice is authoritative when it comes to his depiction of the violence and despair of living rough on the streets of London. It is of paramount importance to clarify and define exactly what Healy's conception is of the place he describes as 'the grass arena'. For instance, does he experience the grass arena solely as a physical environment? Or is the grass arena a mental state, a social construction, a space of otherness or unbelonging? And, crucially for this study, does Healy himself conceive of the grass arena as what Agamben would describe as a 'state of exception'? Furthermore, violence pervades what Healy terms 'the Grass Arena', a physical space, a neighbourhood, a mode of being, a transitional space between the living and the dead. As a physical space, 'the grass arena' can be viewed as backdrop that forms the major part of the setting of Healy's memoir. The public parks, abandoned buildings and graveyards of London are colonised by the homeless, alcoholic, drug-addicted, or otherwise socially excluded. Within 'the grass arena' law is suspended and order is enforced and concessions gained by other means, chiefly violent. As Healy avows: 'Violence was the currency of the Grass Arena, of the place. It was quite a backwards subculture in this respect – almost like Vikings' (Healy in conversation with Collings, The Quietus, 2012).

Furthermore, if Healy's 'Grass Arena' is conceived of as a neighbourhood or community of the displaced, then it can perhaps fit in with Agamben's definition of the 'State of

Exception' as a state of 'being-outside, and yet belonging' (2005, 35). For instance, when Healy first begins drinking in the parks amongst the 'winos and alcoholics' he experiences a novel sense of belonging and acceptance: 'One thing that impressed me about these winos was that they did not care what anyone had done in drink or otherwise the day before' (2008, 80). Healy can also be viewed in terms of Agamben's idea of *Homo Sacer*, a victim of state manipulation and violence. Due to his failure to conform to society's norms and abide by its rules, Healy is seen as a threat to social order. He is placed in the 'State of Exception' and is subjected to ill-treatment and violence. Describing one incident of police brutality, Healy recalls: 'I soon became sober enough to make out two black shapes, silver badges gleaming on their helmets, laughing as they trained a hose on me. They'd got me handcuffed to that old iron refuse container in the yard at the back of the station and my wrist was rubbed raw where the cuff had bit into it' (2008, 96).

Throughout *The Grass Arena*, it is clear that Healy identifies a certain relationship of cause and effect between his impoverished childhood and his adult life on the margins of society. He gives the impression of someone who feels his fate has been determined from birth, that for him there was ultimately no escape from poverty and hardship: 'My mother longed to move to a nicer area, but poverty destroyed such fond hopes' (2008, 5) 'Funny how heavy work followed me' (2008, 256). When reading Healy's memoir his downward trajectory seems almost inevitable, and it comes as no surprise that he eventually finds himself homeless. It is perhaps worth noting at this point that statistically Irish first and subsequent generation migrants do tend to make up a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population of London. In research published in 2001, it was found that as an ethnic group, Irish people represented a quarter of homeless day centre users in London, yet they represented only 3.8 per cent of the population of Greater London (Dunne, 2003,

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12). In addition, a report of 2012 found that in 2011 there was an 84% increase in the number of new rough sleepers in London with Irish nationality (Crosscare Migrant Project, August 2012).

In terms of establishing the relevance of Agamben's theories when applied to the depiction of marginalisation and violence in migrant literature, his concept of the ban seems particularly interesting and relevant. Agamben uses the concept of *ban* to denote exclusion and exception, what I would argue can also be termed as marginalisation. He explains the origin of the word: 'from the old Germanic term that designates both exclusion from the community and the command and insignia of the sovereign...' (1998, 28). In terms of the state of exception, Agamben explains:

> The relation of exception is a relation of ban. He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (This is why in Romance languages, to be "banned" originally means both to be "at the mercy of" and "at one's own will, freely," to be "excluded" and also "open to all", "free" (1998, 28-9).

These descriptions seem particularly relevant to John Healy's memoir, in particular his accounts of his relationships with society and authority. He can be viewed as 'banned' from many aspects of conventional society. He is dishonourably discharged from the army because he continually behaves in a manner that flouts authority and because he

tries to run away a number of times. He wishes to escape the restrictive and regimented

military lifestyle, however when he does eventually attain his freedom it is in the form of

yet another ban or exclusion. Being in the army afforded him a certain degree of

respectability, security and state protection. When he is discharged from the army he is

effectively banned from these protections and is at the mercy of the darker aspects of

society.

For Healy, with his chronic reliance on alcohol, this sets him on a downward trajectory

which ultimately leads to further exclusions and bans. Without any structured control,

Healy descends into a life of squalor, crime, and isolation. He is banned from the family

home for drunken and violent behaviour, he is banned from the more respectable pubs for

the same reasons. Eventually, his only option is to drink in the park with the other social

pariahs. The more bans imposed upon Healy, the further he is pushed into the 'State of

Exception' in which he is no longer afforded the privileges and protections that come from

conforming to society's rules and regulations. Thus, Healy finds himself on the threshold

of society and the law, unprotected and exposed. In such a state, when he commits a crime

or transgression, the consequences for his body, in its unprotected state, can be dire. For

instance, during one of his first periods of incarceration, Healy is badly beaten by a group

of prison officers, agents of a state that no longer considers him to have any rights:

> ...suddenly my arms were pinned to my sides by the escort screws and, with
>
> surprising agility for a man of his size, the chief sprang up from the chair and
>
> reached me in one bound. I lowered my chin just as he threw a right which caught
>
> me too high on the head to knock me down but still with enough force to stagger
>
> me. The screws released their hold on me and with a swift blow to the guts he

dropped me. The last thing I remember was a boot coming at me. Then I got it in the head' (2008, 72).

This is just one of many instances recalled by Healy of his experiences of state administered and sanctioned violence over a period of fifteen years of homelessness and alcoholism.

Another ban experienced by Healy during this period was a ban from entitlement to state protection in terms of benefits. During this period, homeless people did not qualify for any social benefits. Here, once again, we see an example of Agamben's 'State of Exception'. In *The Grass Arena*, John Healy describes the phenomenon of state neglect of the homeless men and women of London, among them many first and subsequent generation Irish migrants. The problem of state neglect of the Irish migrant population of London is presented adroitly by Catherine Dunne in *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*. In this work, Dunne explains that many of those Irish people who settled in London from the 1950s onwards were denied state assistance to lesser and greater extents. Dunne puts the issue in context when she notes:

> It is worth remembering that the Irish *did* qualify for Social Welfare payments in 1950s Britain – and had done so since an agreement was signed between the two governments in 1921. But...many Irish were refused their Social Welfare entitlements....It was not uncommon for those working in the Social Welfare system in the UK to be unaware of the 1921 agreement and they treated Irish workers with hostility. Often, people were unable to fight for what was due to them and...believed that the Irish were entitled to nothing, unlike those from the Commonwealth, for example, who were deemed to have a natural right to live and

work in the "mother country" (2003, 9).

In Healy's experience, those who found themselves in need were offered no assistance from the state.

Another pertinent example of the state neglect of Irish migrants who were unsure of their rights is depicted in *The Grass Arena* when Healy is knocked down by a car and suffers a broken leg as a result:

> My leg would not heal properly. Those days you couldn't draw social security unless you had a room, but you couldn't get a room unless you had money, so I stayed in a derelict house for three months. There was a law against that too – 'vagrancy'. Of course the police used it how they liked – putting a bit of lead in your pocket altered it to 'being on enclosed premises to steal'. The criminal charges associated with simple vagrancy were endless. The advantages of this communal life were similar to those enjoyed by a shoal of tiger sharks (2008, 116).

The Vagrancy Act was instrumental in ensuring that many homeless first and subsequent generation Irish people were criminalised, although their only real transgression was homelessness or begging. Healy's description of the Vagrancy Act clearly illustrates the relevance of Agamben's theory of the 'State of Exception' to the depiction of the marginalised position of migrant groups in literature. Healy explains:

> In Britain, begging is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment. On the third offence, one is charged with being "an incorrigible rogue". (Only the Home Office could make asking a bloke for a fag sound worse than shagging your sister.) An incorrigible rogue! A phrase from a book, but it is a dangerous book, a law

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book, a firm unyielding statute that condemns vagrants to be tried at a Crown court, where a sentence for this offence (without a trial or jury) now becomes mandatory and ranges from one to three years' imprisonment. The trial moves swiftly on when the judge has determined the sentence beforehand and against that sentence there is no appeal (2008, 128).

In this excerpt Healy voices his vehement disapprobation of the legal system's disregard for the rights of individuals who constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in society, adding: '...who needs to be reminded that equal protection of the law does not prevail when the vagrancy law is enforced' (2008, 128). Thus, a facet of the law itself is envisaged as a marginalising mechanism for those who find themselves in a destitute position, regardless of whether or not they are actually criminals, the law makes no distinction in terms of levels or degrees of criminality or the perceived threat to the public good.

Another particularly significant aspect of Agamben's theory of the state of exception is the nature of violence that occurs within the state of exception. As Agamben explains: 'The violence exercised in the state of exception clearly neither preserves nor simply posits law, but rather conserves it in suspending it and posits it in excepting itself from it' (2005, 41). This idea seems especially relevant with regard to the depiction of violence on the margins of society in migrant texts, particularly *The Grass Arena*. This idea is further explained by Agamben when he writes:

In this sense, sovereign violence, like divine violence, cannot be wholly reduced to either one of the two forms of violence whose dialectic the essay undertook to

define. This does not mean that sovereign violence can be confused with divine violence. The definition of divine violence becomes easier, in fact, precisely when it is put in relation with the state of exception. Sovereign violence opens a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law (2005, 41).

It can be argued with some certainty that Agamben's conception of spaces outside the law that are categorized by violence and lack of state protection are germane to a discussion of Healy's marginalized position in British society. This paradigm is in evidence in *The Grass Arena* when Healy is positioned firmly in the realm of violence and exclusion outside of the law. It can be argued that Healy moves through a number of different 'states of exception' over the course of his life. The three main spaces that can be conceptualised as 'states of exception' for Healy are the army, the prison and the hospital. These three places can be conceived as both physical and symbolic spaces for Healy. In the sense that they are physical places, Healy experiences them as places of restriction and confinement. His arrival in these places marks the culmination of his unsuccessful lifelong journey to find a place of belonging in England. The failure of this quest, and his ultimate arrival at these places of actual and symbolic confinement, confirms Healy's embodiment of the psyche of Irish diasporic identity. Ireland is the longed for homeland but he cannot live in Ireland as he is made to feel alien there: 'The Farrell boys started laughing and tried to make me *shut up*...they picked up stones and started throwing them at me, shouting, "You English cur! Go back to England!....Go back to England, John Bull" (Healy, 2008, 13.) This fact also precludes him from finding a place to belong in England. Thus, his life becomes a journey or movement through a series of 'states of exception'.

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The first 'state of exception' Healy inhabits is the army. The army, similar to the other 'states of exception' specified above, is a space of exclusion, while also being a place of sovereign-controlled violence. On joining the army, recruits enter a 'state of exception', a place where the normal rights and privileges of the free individual are suspended, a place that is set apart from mainstream society. With this in mind, it is therefore interesting to note that John Healy does not choose to join the armed forces of his own accord. The decision is essentially made for him by his parole officer, who tells him that, having spent a week in remand for suspicious behaviour and being found in an inebriated state in public on numerous occasions, he must either find a regular job or join the army, otherwise the probation officer would recommend 'a stiff prison sentence' (2008, 32-3). The threat essentially forces Healy to join the army, as he is unable to hold down a regular job due to his alcohol problem. The army is a space where violence is authorised by the state, but only in a highly regimented form. The paradox of controlled, sanctioned violence is deeply problematic for Healy during his time in the armed forces. On one hand, violence is inculcated into his psyche. He is conditioned and indeed encouraged to act in a physically aggressive manner: 'The general shook all our hands. He stopped by me and said: "Anyone who can fight like that will never get in trouble in the army"' (2008, 38). On the other hand he is punished for any act of non-sanctioned violence: '"You was kicking and struggling; they got you cuffed to the pipes, you spat at them, they gave you a few kicks in the ribs"' (2008, 43). The punishment itself is also meted out through the medium of violence. Healy finds himself subsumed in an all-pervasive culture of violence.

The detrimental impact of this all-pervasive culture of violence is further intensified by Healy's membership of his company's boxing team. His talent as a boxer leads his company commander to urge Healy to volunteer to take part in a boxing tournament. His involvement in the tournament impacts negatively on Healy's mental health and he resumes his heavy drinking in order to help him cope with the anguish of the emotions stirred up by all this violence. Unconcerned with his subaltern's emotional welfare, his only aim being the exploitation of his body, Healy's commander manipulates him into continuing with the tournament, promising that he will be 'looked after, excused all duties, given best steaks to eat' (2008, 35). The symbolism of the feeding up of Healy's body with 'best steaks' is striking. In the eyes of his superiors, Healy is little more than a metaphoric pig to be fattened up for slaughter. His body is regarded as belonging to the army and is therefore treated as an object to be used in any manner deemed appropriate. His free will, along with his identity, is discarded. The only part of the person who was once John Healy that is invested with any worth is the body that can be trained and manipulated for deployment in combat. During the training for the boxing tournament, Healy is subjected to total corporeal domination at the hands of his superiors. His every movement is dictated until the simple agency of free control of the body is completely denied him: '...we were supposed to train all day, running, skipping, punching the heavy bags and sparring...' (2008, 35). When Healy rebels against this control, using his body to engage in a fight outside the boxing ring, he is severely punished. He receives a twenty-one day sentence of detention. During this period of incarceration, Healy is subjected to extreme corporal control and deprivation: 'There were six blocks of wood, three on each side, which served as beds....We spent the morning doing bunny hops, drills and press-ups. By dinner time we were all fit to drop, no one could eat' (2008, 45). This extreme physical treatment stands in stark contrast to the special care bestowed upon Healy's body while it was

pressed into obedient servitude for his unit's boxing team. The extremes of corporal treatment Healy is subjected to in the army demonstrate that the state-controlled body is often placed in grave danger and therefore must comply at all time in order to survive.

Eventually, Healy deserts the army, only to be apprehended one year later by the Royal Military Police and placed under arrest pending court martial. Tellingly, on his arrest one of the officers says of Healy: 'He's ours and we're keeping him' (2008, 68). The symbolic significance of the Royal Military Police Officers' handling of Healy's body in this extract is also striking: 'They lifted me up between them and carried me downstairs...' (2008, 68). He is denied the basic right to walk and is instead handled in a brutish and entirely unnecessarily violent manner. Ultimately, Healy is given dishonourable discharge from the army, which can arguably be considered as a minor victory, a small triumph of individual will over the callous regime of state control.

The next 'state of exception' through which Healy passes is the prison. Almost immediately following his discharge from the army, he is sentenced to fifteen months penal servitude for burglary. He begins his sentence in Wandsworth Prison, where he feels relatively comfortable, but is subsequently transferred to Albany on the Isle of Wight, where he must engage in physical labour: '...I was put breaking the ground with a pickaxe..' (2008, 71). He endures violent treatment at the hands of the prison guards: 'The last thing I remember was a boot coming at me. Then I got it in the head' (2008, 72). The violence and physical degradation occurs on a regular basis. On one occasion he is given a sentence of fourteen days' solitary confinement, during the course of which his body is

deprived of many basic rights: '...I started to look around for somewhere to sit before sitting...on the floor. A small piece of cheese, two slices of bread, a teaspoonful of jam and a mug of cold tea made up the evening meal....Just before light out I was allowed to fetch my bed into the cell. Each morning I had to place it back outside (such a thing as too much comfort, you know' (2008, 72-3). Healy crystalizes for the reader his suffering at the hands of the penal system and underscores the inhumane nature of solitary confinement as a mode of punishment when he says: 'In the end, though, whichever way you handled it, you were just staring at a wall. A concrete wall reinforced by time and silence' (2008, 74).

Moreover, Healy's memoir certainly sheds light on those aspects of the penal system that are shrouded in secrecy, for example the oppression and abuse of the prisoner's body. In his description of the conditions imposed upon his body in prison, Healy describes many of the forms of physical oppression detailed by Foucault. According to Foucault, 'in its most explicit practices, imprisonment has always involved a certain degree of physical pain', for instance, 'rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement' (1991, 16). Pain and physical oppression are therefore used by the state as tools to bring the divergent body under control, or as Foucault argues, 'we can regard punishment as a political tactic' (1991, 23). Thus, biopolitics helps to frame Healy's position in society as represented in *The Grass Arena*: '...the body is...directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks...' (1991, 25).

Thus, it is clear that Healy's existence is reduced to 'bare life' in prison, as it had previously been restricted during his time in the army. As a conceptual space, however, the prison is

perhaps more symbolically significant of Healy's place in British society than the army. Symbolically, the prison can be read as the literal embodiment of Healy's sense of being 'foreign' and 'alien' in England. His incarceration in prison confirms his view that he does not belong and that his life as a self-identified Irishman in England has consisted of little more than a series of violent episodes designed to control, discipline and punish his physical being, his foreign body, so to speak. As he observes, his view of the world from childhood was early informed by his experiences of pain and violence: 'It seemed that the world was made up of punishment and suffering...' (2008, 14). In his encounters with the representatives of the sovereign, the police and juridical system, Healy experiences brutality, intimidation, violence, discrimination, and victimization. His rights are compromised by the fact that he is not a functioning member of what is regarded as law abiding, mainstream society. In Healy's alcoholic and therefore enfeebled state, he does not have the resources or strength to defend himself, and thus becomes a helpless victim of the state of exception. The violence perpetrated against Healy's physical self is deemed acceptable by the sovereign state. Healy and his peers are periodically physically assaulted by police officers and prison guards: 'I realized I'd got through another week without falling down any stairs. It seems to be a major cause of death around here. Scotch Billy was found dead in a police cell on Monday. Seems he fell down the stairs' (Healy, 2008, 96). This treatment is condoned by a legal system that views him as beyond the pale. Healy is without rights and powerless to retaliate.

The third 'state of exception' through which Healy passes is the hospital. As a conceptual space, the hospital can be seen a beneficent space of state-control, but Healy does not experience it as such. Rather, the hospital becomes another space of exclusion and

exception, a place where his body is once again abused with legal impunity. Healy is admitted to hospital under false pretenses when a doctor approaches him and a group of his drinking companions, offering them an opportunity to dry out in hospital. In reality, the doctor has deceived the men into taking part in a medical trial of a drug called Antabuse, an alcohol aversion treatment. Healy realises that he has been duped when he speaks to another patient who reveals that other alcoholics have died as a result of the drug trial; however Healy has been tricked into signing a consent form so he must continue with the treatment. Having been 'pumped full of Antabuse', Healy and the other men are 'force-fed a bottle of Scotch....The nurses handed each of us a bottle of Scotch while the doctor checked our pulse rates. "We're going to have a little party", he said and smiled at us' (2008, 115). Healy is once again stripped of all but his 'bare life', his existence reduced to the purely physical, his value lying only in his body's utility as a site of experimentation. Having signed the legal consent form he can be harmed or even killed with legal impunity. This is a very real danger, as demonstrated by Healy in the narrative when he mentions the fact that many of the winos who went into the hospital for the clinical trials died as a result of their exposure to the drug and the doctor in charge claimed they had died of natural causes:

> "That fucking quack always puts 'Heart Attack' on an alky's death cert when he's pumped full of Antabuse before being force-fed a bottle of Scotch. And it's all legal, 'cause I bet you've already signed a form on admission agreeing to take part in his little aversion treatment 'experiments'" (2008, 115).

The sinister representation of the doctor in this extract contributes to Healy's depiction of an alternative vision of a state-run organisation that exists to care for the general public

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yet seems to treat those at the margins of society in a cruel and sometimes violent manner. In this excerpt there is a direct inversion of the received notion of the doctor/patient relationship, as it is conceived by Foucault: 'medicine in its entirety consisted of an immediate relationship between sickness and that which alleviated it' (1976, 55). It therefore seems counter-intuitive that a doctor should intentionally set out to do what is diametrically opposite to the very aim of medicine, the alleviation of sickness and suffering.

Furthermore, Healy's account of his experience of being used as a guinea pig in a clinical trial brings to mind Agamben's discussion of bare life, in particular his reference to the case of Wilson, a biochemist who used his own body for medical research and experimentation on discovering he was suffering from leukemia (1995, 185). Similar to Wilson, Healy's body 'is no longer private, since it has been transformed into a laboratory; but neither is it public, since only insofar as it is his own body can he transgress the limits that morality and law put to experimentation' (Agamben, 1995, 186). Thus, Agamben would argue that Healy, having been tricked into taking part in a clinical trial, becomes 'biological' or 'experimental' life. His body becomes a separate entity to his identity as John Healy, and that 'biological life' is completely controlled by the medical authorities.

In the memoir, Healy also depicts the homeless shelters run by Department of Health and Social Security in the United Kingdom at the time. His experiences of the shelter confirm it is yet another state-run public space that places the marginalised and vulnerable in a 'state of exception'. The derogatory name Healy bestows upon the shelter, 'the Morgue',

is telling and certainly does not convey the impression that this is a place where the homeless men will receive the care and attention they need. Rather, it suggests that those who enter the shelter may actually be placing themselves in danger: 'Joined a queue of shabbily dressed, battered-featured vagrants, some with limbs missing, others on crutches. Even the young looked old here. Time dragged as each one slowly shuffled up to the check-in window to be processed into hell' (2008, 212). Healy goes on to describe the treatment the men received at the hands of the shelter's staff, likening them to officers in a concentration camp: 'The staff were big and well fed, dressed all in black; with their big boots and shiny peaked caps, they looked and acted like a death's-head division in a German concentration camp' (2008, 212). He continues to describe techniques used against the men that are reminiscent of the torture techniques found to have been used against detainees at Guantanamo Bay. The staff forced the men to remove their clothes and hustled them into a bath, 'all the while shouting at the old guys to keep them confused' (2008, 212). Sensory bombardment, such as prolonged shouting aimed disorienting the victim, has been defined as torture by The European Court of Human Rights (Physicians for Human Rights, June, 2008). The men who sought shelter at this government-run refuge committed no crime and yet were treated in such a manner that their fundamental human rights were breached.[6]

The Scapegoat and *Felicia's Journey:* Victimisation and the Female Migrant

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[6] Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/

Body

The exceptional nature of certain facets of Irish migrant experience in Britain is also explored in *Felicia's Journey*, by William Trevor. The novel is set in the early 1990s and tells the story of Felicia, a young, small-town Irish girl who becomes pregnant and travels to England in search of the father of her child, Johnny Lysaght, who has left her without any means to contact him. The sole piece of information with regard to his whereabouts she has to act on is the name of the town where Johnny has duplicitously lead her to believe he is employed in a lawnmower factory. He is in fact a British soldier stationed at a barracks in the town, described in the novel as somewhere 'north of Birmingham' (Trevor, 1994, 3). When she arrives in the midland-English town, Felicia searches fruitlessly for Johnny and is relentlessly preyed upon by the sinister Mr Hiliditch, a character who has been described as 'a product of thwarted imperial ambition' and an 'agent of colonialism' (Harte and Pettitt in Bery and Murray, 2000, 73,75). By the end of the novel, Felicia has been forced to have an abortion and finds herself homeless in London. Liam Harte reads the novel as a nuanced exploration of the deleterious effects of Britain's extended period of colonisation of Ireland. In particular, he notes how Trevor 'draws on the resources of allegory to represent the psychic scars of this history of military occupation, political violence, and cultural deformation', viewing the novel as 'a richly nuanced allegorical drama of domination and resistance' (Harte, 2012, 411). The legacy of British dominance over Irish subjects is framed in Trevor's novel in terms of a depiction of English cities as violent spaces for vulnerable, marginalised Irish female migrant bodies. It is clear that Felicia embodies the figures of both *Homo Sacer* and the scapegoat in Trevor's novel, and his depiction of her experiences is in keeping with what Imhof sees as a thematic preoccupation with 'the evil of prejudice – prejudice against all

foreigners in London, especially, though, against blacks and the Irish' across his oeuvre (2002, 148).

The final paragraph of *Felicia's Journey* could be described as a poetic vision of Irish immigrant poverty and homelessness in Britain. At the end of the novel Felicia, a symbol of victimised Irish migrancy, finds herself homeless on the streets of London. Trevor writes:

> Idiot gawking, fool tramping nowhere: shreds of half-weary pity are thrown in the direction of a wayside figure, before the hasty glance darts on to something else. There will be other cities....There will be charity and shelter mercy and disdain; and always, and everywhere, the chance that separates the living from the dead (1994, 213).

Throughout this novel, Trevor's treatment of the themes of homelessness and social exclusion amongst the Irish immigrant population of London has a number of elements in common with Healy's narrative of real-life experiences. It is apparent that Trevor's fictional account of one young Irish woman's experiences of homelessness and marginalisation on British streets draws heavily on real situations and scenarios across the breadth of problematic aspects of Irish settlement in England. In the novel, questions of state neglect of Irish migrants are raised, alongside other real social problems faced by the some members of the Irish diaspora in English cities. Trevor pays particular attention to problems experienced by Irish female immigrants, in particular prostitution and unplanned pregnancy. This focus on female migrant issues is important in terms of the wider scope of this project, not only because it ties in with texts such as *Brick Lane* and

White Teeth, but also because it provides a much needed counter balance to the predominately male oriented depictions of immigrant homelessness and marginalisation portrayed in works of Irish migrant fiction such as *Ripley Bogle* and *The Grass Arena*, and in earlier works of Irish migrant experience in Britain such as the play *A Whistle in the Dark* by Tom Murphy.

The theme of the existence of violent spaces is also considered in Trevor's novel. At the close of *Felicia's Journey*, there is a stark contrast between the physical and social places occupied by the novel's two protagonists, Felicia and Mr Hilditch. While Felicia finds herself living rough in an urban setting, Mr Hilditch 'visits a stately home' (Trevor, 1994, 157). The image of Mr Hilditch, a sinister and cruel man, at home in the environs of the beautiful stately home and its idyllic grounds is juxtaposed with the image of Felicia, good and trusting, lost in the menacing streets of a strange city: '...Mr Hilditch visits a stately home....from his position under the tree, he can see most of the long, tarred rive that winds through parkland, and the house itself, a sprawl of red brick and stone, with turrets and chimneys, and walled gardens. Swards of crocuses bloom close to where he picnics' (Trevor, 1994, 157). This picture of rural tranquillity and stately elegance and wealth is in stark contrast to the environment in which Felicia finds herself:

> The city she has come to, moving on from other cities and other towns, is no longer strange to her. She knows the way to the river....You have to move about. You get to know the windows of the shops, the streets in different weather, faces you're always seeing, the H. Samuel clock, post-office clocks and clock-tower clocks, the parking-meter women, the obstruction of scaffolding on the pavement, red-and-white plastic ribbons to warn you, the street lights coming on

(Trevor, 1994, 205-6).

For much of the novel, Felicia, a naïve young girl from a small town in rural Ireland, appears like an incongruous dot on the post-industrial landscape of the English midlands. The places she comes to on her fruitless search for the father of her unborn child evoke a vision of a landscape permanently marked by the legacy of industrialisation and distinctly at odds with the rural setting of her hometown: 'There are no hills. Against a grey sky, tall bleak chimneys belch out their own hot clouds. Factories seems like fortresses, their towers protecting an ancient realm of iron and wealth. Terracotta everywhere has blackened to the insistent local sheen. The lie of the land is lost beneath a weight of purpose, its natural idiosyncrasy stifled, contours pressed away' (1994, 34). The spaces are imbued with a sense of anonymity, as Felicia moves through them she experiences a sense of dislocation and alienation, she is constantly at risk and in search of sanctuary.

Throughout the narrative, Trevor deftly describes the plights both of Felicia herself and of those she encounters on the streets. He provides the reader with a vivid picture of the alternative cityscape as it appears to those on the margins of society:

> As maggots make their way into cracks in masonry, so the people of the streets have crept into one-night homes in graveyards and courtyards, making walls of dustbins pulled close together, and roofs of whatever lies nearby. Some have crawled up scaffolding to find a corner beneath the tarpaulin that protects an untiled expanse. Others have settled down in cardboard cartons that once

contained dishwashers or refrigerators (1994, 102).

When Felicia meets an elderly homeless woman who originally came from County Clare, the reader is reminded of the legacy of Irish immigrant poverty and state neglect. (See Catherine Dunne) The elderly woman explains to Felicia: 'I'm from the County Clare myself. A while back….Forty-one years, two months and a day. I keep the count. Sharpens you to keep the count….Eighty-two years of age, still going strong. I've been all over. Liverpool, Plymouth, all the sailor town." (1994, 103). Here there is the suggestion of prostitution, mirroring a later point in the novel where it is implied that Felicia herself may have been forced to prostitute herself on at least one occasion: '"O.K.?", the driver of a lorry carrying furnaces asked, and she said yes because it was only fair in return for a lift of two hundred miles, all the payment she could offer…' (1994, 211). Prostitution is just one of a range of issues that affected Irish migrant women in England from the 1950s onwards. Another, altogether more common problem, was unplanned pregnancy. Of course Felicia's problem stems from Irish responses, in both public and private spheres, to pregnancies outside of the institution of marriage. This issue is also dealt with in *Felicia's Journey*. In her study of Irish migrants in London in the latter part of the twentieth century, Catherine Dunne discusses the problem of unplanned pregnancy at length. She describes how 'hundreds of girls arrived at Euston and other points in the 1950s, newly pregnant and very afraid' (Dunne, 2003, 17-8).

In this novel Trevor offers a distinctly female perspective on the history of Irish migrant experience in Britain. This is an important literary contribution, alongside that made by

Edna O'Brien on the same topic, because, as Catherine Dunne notes, 'Irish patterns of emigration differ from our European counterparts – for the latter, the typical emigrant was male, usually bringing wife and children with him. Not so in the case of Ireland' (2003, 17). Dunne goes on to cite research conducted by Clare Barrington for her book *Irish Women in England*:

> Irish emigration is a remarkable story of female self-determination. During most decades since the 1880s, more women than men have emigrated from Ireland. The vast majority of these women were single, younger than their male counterparts, and travelled alone. This large, sustained emigration of single females is an anomaly in the history of European emigration, as women from other countries did, generally, emigrate with husbands and fathers (Dunne, 2003, 17).

It can be argued that economic factors are instrumental in placing marginalized migrant groups, such as the Irish in London, outside the law and into the locus of what Agamben terms the 'State of Exception' (2005). This is certainly the case in Trevor's portrayal of Irish immigrant marginality in *Felicia's Journey*. In the novel, Mr Hilditch steals Felicia's money: 'In her absence he goes through the two carrier bags she has left in the car. At the bottom of the second one, stuffed into the sleeves of a navy-blue jersey, are two bundles of banknotes. He hesitates for a moment, before transferring the money to an inside pocket of his jacket' (1994, 67). The theft demonstrates for the first time in their interactions the fact that Mr Hilditch sees Felicia as a target to be pillaged and a victim to be preyed upon. In the aftermath of the theft, her resulting poverty crystallises Felicia's status as scapegoat, obliterating as it does her only remaining resource and the chance to

return home to Ireland: '…if she wanted to turn around now and go home she wouldn't be able to; she hasn't enough money left for a single night's lodging' (1994, 94). After Mr Hilditch steals her money, Felicia finds herself homeless. She attempts without success to claim social welfare and her economic problems lead her into a more entrenched position on the margins. Trevor depicts the failings of the British state in this section of the novel. When Felicia seeks assistance from the social welfare system she is turned away because she does not have a permanent address:

> "I require your national insurance number."
>
> The clerk speaks through glass, making it difficult to hear him. He repeats what he has said. "I haven't one over here."
>
> The clerk directs her to where the forms are, pointing behind her. He mentions a permanent address, stating that that will be necessary.
>
> "I haven't anywhere permanent. I've had my money stolen."
>
> "An address is required on a benefit application."….
>
> Felicia says she has been staying at the Salvation Army hostel, but they tell her that won't do for an address (1994, 99).

In this excerpt Felicia is unsure of her entitlements and her timidity prevents her from insisting on assistance. This depiction of the state neglect of vulnerable migrants demonstrates the extent to which Girard's vision of a culture of opposition can create the environment in which an individual can become a scapegoat. Eventually, Felicia gives up and must fend for herself without state assistance.

By virtue of being a poorly integrated minority, a vulnerable female, and an impoverished

foreigner, Felicia comes to inhabit the figure of the scapegoat in Trevor's novel. She is persecuted by Mr Hilditch so that he can appease his own anguish and suffering. As Girard notes, the scapegoat, as embodied by Felicia in this paradigm, is an innocent victim against whom opposition is polarized (1986, 39). Throughout the novel, Felicia encounters opposition at every turn, eventually forcing her into the menacing sphere of Mr Hilditch, himself an amalgamation of the collective forces of opposition and malice that plague Felicia along her journey. The first instance of this polarization of feeling against Felicia is made manifest through the depiction of her father's reaction to the news of her pregnancy: 'He crossed himself. He called her a hooer, looking at her over the smoke from the frying pan, not raising his voice. He said he was glad her mother wasn't alive. No better than a dirty hooer, he furiously repeated' (1994, 59-60). With her father's reprobation and the lack of alternative familial support, Felicia turns to a neighbour, Miss Furey, who in turn rejects and condemns her: '"Take care I wouldn't go to the Guards," she threatened. "Get off my property."' (1994, 58).

In England, Felicia also experiences polarization in opposition against her. An example of this is found in her interactions with the Jehovah's Witness, Miss Calligary, and her associates. At first, Miss Calligary regards Felicia as a victim to be preyed upon and manipulated into a life of religious servitude: 'she notices a girl in a red coat on an isolated seat in a walkway, with litter blowing all around her. Miss Calligary observes this figure from a distance, noting the two green-and-black carrier bags and the tired hunch of the girl's shoulders. There is unhappiness here, Miss Calligary silently remarks to herself, and strides forth to gather the girl in'(1994, 81). The tactic succeeds when an exhausted Felicia succumbs to the offer of accommodation at the church's gathering house. Felicia is welcomed into the religious community and for a time she experiences a sense of

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belonging, but ultimately she knows that she must continue her search for Johnny. She leaves the gathering house, but returns a short time later when she discovers the loss of her money. Unaware that Mr Hilditch has in fact stolen from her, Felicia asks Miss Calligary if it is possible that someone has come across the money in the gathering house. This is taken as an affront by the religious community, they assume she is a confidence trickster, and they collectively turn against her:

> Their response is to stare at Felicia with disappointment that is not disguised. All trace of friendliness has drained from the bloodshot eyes of the old Ethiopian and from Mr Hikuku's peering out of their narrowness. The hurt in the other faces distorts them; loathing sours Agnes's prettiness. No one speaks. Miss Calligary has become so still her features might be cut in ebony. With nothing left to say, Felicia goes away (1994, 96).

This is in fact typical of the predicament of the victim, as Girard notes: 'The polarization exerts such a constraint on those polarized that the victims cannot prove their innocence.' (1986, 40). One of the factors that leads to Felicia being identified as a scapegoat by this group is her status as a foreigner: 'The Irish girl brought pain to our people', Miss Calligary remarks. (1994, 185). Mr Hilditch also refers to the significance of Felicia's Irishness, describing her as 'an alien' and even going so far as to compare her to a foreign invading power: '...the Irish girl has invaded him, as territory is invaded' (1994, 121,179) Here is another of Girard's identifying marks of the scapegoat, 'the foreigner, banished or assassinated by the community...The victim is a person who comes from elsewhere, a

well-known stranger' (1994, 32).

Unable to prove her innocence and abandoned by the state, Felicia turns to Mr Hilditch, a man who sees her only in terms of the next victim in a long line of vulnerable young girls: 'Elsie Covington and Beth. Sharon and Gaye. Jakki and Bobbi. Chosen for death because no one would know when they were no longer. What trouble made victims of them?' (1994, 209). In order to relieve his own suffering, Mr Hilditch stalks and kills young women. He lines Felicia up as his next victim, describing her as 'this present girl', in an act of eradication of individuality and humanity. He believes that Felicia's death will bring an end to his suffering because he sees her as a powerful agent of torment who is targeting him specifically: 'This present one came to him at his place of work, he didn't make an approach' (1994, 150). As Girard notes of persecutors of scapegoats, 'they see themselves as completely passive, purely reactive, totally controlled by this scapegoat at the very moment when they rush to his attack. They think that all initiative comes from him' (1986, 439). Thus, Felicia is viewed as a direct threat to Mr Hilditch and must be eliminated. As a vulnerable female Irish migrant, Felicia is an example of a protagonist on the margins in contemporary diasporic literature.

Conclusion

During his recent state visit to Britain, President Michael D. Higgins took the time to visit present and past Irish National Health Service workers at University College Hospital. Commenting on the visit, retired nurse Bridie Brennan, originally from Mayo but living in England since the late 1950s, said that President Higgins' visit had been 'the most

wonderful thing to happen...He makes us proud to be ourselves and he has given us recognition. For people our age, and for what we did when we were working, especially the men' (*Irish Times*, April 10, 2014). This comment is strikingly pertinent to the issues discussed in this chapter, particularly with regard to the feelings of marginalisation and alienation often experienced by certain groups of unassimilated Irish migrants to England. Both *The Grass Arena* and *Felicia's Journey* depict the more extreme aspects of the violence that are often associated with a position on the margins of society. In each text it is possible to identify the experience of 'bare life', as both protagonists are laid bare, offered no protection from the state and subjected to sovereign violence. The impact of this violence, coupled with their lack of belonging, erodes their individual identities. Both individuals, but particularly Healy, inhabit various different 'states of exception', physical and conceptual spaces in which they become victims of state-control and occupy positions beyond the ordinary protections associated with membership of mainstream society.

Throughout the development of the argument contained in this chapter, the overriding aim has been to apply the above outlined theories of Homo Sacer and the Scapegoat to the two selected texts of exceptional marginalised Irish migrant experience in literature. It has been argued that the theoretical work of Agamben and Girard helps the reader to uncover the extent to which the persecution of and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities is explored in contemporary Irish diasporic literature. Religion is often the defining mark or characteristic that leads to individuals or groups being persecuted. Irish migrants in Britain have also been victimised and marginalised on the grounds of religion, and this external signifier of their difference from the ideal of English Protestant has been used to justify discrimination and even persecution. Stereotyped notions about Irishness, influenced by factors such as increased immigration to England

during and after the Great Famine, and the legacy of the Northern Irish Troubles, also contribute to the creation of a culture of fear and violence amongst certain pockets of the Irish diaspora in Britain. Thus, in summation, it is clear that in both *The Grass Arena* and *Felicia's Journey*, it is possible to identify the exceptional forces that combine to place marginalised, impoverished migrant figures in the role of victim or scapegoat, thus making them feel like they are rootless and without a home. In these texts, it is their poverty and membership of an ethnic and religious minority that single these individuals out for victimization and scapegoating.

Chapter Five

Mapping Migrant Memory: Recollections of Things Past

Introduction

Throughout this project a concerted effort has been made to underscore the significance of place and movement through space in the literature of marginalised migrancy in modern Britain. Interactions with and movement through myriad spheres of lived experience have been traced and mapped in the novels surveyed across the breadth of the project. Each of these considerations has at times crossed over into the realm of memory, creating a blurring of lines between reality and recollection or reimagining. Thus, it has become apparent that the mapping of migrant experience in contemporary literature should not be limited to a consideration of private and public space and place, but should also be extended to encompass cartographies of what can be termed memory-scapes. Remembered, reimagined or recollected places of migrant experience in contemporary Britain do not appear on any maps, yet they are real and tangible settings for the fiction of the postcolonial migrant explored throughout this project.

In postcolonial literature the impression that all of life can be viewed as a product of memory and history often strikes the reader as all too accurate. Perhaps this is because in contemporary postcolonial literature there is often a fixation or fascination with the past. It is this preoccupation with the past, and the way in which it is recalled, edited,

created, reconstructed and forgotten, that demands further analysis. A contemplation of the nature and function of memory is thus a fundamental aspect of a scholarly reading of novels of contemporary migrant experience. Across the breadth of this chapter, key questions about the nature of memory and the role it plays in postcolonial literature are explored. In the opening section there is a consideration of seminal ideas in the field of memory studies. These concepts are interrogated in relation to identity formation and collective recollection in an attempt to reveal the significance of the emphasis on memory in the migrant literature explored in this project. This is an important exercise because it can provide the key to unlocking the significance of a major theme in all of the texts considered across the breadth of this research project.

In addition, theories of memory studies are further explored in relation to the notion of forgetting. This is also a fundamental concern in the research, specifically in terms of a consideration of what is recalled and what is forgotten or omitted in contemporary migrant literature, and, more significantly, how the critical reader can interpret such silences and omission. Following on from this exploration of the nature of memory and forgetting, there is a contemplation of the role of trauma in the creation of memories and the nature of what is recalled. A key concern here is to determine the extent to which the colonial past impacts on the present and the extent to which shared, public memory can impact on personal lives in the present of these novels.

The novels read in this section are *Brick Lane, 26A* and *The Grass Arena*. The theoretical framework for this chapter is multifaceted. To begin, the scholarship of Paul Ricoeur is contemplated with regard to the nature of memory, and specifically in relation to the question of who remembers, the individual or the collective. In *Memory, History*

Forgetting, Ricoeur asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship between collective and individual memories. Furthermore, he sees forgetting as an essential part of remembering. Secondly, collective memory and its depiction in migrant literature is considered through the lens of Maurice Halbwachs' scholarship in the area. For Halbwachs, collective memory is irregular and uncertain because 'the memory of a society extends as far as the memory of the groups composing it' and 'the groups keeping these remembrances fade away' (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, 142). This is important in terms of a consideration of collective memory in migrant literature because it underlines the centrality of the individual in contributing to the creation of a group history and thus a communal identity. The section on trauma draws heavily on the scholarship of Cathy Caruth. The work of Caruth is deployed as a tool that facilitates analysis of depictions of traumatic memories in migrant narratives. It is also useful in examining the moments of overlap that occur with regard to traumatic memory across the texts surveyed in the chapter.

Identity Formation and the Nature of Memory in Novels of Migrant Experience

In her musings on the relationship between her past and present selves, Virginia Woolf went quite far in the attempt to describe the nature of memory (1978, 67). Her thoughts and ideas are pertinent to this discussion of memory and identity in migrant literature, as they help to crystallise for us the role of the past in shaping the literary imagination. In the case of postcolonial literature, it is not difficult to see how the legacy of colonial rule must exercise a significant influence over the literary imagination of the migrant author. Woolf writes: 'I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems

as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen' (1978, 68).

Here, one of the notable aspects of Woolf's description of memory is its cinematic quality.

The memory is playing out, like a video reel. In order to allow for the uninterrupted flow

of the 'video reel of the past', Woolf acknowledges that her memory actively fills in the

gaps. Thus, when considering the nature of memory in literature, it is important to note

that the essence of what is remembered is not always true or real because omissions or

gaps in memory are replaced by constructed versions of events. This idea is key to a

reading of the role of memory in contemporary migrant literature. Furthermore, this

concept facilitates a more nuanced application of the phenomenon of what Salman

Rushdie describes as the creation of 'imaginary homelands'.

An exploration of memory in migrant literature involves a consideration of the binary

opposition between reality and recollection, situating the authors of these novels in a

territory of in-betweeness, a position between recalled and actual reality. Similarly, the

narrators and protagonists of these novels often cause the reader to question the dynamic

between recollection and truth. All of the novels conform to Rushdie's assessment of

Midnight's Children, which he characterises as 'a novel of memory and about memory'

(2010, 10). In addition, the novels all resonate with Rushdie's explanation of his depiction

of memory as subjective and fragmentary in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie has made the

following observation on the nature of memory in the novel:

> ...my India was just that: "my" India, a version and no more than one version of
>
> all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively
>
> true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect,
>
> and I knew that my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer

what I was, and who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant

to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged. This is why I made my narrator,

Saleem, suspect in his narration; his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory

compounded by quirks of character and circumstance, and his vision is

fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India

tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose

fragments have been irretrievably lost. (Rushdie, 2010, 10-11).

Rushdie's acknowledgement of the fragmentary and subjective nature of his narrative is,

according to Gurnah, in line with what Bakhtin terms the 'carnivalesque', 'where facts

and fantasy mingle' (2007, 97). It is this mingling of fact and fantasy that is of most

interest here, making it clear that both for the author and the protagonist of migrant

literature, migrancy leads to instability in terms of the ability to distinguish between

memory and reality.

In many of the texts of migrant experience read across this research project, the nature of

memory is central to the narrative. It is often the case that, for the protagonists of these

novels, to remember is to be. Thus, the significance of memory is all encompassing and

is intimately bound up with the self. In the term 'the self' I am encompassing many things:

self-discovery and self-validation, individual, ethnic and cultural identity, belonging and

exclusion in a postcolonial context, etc. At times in these novels it seems that the 'I' of

today and the 'I' of yesterday are fundamentally of the same essence, while at other times

they seem to bear no resemblance to one another. In some instances, yesterday is

undistinguishable from today and tomorrow, and at times there seems to be no escape

from what Joyce sees as the nightmare of history; at other times, the past seems to bear

almost no relation to the present or the future.

The connection between memory and identity is thus a key concern in contemporary migrant literature. Before applying this assertion to texts of migrant experience, it is necessary to explore the relationship between memory and identity in more detail. To begin, Paul Ricoeur's philosophical conceptions of the phenomenology of memory establish a number of key foundational ideas in this area. In his discourse on the nature of memory, Ricoeur posed two crucial theoretical questions: 'Of what is the memory?' ; 'Whose memory is it?' (2004, 3). The relationship between the answers to these two questions is key to an understanding of the nature of memory itself. Ricoeur emphasises the significance of what he terms 'the reflexive nature of memory', asserting: 'To remember *something* is at the same time to remember *oneself.*' (2004, 3 Original emphasis) So, we are given to understand, the primary nexus here is that in place between the remembered something and the rememberer. He emphasises the fact that true self-knowledge can only come from an understanding of what has come before. This is indeed a pertinent factor with regard to self-discovery and the formation of identity in a postcolonial context, particularly when we take cognisance of Ricoeur's underscoring of the prime position of collective memory. In effect, our individual memories, and thus, to a certain extent our individual identities, are shaped from group or collective identities that in turn form the basis for cultural or collective identities.

In migrant literature, the role of collective and group memory is often crucial in shaping individual identities and forging a sense of belonging. Ricoeur, in his discussion of the reasons we remember certain things and not others out of the vast pool of our entire life experiences, points to the quality of 'emblematic memories' (2004, 23). He argues that

the reason these events or experiences are remembered is not because of their exceptional nature, but precisely the opposite, that these are typical or even emblematic occurrences: 'Memorable meetings offer themselves to be remembered due less to their unrepeatable singularity than to their typical resemblance, even their emblematic character' (2004, 23). The application of Ricoeur's conception of 'emblematic character' to texts of migrant experience leads to a consideration of the significance of certain memories being recalled over others. If it is the case that some things are remembered as emblematic of lived experience, while others are omitted or excluded altogether, it is therefore clear that liminal experience is overlooked in the creation of collective memory in favour of mainstream experience. Therefore, even when it comes to the forging of memory, those marginal figures of any given migrant group once again find themselves silenced and their stories edited to reflect the version of events that most conforms to the story of the group as a whole.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie affiliates himself as a member of a collective of immigrants to Britain. He claims as his ancestors the members of all minority groups in British history: '…Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quite apart from their own racial history. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews; the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain' (Rushdie, 2010, 20). If the existence of such a group has been established, it then becomes possible to apply Ricoeur's principles of collective memory to their depiction in literature, as we shall see in the section that follows.

Collective Memory, Forgetting, and the Construction of Home

The role of collective memory in shaping conceptions of migrant homelands is explored at length in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*, but it is arguably forgetting rather than remembering that is the key to the construction of home and past in the narrative. Throughout the novel there is a fascinating duality at play with regard to the collective memory of the two sisters, Nazneen and Hasina. The dramatically different trajectories of the sisters' lives is the predominant cause of the divergence. While Nazneen is forced to leave her village in Gouripur, Bangladesh to go to England for an arranged marriage at the age of seventeen, her sister Hasina eschews tradition and duty for a love match, running away with her lover at the age of sixteen. While the two sisters' paths are dramatically divergent, it is interesting to note that their shared memories of childhood are remarkably uniform and lacking in individual nuances. Yet, in spite of this, the two sisters have very different emotional responses to the past. Something strikes the reader as amiss here. There seems to be an unspoken agreement between the sisters to censor the past, to edit out any unpleasant or unhappy memories, and most importantly, to silence one another and themselves when it comes to differing or contradictory versions of their shared past.

Thus, the sisters collude, whether consciously or subconsciously, in creating an official, sanctioned version of their childhood. This construction of memory between the sisters aligns to Olney's description of collective memory when he says: '…we collaborate with other family members in a collective reconstruction of that has much more to do with subsequent relationships between children and parents and among siblings than with anything that could be called historical, factual past' (1998, 369). In this collaborative

and constructed version there is no room for traumatic memory. Hence, the spectre of their mother's suicide haunts the narrative for a long time, until the truth about the circumstances of her death is finally acknowledged. It is Hasina who eventually broaches the subject of her mother's suicide in a letter to Nazneen, only to censor herself in her next letter: '…she give threat to kill self….Everyone know it but us. Tears will come but I tell the truth' and in the next letter 'Sister it wrong thing I write about Amma….Burn letter take it out of mind' (Ali, 2003, 156-7). Similarly, there is a silencing of individuals from the women's past when what they might have to say threatens to be too difficult to hear or to have a detrimental impact on the present. A cogent example of this is the case of their father and his discarded mistress. Both sisters fail to attempt any recollection of what was surely an important moment in their family's history. The events are glossed over and the mistress silenced completely. Thus, the reader is left wondering about the shaded events of the past and what has been omitted.

Alternatively, it is possible that the sisters have actually forgotten certain incidents from their collective past. As discussed earlier, in Ricoeur's formulation of collective memory, forgetting is a necessary part of remembering. It is also, according to Ricoeur, 'an attack on the reliability of memory. An attack, a weakness, a lacuna' (2004, 413). If these are indeed forgotten rather than omitted memories the reader must begin to question and scrutinise the reliability of other memories in the narrative. As Ricoeur contends,

> what forgetting awakens at this crossroads is, in fact, the very aporia that is at the source of the problematical character of the representation of the past, namely, memory's lack of reliability. Forgetting is the challenge par excellence put to memory's aim of reliability. The trustworthiness of memories hangs on the

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enigma constitutive of the entire problematic of memory (2004, 414).

The lack of reliability that Ricoeur sees as inherent to memory thus presents the reader with a problem in terms of which version of the past should be taken as authentic in migrant fiction.

Returning to the consideration of collective memory in *Brick Lane*, it is evident that this silencing, or forgetting, depending on perspective, on a private scale mirrors the larger scale whitewashing of history that takes place throughout the narrative. The historical background is all but painted over in Ali's novel, but the reader must pay attention to the submerged context. The novel opens in Mymensingh District, East Pakistan, 1967, on the day of Nazneen's birth. The historical setting is important, the reader is obviously going to construe from the date that this is a novel set in a turbulent period in Bengali history. The novel begins just four years before the war in which Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan. In spite of this fact, conspicuously absent from the text is any account, or indeed fleeting reference, to this period of strife on the part of Nazneen, the novel's protagonist. This glaring omission from the narrative can perhaps be explained by taking into account the nature of the memory, which is traumatic, and the fact that Nazneen has created an idyllic version of her childhood and her homeland that bears little relation to reality. The idyllic nature of her memories of home is evident in the dreamlike quality of Nazneen's recollections of her childhood. In almost all of Nazneen's recounted memories of home, she evokes a picture of herself and Hasina as small girls living an idyllic life in an unspoiled village, entirely unaware of any hardship or turbulence that may exist in the wider society. The following is an instance of such a recollection:

And she drifted off to where she wanted to be, in Gouripur, tracing letters in the dirt with a sick while Hasina danced around her on six-year-old feet. In Gouripur in her dreams, she was always a girl and Hasina was always six. Amma scolded and cuddled, and smelled as sweet as the skin on the milk when I had been boiled all day with sugar. Abba sat on the choki, sang and clapped. He called out to them and took them on his lap, and sent them away with a rough kiss on the cheek. Then they walked around the lake to watch the fishermen pulling in great nets of silver fish, and saw the muscles knot on their arms and legs and chests. When she awoke she thought I know what I would wish but by now she knew that where she wanted to go was not a different place but a different time (Ali, 2003, 45).

In this extract, memory is intricately intertwined with myth and dream. Time is suspended and childhood lasts forever in this construction of the past.

However, the idyllic dreamscape of Nazneen's childhood is challenged and scrutinised at other junctures in the novel, when encroaching reality tarnishes Nazneen's imaginary homeland. In a rare moment, Nazneen steps out of the constructed version of her native village to consider the reality of how her daily life would be had she remained in Goripur:

Amma used to make yoghurt: thick and sweet and warm. Nothing like these little plastic pots from the plastic English cows. But still. With the sugar, it went down. And it was very convenient. When she thought about Goripur now she thought about inconvenience. To live without a flushing toilet, to abandon her two sinks (kitchen and bathroom), to make a fire for the oven instead of turning a knob-

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would these be trades worth making? (2003, 78).

The reality of life in the village is absolutely at odds with the idyllic version recounted by Nazneen at various junctures of the narrative. When reality imposes itself upon her recollections, Nazneen is hesitant to acknowledge its presence. This is most overt in her reluctance to understand and accept the actual circumstances of her mother's death. It is not until Nazneen's own memories are joined in patchwork fashion to her sister Hasina's, that a more complete version of events can be established. Her mother's suicide was such a traumatic event for the young Nazneen that her conscious mind refused to accept the reality of the situation. This repression of traumatic memory continued into adulthood, so that each time Nazneen recounted the incident there were always things that did not make sense, yet still she could not allow herself to remember the incident as it really occurred. The nature of this form of familial collective memory depicted in *Brick Lane* can be understood in greater detail by referring to Maurice Halbwachs scholarship in this area. Halbwachs makes the following observations about collective memory within families that bear specific relevance to the depiction of memory in *Brick Lane*:

> Family recollections in fact develop as in so many different soils, in the consciousness of various members of the domestic group. Even when they live near each other, but all the more so when life keeps them distant, each family member recollects in his own manner the common familial past. Their individual consciousnesses remain in certain respects impenetrable in regard to one another – but in certain respects only. Despite the distances among them that are created by opposition of temperaments and the variety of circumstances, they all shared the same daily life (1992, 54).

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Thus, Halbwachs underscores the significance of shared experiences within a specific group, such as the family in *Brick Lane*, to the construction of memory. This is important when it comes to a contemplation of memory in the wake of the destruction of familial ties brought about by the after-effects of colonial history. The separation from the family, the homeland and collective memory in *Brick Lane* thus poses a problem. As Halbwachs notes, 'every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time' (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, 143). The importance of the support of a group such as the family in the preservation of collective memory is explored to great effect in Ali's novel.

In texts of migrant experience, such as *26A* and *The Grass Arena*, the collective migrant memory conjures up a version of the past and of the lost homeland that is intricately intertwined with heritage, tradition and family. The novel *26A* begins with a depiction of collective familial memory in the form of a shared memory of the twin protagonists', Georgia and Bessie. In this shared memory, the twin girls recall an experience that happened to them in the moment immediately preceding their birth: 'Before they were born, Georgia and Bessie experienced a moment of indecision' (Evans, 2005, 3). The notion the twins' shared collective memory of a pre-history is established early on in the novel and the reader understands that the weight of the past rests on the shoulders of these protagonists from the very moment, and even before, their birth. In Evans' opening paragraph she offers her readers a telling insight into the twins' shared memory of a sensory perception of the world they were about to enter: 'The earth smelt of old rain' (2005, 3). This is a memory of before the twins were born but it their most important shared memory, as Evans emphasises: 'That was the memory that stayed with them'

(2005, 3). This can be read as a fictive depiction of what Halbwachs has to say about the nature of certain memories and how they are supported in space and time by familial bonds.

Throughout *264* there is an emphasis on how the memory of home is shaped. This is demonstrated most vividly through the character of Ida Hunter, the mother of Georgia and Bessie. Born in a small village in Nigeria, Ida meets and subsequently marries Archie Hunter, an Englishman in Lagos. The couple returns to Archie's homeland and settles in Neasden, East London. Over the years, as she raises her family in the London suburb, Ida creates an imaginary Nigeria. Before leaving her village, Ida engages in a process of conscious memory creation. One of the most resonant objects she saves a mental image of is the village water pump: 'The *water pump became a fresh memory*' (2005, 30). In essence, Ida's composite memory of her village, and by extension her childhood, begins and ends with the water pump, a metaphorical object that embodies an entire world. The water pump is the fulcrum around which the life of the village revolves. Its significance in this narrative is heightened when we consider what Seamus Heaney once revealed about the memory of a water pump in his own recollections of childhood and home:

> I would begin with the Greek word, omphalos, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and repeat it, omphalos, omphalos, omphalos, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. It is Co. Derry in the early 1940s. The American bombers groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, the American troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all of that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard. There the pump stands,

a slender, iron idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world (1984, 17).

The water pump, as a richly symbolic memory object, becomes central to the conjuring up of the childhood home. It is what Heaney terms omphalos, the centre point from which Ida's world originates.

Salman Rushdie also establishes a link between memory and objects in facilitating communication with the past and the homeland. Ruminating on the power of association between objects and personal history, Rusdhie observes: 'An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It's a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born….it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time' (2010, 9). For Rushdie, memory is a beast that demands to be fed. It has a voracious appetite, feeding on, among other things, mementos of past lives that can bridge the lacunae between then and now, London and home (Rushdie, 2010, 9). This appetite can also be seen in Evans' *26A*, when Ida feasts on mementos of home to feed her homesickness. She fills the house with resonant objects, like carvings and masks, that help her to bridge the great distance between London and Nigeria: 'Opposite the mirror in the hallway, so that you could see it if you saw yourself, Ida put up an ebony carving of an old spirit woman with horns' (Evans, 2005, 37). The manifest conflation of the carving with Ida herself is signified by the fact that Ida can see it when she looks at herself in the mirror. Through the display of this object in her home, Ida's Nigerian identity is proclaimed and celebrated. The inanimate object acts as a touchstone, not only to her

homeland, her past and her childhood, but also to the essence of her true self.

Thus, memory objects in the novel offer the protagonists a way to commune with past selves as well as lost homelands. Moreover, through an interpretation of her symbolic interaction with memory objects it can be argued that Ida does not simply wish to remember the past, she wants to be enveloped in it, to embody her past self in the present moment. In this regard, the most resonant touchstone to the past for Ida is her handmade dressing gown, a garment she has sewn together in patchwork from fragments of fabric that hold within their fibres the essence of home:

> In the evenings, to keep herself from despair, Ida sat down before the sewing machine in the dining room, to make her magic dressing gown. She had three pieces of fabric: a white and copper kente she'd brought back with her from Lagos, an explosion of stars on a black background bought from a fabric shop in Harlesden and the third a design of Nne-Nne's, amber and disco-blue shooting through one another like the inside of champagne. As she sewed one piece to another in cyclical patchwork, she came across a road. Not a strange road, with headlights or danger, but one to take her back, to remind her of who she was and where she had come from. Inside champagne, Ida saw the water pump and the bushes moving in the breeze. There were home skies in her yard of universe; there was ancient bark singing old songs in the copper. She imagines, as she sewed, that she was the needle, walking along Aruwa slopes, back through the village, her footsteps soft and steady like slow rain into sand (Evans, 2006, 39-40).

As delineated in chapter two, sewing and patchwork are symbolic acts for women in the migrant texts surveyed across the breadth of this project. In *Brick Lane*, *White Teeth* and

26A, female migrants in London engage in the crafts of sewing and patchwork as conduits to self-expression, self-liberation and ultimately, self-empowerment. Furthermore, it can be argued that the activity is in fact bound up with their cultural and ethnic self-assertion and identification. In the act of sewing a piece of fabric purchased in London to two pieces from Nigeria, Ida is eliminating the chasm that exists between the adopted and the native home. However, this is also symbolic of an eradication or erasure of certain events and their memories. In effect, everything that has happened to Ida in the intervening period between running away from her village as a teenager and the present day, including her marriage, emigration and bearing four children, has been obliterated from memory. All that is important now is to bond the pieces of fabric together, to join Nigeria to England in the imaginary homeland of Ida's mind.

Another text that explores the idea of imaginary homelands is John Healy's memoir *The Grass Arena*. This literary memoir is an example of a paradigmatic life-narrative that deftly negotiates the borderlands of Irish identity, experience and cultural memory, but to what extent is his presented version of history and Irish migrant identity true and representative for the wider diaspora? While Healy challenges his readers to reconsider their conceptions of "Irishness" and "home", and simultaneously contributes to a broadening of the scope of the genre of Irish migrant autobiography to include the concerns of second generation Irish migrants, his own experiences are clearly subjective and may not be completely accurate or balanced. In her reading of Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*, Emilie Pine identifies several problems that can arise within this paradigm of memory and construction of selfhood. For instance, she uses the example of the family's memory of a Gaeltacht holiday during which they felt a sense of family unity

and belonging. The memory is in fact untypical of the family's everyday experience:

> What is prominent here is the eternal, timeless nature of the Gaeltacht, and the power of remembrance to stand outside, and even work against, normal temporal processes. If the past is refused as a concept, however, then the future is also; if the emphasis is always on preserving the past as a form of the present, then the future cannot be developed. Moreover, the past that his parents choose to reify is an isolated moment, based on one holiday rather than long-term experience, again weakening the foundations of any self based on such a narrow form of memory (Pine, 2011, 60).

This notion of a conception of self founded on the basis of a very narrow memory seems particularly relevant to our reading of Healy's memoir. The edifice of Healy's Irishness seems to be built on a handful of childhood memories and recollections, many of which are infused with liberal doses of sentimentality and nostalgia. The following excerpt is a pertinent example of the nature of his memories of Ireland:

> There's a sort of calmness that seems to come out of the grass and the ditches and the mossy banks. Lonely mists that suddenly spread over the fields give an old feeling, cosy and warm….The bogs are very ancient. The people, especially the women with their delicate skin, soft as the misty climate, give the warmest welcome to friend and stranger alike' and 'My first recollection of Ireland was when I was about four years old – playing in green fields, surrounded by animals, loved by my uncles, grandmother, grandfather and especially by young aunties,

who seemed to be Love itself (2008, 8, 9).

Healy's memories of Ireland appear to be heavily edited and presented in a selective fashion in order to set Ireland up in binary opposition to England as the site of belonging versus the site of exclusion.

It can be argued that John Healy is the author of a memoir of exclusion, or as Lauren Rusk more succinctly terms it, 'the life writing of otherness' (2002). By virtue of the fact that Healy has never truly belonged to any group, he is neither Irish nor English in his self-conception, Healy is an example of a life writer who sets out to 'recreate experience that has been erased, falsified, and devalued by the construction of otherness' (Rusk, 2002,1). He is unable to rely on the support or aid of the collective in accessing his heritage or ethnic identity. Thus, his personal history is fragmented and his sense of self punctured with empty spaces. This is exacerbated by the ill-effects on his memory of excessive alcohol consumption until it reaches the point where he virtually loses his memory entirely: 'I began getting memory blackouts far quicker and for much longer stretches' (Healy, 2008, 80). Pine contends that 'the simultaneity of remembrance and self-creation' is a fundamental aspect of literary memoir:

> Memoir is founded on the assumption that memory is the storehouse of identity, and that in memoir that identity can not only be recalled, but also retrospectively shaped....Moreover, if memory is identity, then the greatest fear which haunts memoir is the fear of losing memory and thus of losing the self' (2011, 56).

Healy's iteration of the fact that he is indeed losing his memory is testament to the

realisation of this fear of losing the self. His grasp on his sense of self is weak prior to this, as we can see in the recurring aporia of hybrid identity in the memoir.

The central struggle for Healy is the attempt to reconcile his different selves, his Irish self and his British self. At times, it seems as though Healy's whole sense of self will be effaced as a result of this uncertainty, this unsettling hybridity. Throughout the memoir, Healy challenges his reader to consider the role of memory, both personal and collective, in shaping his 'LondonIrish' identity. As both a child and an adult, this hybrid identity is immensely confusing and problematic for him. Memories of childhood holidays spent pleasantly in rural Ireland are central to his construction of self in adulthood, the memory of belonging in the idyllic past assuaging some of the pain of exclusion in the present. But if, as he assures us, he is losing his memory, on what foundation can Healy construct his sense of self? It seems that shady, patchwork remembrances of a mythologized rural Irish childhood are all that remain accessible to Healy, as the following passage implies:

> I remember one picture, a farmyard scene it was….it was coming on to dusk in this rural scene , black and white pigs rooting in the dirt, a cockerel and his hens pecking at invisible grains among clumps of grass, and a cow – back arched, tail curled at an angle, making water (2008, 127).

In fact, this is not even a real memory of Healy's childhood spent in rural Ireland, but a recollection of a painting he once saw that obviously reminded him of his grandparents' farm in the west of Ireland. The memory then is detached, dislocated, as Healy is from his identity and heritage. The section that follows considers other examples of dislocation, in this case as a result of the trauma of the legacy of imperialism in the context of the

troubles in Northern Ireland.

Remembering Trauma: *Ripley Bogle*

While it has been established that there is indeed a clear connection between memory and identity formation in the literature of migrancy, a counterview would envisage memory not as a shaper of identity, but rather see memory as an eraser of identity. Many of the protagonists of the novels of migrant experience read in this project encounter the recollection of the past as an assault on the present self. For such protagonists, memory comes as a wave that has the power to wipe away the present and the future. Memory in this case is a destructive force that effaces identity and wreaks havoc on the present. The nature of such a memory is traumatic. The depiction of traumatic memory in novels in this study is most prominent in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*. Therefore, this section is a close reading of the nature of traumatic memory in McLiam Wilson's novel.

Where migrant memory narratives recall traumatic experience, it is the present self that is wounded, as well as the past self. Trauma occludes development of confident self-identification. The mark of trauma is indelible. Its legacy lives on in the present because it is carried forward within the individual, embedding itself in the consciousness. As Caruth has it, 'to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event' (1995, 4-5). An example of the kind of traumatic encounter described by Caruth can be found in the partially Northern Ireland set novel *Ripley Bogle* by Robert Mc Liam Wilson. At the opening of the novel Bogle is homeless in London. At the end of the third chapter, having elucidated for the reader the degraded nature of his current existence, Bogle indicates that he is about to explain how he came to this: 'How has this happened? Why

have I let myself come to this? Why? Let me tell you' (1990, 21). This statement leads directly into the opening of chapter four, which begins with the words 'In my boyhood'. The chapter commences innocuously enough with an account of Bogle's early education, but this workaday description of boyhood acutely transmutes into a vivid recollection of collective and personal traumatic experience:

> In common with the majority of Catholic working-class population of the city of Belfast, we Bogles were raided on Internment Night. Just before two o'clock in the morning, the front door of our squalid little house was kicked in by four hard-faced and anxious young soldiers. (At least, I presume they were hard-faced and anxious – I was in bed at the time.) Apparently, these soldiers were polite, even slightly diffident as they separated in order to ransack our ghastly, microscopic hovel (1990, 27).

As in other portions of the narrative that touch on difficult or emotionally fraught situations, Bogle uses hyperbole and caustic wit as armour. Nonetheless, it is clear in spite of the use of these distraction techniques that traumatic memory is central to the formation of selfhood and cultural identity in *Ripley Bogle,* a novel that can be categorised as a kind of hybrid manifestation of the intersecting spaces between memoir and fiction.

In drawing the protagonist of his fictive memoir, McLiam Wilson mines the cavernous spaces of the lived history of his native Belfast. As a member of the Catholic working-class, Bogle is subjected to traumatic experiences that leave an indelible mark on his conception of self. Even in adulthood, Bogle cannot escape the impact of these traumatic incidents from his childhood. As Caruth notes, 'the traumatized…carry an impossible

history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess' (1995, 8). The shadow of the Troubles descends upon Bogle, bodily, like a spectre every time he recalls his childhood, his family and his home. 'Oh yes, those Troubles! Those nasty Irish things! The Northern Irish Conflict certainly did its bit for the decoration of my early years. I made damned sure that I got a good seat' (1989, 26-7). Recounting his memories of Internment Night, Bogle emphasises the impact of public violence on the private sense of self.

> I spent a great deal of my childhood seeing things that I shouldn't have seen and making the acquaintance of uncomfortable notions that certainly could have waited a decade or so for their entrance. Murder, violence, blood, guts and sundry other features of Irish political life tend to telescope one's development a little as you can imagine. You zip along to cynicism – blink and you'd miss it. For me, the beginning was Internment Night (1990, 26-7).

The trauma of Internment Night connotes a turning point in Bogle's development. The event itself, and the memory of it, is indelibly 'marking 'or 'striking' (Ricoeur, 2004, 16). Bogle suggests that it is his childhood experience of trauma that is the cause of his present homeless state, seeing it as symptomatic of his experience of trauma during the Troubles. His memory of the events of Internment Night reveals the impact of a traumatic awakening to the reality of war: '…the mysteries of war and hatred welled in my boy's mind….I could sense the birth of power and fear' (1989, 29). Bogle's nascent consciousness of power and fear mark and change him from this moment on and these are memories that will stay with him indefinitely: 'This nightly broadscreen scene gives me my space, my embarrassment of elbow room. The gap for my memories to fill. And

lo, here they come, crowding and jostling around my moistened bench. They have a grievance, they want to be heard' (1989, 32).

These constructed, fictive memories have the same tendency to return insistently as Freud ascribes to traumatic dreams in cases of neurosis (Cited in Caruth, 1995, 4). Insistent memories seem to dominate Bogle's consciousness, requiring him to disconnect from the present and thus anchoring him to the past. However, it is not until the final section of the novel that the extent of the trauma that occurred in his past is revealed. In the final section of the novel, entitled Sunday, and representing the last of the four days over which the novel is set, Bogle tells the harrowing story of the murder of his best friend by the I.R.A. It is arguably not until he recounts this memory that Bogle actually lives the true horror of the incident. It seems as though this is one of the traumatic memories that he has tried to suppress and that has forced itself to be heard. It is not until he finds himself homeless that Bogle begins to relive the event.

As Caruth says, 'since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time' (1996, 202-3). Thus, the difficulty of his current situation brings up the traumatic memory. Bogle holds himself responsible for his friend's death, thus it is possible that he is punishing himself through the degradation of his body on the streets. There are options for Bogle, he could find a job and a place to live, but he chooses not to, he chooses a life of vagrancy, as evidenced in the following conversation in which Bogle is questioned by an old tramp called Perry:

"Why do you do this thing?"

"What thing is this?"

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"Being a tramp, you know, that thing."

"Oh yes, that."

"Well?"

"My career plans are a little uncertain at the minute, Perry."

...."Get yourself some money. Get a place to live. You could do that easily enough. Couldn't you?"

...."Oh yes. Not a problem nowhere" (McLiam Wilson, 1989, 75-6).

The decision, then, to choose this lifestyle, indicates Bogle's wish to get in touch with the pain that he has long repressed. The memory of the night of his friend's murder, when recounted, is disturbing and violent:

Soon, however, Maurice regained consciousness and started to scream, gruesomely enough. Mother of God, he just wouldn't stop screaming. Over and over, the same bitter, inarticulate cries....His eyes were open by this time. Wide open and boiling in his bloodied skull. His frantic hands tore at the frayed edges of his wounds, splitting his own soft flesh like a ripe, bloodfilled peach (McLiam Wilson, 1989, 258).

The connection between memory, trauma and place is clearly elucidated in McLiam Wilson's narrative reconstruction of war-torn Belfast in *Ripley Bogle*. By the end of the novel Bogle has attributed the root of all of his problems to his nationality, although it is not clear if he is being sincere, the statement is nonetheless interesting in this context: 'The world did me wrong by making me an Irishman. I've kicked hard but Micksville packs a boot like a donkey. When you think about it I'm practically faultless – a victim

of circumstance, timing and nationhood. It's Ireland's fault, not mine' (1989, 272). When he refers to himself as 'a victim of circumstance, timing and nationhood', it seems that Bogle has internalised the struggle in Northern Ireland and allowed it to define his entire identity. For Bogle, recollections of home boil down to one thing – trauma. Belfast becomes a signifier of personal trauma: 'Belfast does that to you. Thickens your body and your brains. Chases your soul away' (1990, 31). The word Belfast here takes on a synechdochal significance, as the very name of the home city, when spoken, written or called to mind, manifests itself as an amalgam of all of the violence and traumatic events that have shaped Bogle's personal identity as well as his sense of his national identity.

Thus, Bogle's recollections of specific incidents that occurred in Belfast are therefore metonymical, standing for the violent nature of the space at this time. On Internment Night, Bogle recalls, he witnessed the appalling injury of a young girl, who a British soldier mistook for an adult trying to escape the raid:

Fear and horror seemed to melt my bowels and I could feel the first warm trickle of urine greeting my thigh. "It's only Muire, mister." "What?" "It's only Muire." "What are you talking about?" "Round the back there. She's only a wee girl."....I saw her. Standing high on the fence, her tiny draped figure stamped against the vague, looming glow of the Black Mountain. I saw Wilson just beneath her, gun raised. For a moment they were still, their silhouettes framing a slow tableau of weird dusky beauty. Then I heard the soldier's rifle click and shunt, ready to fire and I rushed madly towards him, bellowing with fury. Muire screamed, her body seemed to twist in terror and slipped, dropping straight down, her open legs

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straddling the barbed wire (McLiam Wilson, 1990, 30).

Bogle subsequently comments on the consequence for Muire of this horrific incident, noting that it left her unable to have children. The violence of the conflict leaves all that it encounters barren, for Muire was not the only one to lose an integral part of herself that night. For Bogle, the events of that night, and all the other traumatic events of his childhood in war blighted Belfast, form the foundation for his adult relationship with his home city. Belfast endures in his consciousness as a signifier of the violence and devastation of war: 'Who do we blame for that?....blame Belfast. It's all Belfast's fault' (1990, 31).

The fact that Bogle attributes all of the blame for this situation onto his native city of Belfast is an example of how the legacy of British imperialism lives on and can continue to impact negatively on the present, even to the extent that it has a negative impact on Bogle's experience of London. Writing about two postcolonial novels of Nigerian traumatic memory, Amy Novak comes to the conclusion that 'in these novels there is no end to colonialism' (2008, 38). This statement can be applied with equal accuracy to *Ripley Bogle*. In her work, Novak considers in some depth not only the public or national legacy of colonialism, but the intertwined relationship between its public and private legacies. She observes: 'The economic, political and cultural domination of colonialism lingers in multiple ways long after the changing of flags. The traumatic legacy of colonialism is not only evident in the large-scale events of history but also in the daily private lives of citizens' (Novak, 2008, 34).

The daily lives of Ripley Bogle and other members of his immediate community are

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certainly affected by this traumatic legacy. They bear out Novak's testament that 'trauma lingers and repeats itself in the present' (Novak, 2008, 35). Furthermore, *Ripley Bogle* also demonstrates the veracity of Novak's theory with regard to the myriad ways in which the trauma of colonialism and the process of decolonisation leads to a sense of dislocation from the past and from culture, heritage and traditions. In the novel, Bogle has become completely divorced from his national heritage as a result of the atrocities he has witnessed in the name of nationalism.

Both cultural and individual identities are fractured and split as a result of this dislocation from the past. For the victims of imperialism who subsequently migrate to Britain, such as *Ripley Bogle*, the impact of this dislocation is often quite profound. In terms of cultural identity and tradition, the loss of context is doubled when we consider the double estrangement of the legacy of colonialism and the physical removal from home and heritage that emigration involves.

The impact of this physical estrangement is succinctly described by Salman Rushdie in the essay 'Imaginary Homelands' when he describes how 'physical alienation' from the homeland 'almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' (2010, 10). As is the case in the Nigerian novels read by Novak, so in contemporary British and Irish novels of postcolonial experience, we see how protagonists 'struggle to construct an identity and life in the face of lost traditions and political repression' (2008, 36). In the case of Bogle, it seems that this struggle has ended in failure, as he has ended up falling between the cracks of British society, a nameless, voiceless, homeless man.

Conclusion

The aim of this study from the outset was to offer a cohesive overview of the interconnected nature of migrant experience in contemporary Britain across diverse ethnic, national and cultural groupings, while comparing and contrasting literary depictions of these intersections and connections. Depictions of migrant experience in contemporary literature offer fascinating insights into society and culture. The project began by focusing on marginal and hybrid experience in order to convey what was identified as a tendency in the selected texts to view the condition of migrancy as routed in a sense of otherness.

The first chapter of the dissertation foregrounded the theme of identity formation in modern and contemporary fictional representations of migrant experience in Britain. The representation of migrant identity as embodying a sense of fracture is encountered time and again throughout these narratives. It is given a voice in the exclamation of the character of Samad Iqbal in the novel White Teeth, quoted at the opening of this chapter, when he declares: 'We are divided people' (Smith, 2001, 179). In this sentiment, Samad encapsulates the concerns of the wider migrant community of Great Britain. The division that exists within society between the migrant and the native is vivid for a character such as Samad and it is explored detail throughout this chapter.

In chapter two, the depiction of the connections between diverse migrant experience in contemporary literature is explored through a focus on identity formation and symbolic objects. The chapter compares and contrasts depictions of identity formation in novels by

Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali and Zadie Smith. It comes to the conclusion that identity formation is bound up with various objects but it manifests itself differently in each of the novels.

The third chapter of the dissertation begins with the central premise that London is a postcolonial city and also the setting for many important works of migrant fiction in the contemporary era. The chapter views the city of London as a hybrid space inhabited by migrants in different ways. Throughout the chapter there is an application of aspects of psychogeographical theory, paying particular attention to the model of the flâneur, and considering how male and female migrants can be viewed in these terms.

The fourth chapter of this research project narrows the lens to focus more closely on depictions of Irish migrant experience in literature. The chapter acknowledges the complex history of the Irish in London and the nuanced nature of the Anglo Irish relationship, while also focusing on the more negative aspects of Irish migrant experience in Britain. The chapter considers the differences and similarities in depictions of migrant experience in literary works by John Healy, William Trevor and Robert McLiam Wilson. In each of these narratives Irish migarncy is conceived of in a negative light, and the experiences of the migrant are bound up with exclusion, marginality and violence in each of these texts.

In the final chapter it is argued that the shared legacy of colonial rule fosters deep connections between the disparate immigrant groups depicted in the body of migrant literature read in this research project. Collective or shared memories of colonialism contribute to a forging of understanding and empathy among immigrant groups. As Cathy Caruth observes, 'the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of

another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound' (1996, 8). Thus, collective memories of shared experiences of imperialism and immigration foster a sense of kinship and belonging in the most difficult of scenarios. In these ways, it is clear that memory often facilitates understanding of identity, culture, heritage. It becomes possible to see how conscious creation of memory is important as a key method of forging national and cultural identity.

Memory therefore plays a fundamental role in transnational identity formation across a wide spectrum of postcolonial literature. Identity formation in diasporic literature is ineluctably involved with memory, particularly collective memory. As our reading of novels such as *Brick Lane*, *26A*, *Ripley Bogle* and *The Grass Arena*, establishes, memory and recollection are central to the shaping of migrant experience. The nature of memory and the ways in which it contributes to perceptions of selfhood, nationhood and belonging are key themes in these texts.

As the concluding chapter of this research project, this chapter brings together some of the overarching concerns of the dissertation as a whole and considers them through the lens of memory studies. In a more general sense, this concluding chapter is the final thematic discussion in the dissertation and offers the opportunity to consider the breadth of the project in its entirety. The scope of this project has been broad in order to encompass the salient themes of late twentieth and early twenty-first century migrant narratives. From the outset, the aim was to embark on a thematic consideration of the

depiction of migrancy in contemporary fiction.

The authors chosen for this research project can all be categorised as postcolonial authors. Each writer, whether born in England or abroad, has experienced the cultural, social and political implications of colonialism. The individual authors depict myriad facets of postcolonial and migrant experience in Britain. A writer such as Monica Ali draws on autobiographical experience. Her protagonist, Nazneen, shares Ali's own background, having been born in Bangladesh and later migrating to England. Her narrative offers the reader a vivid depiction of first-generation migrant experience in Britain. The thematic concerns that are most prevalent in this novel include marginality, as a result of isolation, language barriers and membership of the working class, and cultural hybridity as Nazneen begins to adapt to her environment. Thematically, the novel has much in common with both Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*. In *White Teeth*, Smith also depicts the concerns and challenges of first-generation migrant experience in Britain, paying close attention to some of the cultural conflicts that arise between recently arrived migrants and natives. Similarly, Mo's novel highlights the differences between cultures, in this instance those that exist between English and Chinese culture.

One of the most important themes explored across the five chapters of the thesis was the literary depiction of the condition of migrancy in contemporary Britain as marginalised and hybrid. This condition often manifests itself through violence and oppression. This has been demonstrated through readings of John Healy's *The Grass Arena*, Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* and William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey*.

In addition, from the outset of this research project the intention was that there would be a specific emphasis on the significance of place and objects in these literary works. The

investigation of this central theme illustrated the interconnectedness of questions of space and place with the nature of migrant cultural identity. Spatial concerns are a conceptual link amongst all of the texts read across the breadth of the project. Throughout the preceding chapters it was argued that the city of London is an important spatial setting for narratives of marginal and hybrid experience written by Irish, Black, and Asian migrant authors. All three of these groups have different histories in terms of migration to Britain and therefore they have different relationships with the idea of Britain and its colonial past. In particular, they approach the city of London in different and interesting ways and their engagement with the city has shaped contemporary London itself. Throughout the project it was demonstrated that the city of London is revealed as a diasporic, transnational space in contemporary literary depictions of migration to Britain.

The research project has offered several important critical approaches to reading contemporary postcolonial migrant literature. Depictions of issues around hybridity and marginality in identity formation are underscored in these narratives. Problems around discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage have also been emphasised. The outcome of the research suggests many further potential avenues of enquiry in the area and promises to generate further discussion and debate on the subject. There is much more scope for scholarship in the area of literary depictions of marginality and hybridity amongst the disparate migrant groups living in contemporary Britain.

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Web Resources

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BBC Archive website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/default.stm

The National Archives website: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Postcolonial Text website: http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/index

Tower Hamlets Council website: http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk