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Being Black, Becoming British: Contemporary Female Voices in Black British Literature

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BEING BLACK, BECOMING BRITISH: CONTEMPORARY FEMALE VOICES IN BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE

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This dissertation focuses on women voices in Black British Literature between the period 1980 and 2005 – specifically in the works of Monica Ali, Zadie Smith, Joan Riley, Ravinder Randhawa, Meera Syal and Gurinder Chadha – and seeks to understand how women who are of Caribbean and South Asian descent form and reform their identities in their new home as immigrants or first-generation Britons and why their stories make a valuable and essential contribution to Black British Literature. Divided into five chapters, the project considers how a woman's role is influenced and shaped by place of birth and ancestry, cultural definitions of gender roles, formation of community, complexities of skin tone and wealth/status and how these factors shape her willingness to either embrace or refute the dominant culture. While a cursory glance at Black British literature might seem to suggest females adapt better than men to their new homes, a more considered approach reveals that the degree of assimilation for women depends on several factors: her status within the immigrant community if such a community exists and is accessible to her; how she is perceived in the larger i.e. white, dominant community; her position within a patriarchal familial system; her relationship to her children, if she has any, and her level of acceptance and encouragement of how those children are developing/faring in the "new" country. Combined, these factors shape a woman's identity, and determine

how readily she accepts or refutes the dominant culture. Chapter one provides an overview of the current debates occurring in cultural studies and postcolonial theory, the nexus between culture and identity for Black British women, and provides context for the intersection of the terms "Black" and "British." Chapter two establishes the link between cultural performance and gender roles and the fluidity of gender specific roles as women navigate through a new culture. Chapter three examines how familial obligations and community ties shape a woman's experience. Chapter four considers how the issues of ethnicity, skin tone and perceived beauty influence a woman's self-identity. Chapter five argues wealth and social status trumps ethnicity.

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CHAPTER 1: THE FORMATION OF A BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE

"Immigration is not a onetime movement; it is a complex shifting of physical, mental and emotional states, which begins much before and extends far beyond the actual event. As children of immigrants we are denied these realities by Western society, yet constantly reminded of them."
-Jasbir K. Pusar, "Resituating Discourses of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness' in Northern England: Second-Generation Sikh Women and Constructions of Identity. "

"For many British people, the idea that Britain has a history that has, over the years, been characterized by much ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, would be to undermine their basic understanding of what it means to be British."
- Caryl Phillips, "Extravagant Strangers*"*

"But surely to tell these tall tales and others like them would be to speed the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect."
- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

If we take to heart Walter Rodney's comment, "To be colonized is to be removed from history" a hypothesis may be put forth that the quest of Black Britons artists and authors to capture their experiences within British society is not only a way to validate their cultural identities but also a way to establish their place in history. This dissertation focuses on the works of Black British women from 1980 to 2005 in an attempt to give these women and their experiences their appropriate place. Specifically under discussion are: Joan Riley's *Romance* (1988), *The Unbelonging* (1985), and *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987), Meera Syal's *Anita & Me* (1996), and *Life Isn't all ha ha hee hee* (2000), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Gurinder Chadha's films *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), *Bend it like Beckham* (2003), *Bride and Prejudice* (2005) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004). Its purpose is to examine how women who are born with darker skin form and reform their identities and examine the factors they encounter that determine how

they assimilate into or reject the dominant English culture. This work is not based on a blanket assumption that one societal ideology – typically white, Western – is better than another or that women always fare better in western culture but rather is an examination of how "black" women fare in white British society. The period between 1980 and 2005 is significant for three key reasons: 1) it established a valid tradition of Black British Literature among academic circles and within popular culture; 2) a women's press is created that allows black women writers to be published and their works to be disseminated; 3) it marks a period in which the definition of black identity in Britain has been redrawn and a new generation of Black British writers and artists have emerged who not only assume their legitimacy as Britons living in Britain but who demand that they be treated as equals to their white counterparts. This shift in the representation of identity is, as Stuart Hall points out, an end to the essentialism of "the black subject." Comments Hall:

> The end of the essential black subject also entails a recognition that the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and division and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity…this shift has been engaged; and that the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity ("New Ethnicities" 269).

Keeping these crossing and re-crossings in mind, this dissertation grapples with the representation of Black British females through the categories of class, of gender and

ethnicity and community and engages with the realization that women's self identity is both fluid and changeable, perhaps more so than their male counterparts, due to their social conditioning.

Evolution of the Term "Black British"

In the 1970s the term Black British became a politically charged term that was meant to unite Britons of Indian and African descent in a bid to earn political reform. Comments R. Bhopal, when the term black is used as a political term it is capitalized and "signifies all non-white minority populations…" (441). However, because the label does not sit well with some ethnicities who while not white, resent the label of "black," the term is falling out of favor, thus, underscoring the problematic nature of the term "Black British." It is problematic for several reasons: first, while it reinforces a conditional acceptance of being British, it still places a barrier between whites and the "other". It implies that in order to be British, one must pass the litmus test of looking the part: fair of face and possessing the right skin color. Second, unlike the term African-American, the lack of standardization of the usage Black British, sometimes rendered black British, underscores the lack of a single signified referent. For example James Procter titles his anthology of writing from 1948-1998 *Writing black Britain* whereas Kwesi Owusu editor of *Black British Culture & Society* prefaces the work with this note: "The focus of this book is African and Caribbean communities in Britain. The variable presentation of the terms 'Black' and 'black' is in keeping with the preferred use of the individual authors." (xiii) Such arbitrary usage raises the question of whether the terms "Black/black" and "British" are of equal weight or whether the term "black" merely serves as a modifier of a less easily defined identity? It seems to be, as Owusu says, a matter of personal

preference. Third, who gets to be Black British? Is it reserved for first-generation immigrants – those who moved here from elsewhere? If so does such a label make sense for their children and their children's children? Moreover, Kwame Dawes comments, "In Britain, however, Black is more likely to equate with 'non-white.' This would make writers like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi as much 'Black Writers" as Ben Okri, John Agard and Q." As Dawes suggests, this is problematic because on the surface grouping writers with such disparate backgrounds is "rather futile." However, Dawes concludes on a positive note, "recent publications by a number of these writers allow us to begin to identify some patterns and trends that may help us to construct a proper critical framework for the writing that is emerging" (Dawes 259). Dawes' identifications of trends might easily be applied to contemporary Black British women and male writers who are destroying the monolithic view of nonwhite immigrants and showing them in their human, complicated glory. On the subject of being black and a writer, Prabhu Guptara declared in 1986, "Being 'black' is a matter of visibility, with social and political consequences. Being a writer is a matter of culture. Being 'British' is a matter, not of culture, but of what passport you carry" (14). Perhaps Guptara was influenced by the 1981 Nationality Act, which while still allowing for non-British people to apply for immigrant status, limited who had the right to call themselves British and subsequently who had the right to take up residence in Great Britain. Jane Carducci points out that Guptara is not without his detractors because in his definition, anyone not white i.e. an immigrant of Chinese descent would be considered 'black' (109). The latter definition is problematic because what goes unspoken is the almost universal attitude that being black, i.e. of African origin, is the lowest of the low on the social scale. This view was encoded

by the western imperialist machine and was responsible for classifying the human race by ethnicity – with the negro race being last in terms of intellect and humanity – and thereby justified its unilateral carving up of the African continent, continuation of slavery and exploitation of its colonies.

Thus the reclaiming of Black by nonwhites became more than a symbol of empowerment, it became the means to political power. Weighing in on this value of Black as political, Stuart Hall concludes:

> "Politically, this is the moment when the term 'black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain and came to provide the organising category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities, In this moment, politically speaking, 'The Black Experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course, disappear. Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses" (Hall, New Ethnicities 266).

So while a blanket label of black seemed to be all-inclusive, in reality it was far from the truth. In the Caribbean and West Indies islands e.g. a tension existed between

the people of African heritage who had been brought over originally as slaves and the Indians who had been brought after the abolition of slavery as indentured laborers and it was a tension that was carried over to Great Britain. According to Bruce King India didn't acknowledge Indians born outside of India. King says to be Indian meant being born in India and India made it clear to Britain that Indians born outside of India were Britain's problem (17). Perhaps this is the greatest difference between how postcolonial cultural studies is practiced in Britain and in the United States. In Britain it is not only a question of reclaiming identity or gaining acceptance but a conversation as to how Black Britons fit into the overarching ideology of the dominant community and how this effects Britain as a *perceived* hegemonic society – thus leading to the question "can one claim to be British without reference to ethnicity or skin color?" This is distinct from in the U.S. where African-American, Native American and Asian American studies are distinct fields of inquiry and the emphasis is more on difference and *reclaiming* cultural heritage. Emulating their U.S. counterparts, a recent movement has started in Britain to label nonwhites by their ethnic origins: Caribbean-Britons, Asian Britons and so forth but even here such qualifiers are fraught with problems. R. Bhopal, self-identifies as a Punjabi-born Indian raised in Scotland and finds the term Asian, popular in the UK, to be limited and not totally accurate especially when in the United States Asian refers to people from Far East Asia (441). Maintains Bhopal the term "Asian Indian" is gaining popularity in North America where it is used chiefly (the U.S. Census) to distinguish between Native Americans formally known as American Indians and people who are from Indian descent and may include people from such diverse locations as Uganda, United Kingdom, Jamaica, South Africa, Trinidad, Mauritius and India. Bhopal critiques the term because

people from South Asian locations such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi do not identify with it (Bhopal 442). The term "South Asian" is also popularly assigned to people of Indian descent and Bhopal defines it as meaning "A person whose ancestry is in the countries of the Indian sub-continent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (in terms of racial classifications, most people in this group probably fit best into Caucasian or Caucasoid but this is confusing and is not recommended). This label is usually assigned, for individuals rarely identify with it" (444). Despite the imperfections and limitations of these terms, I use "South Asian" when it is necessary to distinguish between people of African and Indian descent and "Black British" to refer to people who have Indian or African heritage and a "darker" skin tone.

Initially the British people who had a hazy concept of the makeup of colonies in the West Indies made broad distinctions: people from the West Indies were criminal, lazy and shifty; people from India were mystical, spiritual and culturally interesting. There are apocryphal stories of newly arrived immigrants from the Caribbean of Indian descent who learned that if they wanted housing, they needed to pass themselves off as Indian from India. This public benevolence toward Indians from India soon changed. As South Asians started entering the U.K in larger numbers, they were no longer considered mystical but a nuisance and white Britons no longer cared from where a person of Indian descent immigrated. In 1969, Paul Theroux declared, "In East Africa nearly everyone hates the Asians. Even some Asians say they hate Asians. The British have hated the Asians longest" (60). And this seemed to be true of 1960s England who reserved a particular vitriol for the "Pakis" who were flooding into the country in groups – more than 100,000 by the early 1960s. Tarquin Hall speaks about how in the East End of

London South Asians seem to come from one village. First one person comes, he writes and when established he sends for more family. This method of group migration initially resulted in pockets of closed communities in Britain in which South Asian immigrants relied on each other and were sufficient and independent of the larger dominant community, a fact that angered many white Britons and politicians and became a rallying cry for change to a political system that seemed to encourage this migration of blacks. In 1964 one politician ran for office with the slogan "If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote labour." Enoch Powell, the politician most remembered for his Rivers of Blood Speech**,** said of British neighborhoods being turned black:

> 'Why?' the people used to ask me, 'is the Government bringing these people into our country in ever-growing numbers? And where is it all to end?' I tried to explain that the law of England could not distinguish between one British subject and another and that therefore the inhabitants of India, Africa and the West Indies were all the same in law as the inhabitants of Wolverhampton.…. At last the rising flood of immigration which came on the post-election boom of 1960 forced the Government – but oh, how slowly and timidly – to make our law like that of every other country on earth, in recognizing the difference between its own people and the rest. To subsequent generations it will seem incredible that this was not done until almost a million Commonwealth immigrants had entered (Enoch, Britain's Race Problem)[1]**.**

Much of current Black British Literature highlights this tension between a white culture and the black people who coexist but often misunderstand each other. Black British

literature is filled with encounters between white and black Britons that lead to name calling, expressions of contempt and assault. However, contemporary (from 2000 onward) black British literature often engages with this plot line in a more light hearted way in which it is obvious that "black" people aren't behaving in the manner that the white person assume they would – for example they play sports, are homosexuals, can be promiscuous or shallow. Thus the resulting tension between white and black is a result of the confusion on the white person's part because "blacks" aren't so very different or foreign from themselves. These writers and artists seem to say, that being black doesn't fit any prescribed behavior nor is "black" fixed and that consequently black and white cultures do not operate as distinct universal hegemonies. People are complicated and so is culture. When one considers the definition of culture as proposed by Raymond Williams as being a "way of life…and ordinary behavior" then this way of living and how it is to be defined goes beyond aesthetics and personal preferences and enters into the conversation of dominant and subculture, English and British. Stuart Hall says: "You cannot learn, through common sense, how things are: you can only discover where they fit in the existing scheme of things" (Hall, *Culture* 1977). Dick Hebidge goes on to conclude in his groundbreaking book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) that ideology is centered on the distribution and maintaining of power. So first, we must ask how power is distributed. We will find, Hebidge says, "Some groups have more say, more opportunity to make the rules, to organize meaning, while others are less favorably placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions of the world on the world" (Hebidge, *Subculture* 14).

Since this dissertation is concerned with Black British theory and literature, I have espoused the British cultural studies approach of looking at the subculture and how they challenge/engage with the values of the hegemonic society. One of the key factors that enabled a Black culture to emerge occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when second generation Caribbean-Africans rebelled against the ordered society they had been raised in and rebelled against parents who wore suits, dresses and clothes, never slouched and who were always respectful. Suddenly the "rude boys" lounged against lampposts on public streets, wore informal baggy clothing and seemed menacing. It was a look that seemed immediately attractive to lower class white boys who while automatically disliking blacks had no problem emulating and appropriating elements of the black subculture they considered attractive. It was around this time that a mass resentment started against the South Asians who were viewed as too insular, not capable of assimilating and too foreign.

If many South Asians are disturbed by the term "Black^2," Britons of African ethnicity started to reclaim the term and, emulating their American counterparts, and now viewed the word as a source of empowerment which freed them for emulating the white man and carrying the burden of never quite measuring up. Women of African origin were also paying attention. Says Carol Tulloch, "Since the 1970s Black British women have fashioned themselves to produce aesthetic identities based on the fusion of their own experiences as members of a Black counter-culture which operates within the white hegemony of Britain, with all the political and cultural complexities this combination entails" (211). Tulloch remarks that one way that women did this was to adopt a mode of dress (she focuses on the head tie) that was based on the Diaspora experience and rooted

in the traditions of slavery. Thus, concludes Tulloch, such adoptions "…enabled Black British women to engage in a public embrace with African American, Caribbean and African women, and symbolized the ambitions and potency of the term *pan-African*." Further, Tulloch recalls that the notion of a pan-African identity was so alluring that she no longer wanted the "European look" and noted in the 1970s Black "mothers and grandmothers" emulated the younger women's style in public thus "reducing the age gap and thereby achieved a level of 'Oneness'" (216-17). In effect the label of Black when willingly adopted was for many Britons of African origin a liberating one and allowed them to experiment with the representation(s) of their identity.

Perhaps this is why Bronwyn T. Williams favors the term Black British over any other label saying that "[r]ather than being a dangerously essentialising ethnic and nationalist term, 'Black British' actually becomes more useful because of the shifting nature of what each word signifies" opening up "possibilities of narratives and identities**"** (qtd in Tournay).

I am not sure I wholly agree with Williams' assessment when the term Black British is applied to literature written by non-white Britons because it smacks too much of the "separate but equal" mentality. Unfortunately, because the term Black British is an oft used marketing label for the body of work that Britons with dark skin produce, I use the term "Black British" throughout this dissertation to mean Britons who can claim ethnic ties to the Caribbean/West Indies and South Asia. What is encouraging however, is the recent emphasis in the United Kingdom on regionalism, which might make the term Black/black British increasingly obsolete. For example, in a popular bookstore chain in Aberdeen and Glasgow, the Scots are proud to promote the writer Jackie Kay as a Scot

and local writer and make no mention of the fact that she is a Scot with dark skin. Perhaps this emphasis on regionalism in part explains why Black British Literature is now becoming more palatable to the general public and in some cases even celebrated. John Clement Ball writes:

> …there are now two generations of adults who were born or grew up in Britain as the children of 'New Commonwealth' migrants. …For many, the ex-colonial homeland is a distance world to which they have never been: a land whose languages are unfamiliar and whose culture is know only as it has been sustained and mediated by parents and others in their community…The novels …that began to appear in the 1990s from young authors of Caribbean, African, or Asian descent frequently reflect this generational difference …" (223-4).

In addition to pride in regionalism, there is a hint of national pride when it comes to the British public's willingness to accept authors who through their popularity become simply authors without qualifiers. The nation of Britain, for example, is proud to claim Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith and Hanif Kureishi as British Writers and is seemingly nonchalant about their ethnic background or place of origin.

The Importance of Being English

Another discussion simultaneously occurring in Britain at the moment that has led to the acknowledgement of Black British Literature is the nature of what it means to be English**.** Bede's history details that as far back as the Anglo Saxons there was a sense that being English was being God's people and this idea of being favored is still a

characteristic of the English mindset. In the introduction to his book *Albion* (2005) Peter Ackroyd details how this sense of righteousness pervaded the English imagination and helped construct the idea of the mother country that help create and sustain an empire and the system of colonization. Part of the English pride relied on the fact that though a small island, England had not been invaded since 1066 and thus the people were somehow purer and untainted from outside forces. This is not necessarily true of course. The online site Moving Here attempts to document the history of immigration to Britain, who the people were, when they came, and how they fared[3]. It claims that for thousands of years, people from other countries have been coming to Britain. The site points out that 'English' is based on the languages spoken by Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavian Vikings and Norman French invaders, with words added from the languages of other immigrants so there is very little purity associated with the notion of Englishness although the myths surrounding being English as unadulterated Anglo Saxon are strong and persistent. Since technology now makes it easy to compile, store and publish such information, Arthur Aughey and Christine Berberich and Gareth Young have created an online Domesday book for the 21st century in which they grapple with the question, "what does England Mean to Me?" The website states:

> Questions of identity - so familiar to the academies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and their respective conference circuits - have now become an important part of reflection on the condition of England. As Professor Susan Bassnett observed about the range of publications which appeared in the late 1990s, anyone looking at the question would be tempted to conclude that the

> English are currently obsessed with England. This obsession has grown since then and there is a large literature on the subject across a range of academic disciplines from political geography to English literature, cultural studies to contemporary history and political science to policy studies [4].

Although historically the term Briton referred to the Celtic speaking Bretons, Welsh and Cornish people who lived on the island of Great Britain, today the term denotes anyone residing in Great Britain, the United Kingdom, or its territories. Great Britain includes England, Scotland and Wales. However, as the songwriter and singer Billy Bragg reminds us, the term was always a contingent historical compromise: "Britain isn't cool you know, it's really not that great /It's not a proper country, it doesn't even have a patron saint/It's just an economic union that's passed its sell-by date" ("Take Down the Union Jack").

While for the most part I attempt to use Britain to refer to nationality, I sometimes use it interchangeably with England in a conscious effort to minimize the difference of being British but not white skinned. For the difference between being English and British, seems to be implicitly understood: Englishness goes beyond being born in England and is a quality that cannot be seen but is bred in the bones and bloodlines and confers acceptance and status on people who never have to answer the question "Where are you from?" British on the other hand, is a nationality and can include people of heterogeneous backgrounds and is found stamped on passports and other official documents. Can Englishness be somehow adopted? Ford Maddox Ford said that being English was not a question of race but a question of capturing the spirit of the place. The

playwright Tom Stoppard would agree. A Czech refugee who was adopted by his English stepfather, Stoppard has said that from the moment he set foot in England he embraced England and felt English[5]. His knighthood in 1997 was for Stoppard a reaffirmation that he was truly "English." The implicit message is that "outsiders" with white skin may adopt Englishness while dark skinned English born and bred folk may be told to go back to whence they came. This seeming disparity however, does not stop Stoppard from writing on and critiquing British/English national identity. In "India Ink" (1995) Stoppard attempts to capture what it means to English on foreign soil. The play is the story of Flora and her time in colonial India. Flora tries to embrace all things Indian and even embarks on an affair with an Indian Rajah. The Rajah, in turn, has been educated at Harrow and has his own fantasies about being English and his character serves the purpose of not being "too foreign" for Flora's taste. Flora tries to take people at face value but mostly fails – she can't help but impose her own preconceived notions on the Indian people and culture. Thus, the Indians were always other and never quite "English" and it is something that the Indians and the English whites all recognize: while they may inhabit each other worlds, they are indeed separate entities. Stoppard's critique also captures the colonial concept of being English – which was to be urbane, to be the ultimate civilized nation even when surrounded by savages and to be a people who were always in the right and who knew best.

Similarly another British writer who critiques notions of what it means to be English is the Scot James Kelman who says that his stories in *Busted Scotch* (1997) are not about the rich and the aristocrats but ordinary working people doing ordinary things. The class system and its association with being English – polo matches, afternoon teas,

education at Oxford and Cambridge – still live in the popular imagination. Furthermore if the English have become obsessed with Englishness, not all of it is nostalgia for a forgotten but better past. Julian Barnes' 1998 novel *England, England* is a comical but none-the-less searing indictment of how the myth of Englishness is constructed. In the novel Sir Jack Pitman builds a theme park replica of England called England, England on the Isle of Wight in which Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Princess Diana's tomb, Harrods and the White Cliffs of Dover are placed within walking distance of each other and Robin Hood lives in a nearby Sherwood Forest and robs on a schedule. Vera Nünning argues that what sets Barnes' novel above other novels that deal with the concept of Englishness is that Barnes goes beyond repeating the clichés and successfully "juxtaposes competing versions of and discourses about Englishness, and provides highly self-conscious reflections upon both the invention of cultural traditions and the questionable notion of historical authenticity" (58). Continues Nünning, "First and foremost, *England, England* exemplifies the great current interest in the fictional exploration of Englishness, something that was only a marginal concern in [Barnes'] earlier novels. Second, it is revisionist in at least two ways: it questions and revises conventional notions of Englishness, and it also expresses revisionist notions of historical authenticity." Third, the novel provides ample support for the view recently put forward by Nicole Fugmann that "postmodern genres expand rather than just problematize our historical understanding" (334). In essence Barnes proves how artificial the constructs of "Englishness" truly are and how far remove removed from reality they can be from the true English people who are going about their business in "real" England.

The historical understanding of Englishness – white, Anglo Saxon – was challenged in part when the black immigrants landed in the fifties and sixties, made their homes there and raised their children. As documented in the works of George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, a black man's reality in 1950s England stated that he is not equal to a white man and is considered little more than a boy who is condemned to menial jobs, temporary housing and transient women. Caryl Phillips writes *In A New World Order* (2003) that people of his parents' generation who emigrated from the West Indies to Britain in the 1950s were ultimately confronted with the knowledge that despite the fact they held British passports and considered England their "mother country" they would never be regarded as Englishmen because of their skin color. They were doomed to a life of poor housing, discrimination and menial jobs. This reality killed the dreams of a generation who endured prejudice and ostracism in the futile hope that their children would some day be accepted. The result writes Phillips was *his* generation – a second generation of dark skinned British born people who were not as polite and unassuming as their parents, young people who demanded recognition and equality and whose intractability culminated in the race riots of the 1970s.

The tensions that occurred between this second generation and the white Englishmen seemed based on the fear that the white "English" had something to lose, be it affordable housing, a better job or the biggest fear: their white women. The white men who had for decades been busy exploiting colored women for their sexual pleasure suddenly feared entering into a competition with colored men and ultimately losing. Of course, being Englishmen, they were loathe to articulate the reasons behind their disdain. It was left up to the American press, who was busy fighting its own fight against blacks

who had migrated to the North and had thrown off the yoke of slavery to give voice their fears of assimilation. American papers covered the race riots and were quick to use miscegenation and England as a cautionary tale. As early as 1919 there were race riots in England and *The New York Times* attributed the cause to "'the Negroes' familiarity with white women'" (Phillips 244). Similarly in 1958 after the Notting Hill race riots, Phillips writes that *The US News and World Report* reported "'[in addition] to friction over housing and employment[,] the [riot was caused by] resentment of white men over Negroes associating with white women. In London and other industrial cities it has been commonplace to see young Negro men with white girls…the association of Negro men and white girls has stirred jealously and resentment among young men'" (244).

This is the atmosphere in which Phillips' generation came of age. In turn, their children, the third generation, inherited an "enlightened" if ironic legacy in which prejudice is clearly defined, categorized and even acceptable in certain cases. Such a legacy indicated that at best a black person born in Britain, sharing the same dialect, accent, clothing and cultural references could be call British but never English. However the children of *this* generation are beginning to question and refute such assumptions.

Women and the Black Experience

Black British Literature of the last fifty years has a rich tradition of documenting how *men* of color with British nationality experienced a loss of community when they immigrated to the so-called motherland. While the term motherland is subject to contestation in postcolonial theory, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon and writers of their generation very much internalized the colonial concept of England as a mother who

would protect them and love them equally among her children. George Lamming writes, "England was the country of expectation" but, as their stories unfold, the men quickly experienced both disillusionment and as Fred D'Aguiar termed it, a sense of "unbelonging" as they were caught between a community left behind and a new community which didn't accept them. The discord between expectation and perception is essentially a disconnect between individual perceived identity and how one is perceived by the community. D'Aguiar and James seem accepting of the difference between Black British and English. Partially it is cultural conditioning. These men were born in far-flung locations of the waning British Empire and were taught to believe in the superiority of the English. Any idea they may have had concerning their rightful place within this bastion of civilization know as England was quickly lost when they arrived in a post-war England where housing was in demand, food rationing still occurred and where the people and the weather were both indifferent and cold.

When it comes to race and the Black Experience it must be mentioned that the works of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureshi have became palatable to a mainstream audience and this acceptance in some ways earned these authors the right to transcend their ethnicity in order to write. Also enough time has passed since the first influx of west Caribbean and South Asian immigrants that the current crop of writers, often second and third generation British born, had internalized English culture and co-existed not as guests but as people who fully expect to be granted the same acceptance as white British born people. The last twenty-five years of Black British literature has also been a particularly fruitful period in which black female authors started to be publish stories that might seem small and domestic but as Elaine Showalter reminds us, have a tendency as

women's novels to capture a moment in a country's tradition and history. This comment holds weight when one considers that while Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith have been lionized in literary circles and are too often representatives of Black British literature, other writers, especially women, who don't fit the mold of what the English imagination expects of Black Fiction are still writing their realities. Much has been written on the "clash of cultures" between traditional western culture and "incomers," to use a colloquial term. As Black British literature gains recognition with the general public in Britain the term "Black British" is coming increasingly under criticism. Mahlete-Tsigé Getachew argues the term has given way to a genre that too often publishes books for content versus literary merit and thus only appeals to a limited audience i.e. black readers and not the dominant prevailing culture (326). Further, Getachew says black fiction must redeem itself through "linguistic innovative" means in order to achieve status in the mainstream. Clearly influenced by Harold Bloom's declaration that canonical writers such as Shakespeare, Dante and Joyce earned their places because of their "mode of originality" Getachew concludes that if black literature could only invent its own language, it would "nurture creativity, and would be an asset both to general literature and to the development of an inclusive society." Moreover, Getachew calls for black literature to redeem itself via the discourse of hip hop by learning to fuse elements of language in order to become truly "black" instead of trying to capture the "Black Experience" (342).

Given this debate, how do we begin to talk about the novels that have emerged in the last twenty-five years that give voice to the Black British woman's point of view and which describe how hard is it to be black and a woman in contemporary Britain? To echo

Hazel Carby, I would argue that these black women situated as they are in their communities - these ephemeral and negotiable spaces - are in a unique position to tell their own 'discordant' tales, ones that have appeal even when confined to a woman's novel and even when they retell stories about how terrible it is to be black in a white society. Getachew's critique of black fiction is two-pronged: 1) speaking about the "Black Experience" is passé and 2) black writers show a lack of originality. What he fails to recognize is black women writers have up until recently been largely marginalized and still have valid stories to tell. The "Black Experience" is not tapped out when one considers the woman's point of view because until the advent of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) no one was paying much attention to Black British women writers. In advocating the women's point of view, I don't mean a rereading or interpolating of the views of the absent women into Selvon's or Lamming's works as Carole Boyce Davies, Belinda Edmondson and Evelyn O'Callaghan suggest but a telling of stories through the lens of female characters that are strongly drawn, both visible and vocal in contemporary black literature in texts such as Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) that is a wonderful counterpart to Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956).

Getachew's surmise that contemporary authors would find wider audiences if they experiment with language is a little misguided especially since he seems to confuse inclusion in the canon as synonymous to being widely read. Indeed, several female contemporary "black" writers are already engaged in pushing language, boundaries and story forms in their works while not necessarily being widely read as part of the canon. One such novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) has been called the first explicitly British Asian Novel[6] and Bruce King describes it as the "first noteworthy publication by an

Asian Women Writers' Collective author." Continues King in a slightly disapproving tone, "'It is the first novel by a woman set within England's Asian community – in this case Indian and Pakistani – and remains controversial because of its unusual structure and style…The manner of narrative is oblique and fogged with distracting wordplay and cleverness" (183) while Mark Stein says that the novel is "is …[a]… mixture of colloquial English and Hindi slang which reflects the hybrid identities of her characters" (195). Despite the controversy, the novel has a rich style that combines the lyrical and detailed imagery with a stream of consciousness that captures the reader instantly:

> Red tear drops on a Russian doll. More real than the salt-tasting water running down her face: transient, impermanent couriers of grief. One wipe of the tissue and erased for ever, leaving the face unmarked and clear like newly washed sand. A false front to the pain that still lay coiled within…
>
> Kulwant hadn't know that playing with nail polish would be playing with fire and that in trying to give her doll a bindi the scarlet blob would slip from the loaded brush and landing on the cheek run a red streak all the way down to the chin and there, come to a quivering full stop (Randhawa, 1).

This novel deals in illuminating ways with identity lost, redefined and reclaimed but remains largely marginalized because as Susheila Nasta points out, it is considered a *woman's* novel. In other words, the woman's novel is dismissed for being about the domestic, the banal, and nothing as exciting, transcendental or universal as the lives lived by men. However, a woman's novel even if judged uneven is not as Elaine Showalter,

explains, without merit. Showalter explains the necessity for recognizing women writers by saying that when one examines the historical moment and culture these women authors write about, readers and scholars can learn about a "national tradition" [7]. In a similar vein of uncovering the British national tradition, this dissertation examines the stories of British women of Indian and Caribbean descent in British fiction and film in the last twenty-five years and makes the claim that these works capture a moment in England's history as Black British women and men attempt to come to grips with their country, the expectations and stereotypes placed upon them and their place in the conversation of what it means to be Black *and* British. This ongoing dialogue is the underpinning of Black British Literature.

It is a much needed conversation, because Petra Tournay while acknowledging the commercial success of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) says in general black British women literature still is underappreciated. Perhaps one part of the reason is that such literature could be classified as "decidedly feminine, as an example of *écriture feminine* in the sense that Helene Cixous used the term. [Black British Women novels] are about everyday living, yet they are culturally inflected by gendered and racial existence" (Petra 2).

Lastly, little is said in fiction of the 1950s and 1960s of how *women* immigrants dealt with a society who found them to be too foreign. It was not until the 1980s when The Women's Press was established that female authors en masse entered the literary scene. Women's work being published was a grassroots effort, aided largely by feminist press who often drew on women's groups to publicize their voices. As a result of these efforts, several anthologies including *Charting The Journey* (1988), *Watchers & Seekers*

(1988) and *Let it Be Told* (1987) were published which pulled together poetry, essays and short fiction by Black Women writers. However, this is not to suggest that prior to 1980 women were not writing or being published. In the 1960s and 1970s Louise Bennett and Claudia Jones, Valerie Bloom, Grace Nichols, Hazel Carby and Amrit Wilson were all publishing shorter pieces. Lauretta Ngcobo editor of *Let it Be Told* writes:

> What should be obvious to all those who are interested in Black cultural history is that Blackwomen have always been involved in the creation and performance of our literature, especially oral literature. From time immemorial, they have been the undisputed practitioners of the art. Our involvement in this did not begin only when we changed to the scripted form of expression. We have been writing for a long time; it is now that these writings are beginning to come out in the open. (ix).

So, why has it taken so long for the literature of Black British women to come out in the open? Perhaps it is because the immigrant and colonial experience is typically read with the emphasis on the male. There is an assumption that men are the emblems of a nation's identity and women are attachments to men but not entities unto themselves, a trope that is usually enforced in early Black British fiction. In her book *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock writes "[a]ll nations depend on powerful constructions of gender…No nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state" (353). This state of women taking a back seat to the needs of men is nothing new, nor is it exclusive to women of color. Not surprisingly, the earliest Black British fiction privileges the man's experience while ignoring the fact that large numbers

of women were also arriving in England, an oversight that needs to be rectified. The investment a nation seems to make in the male can leave the woman, not considered a resource, adrift and thus, as Elleke Boehmer observes, the "motherland" of male nationalism may "not signify 'home' and 'source' to women" (5). Thus, narratives in the immigrant woman's voice are important not because her experience as an immigrant is different from the man's or because of her gender, but because she is facing a set of different expectations, ones that are influenced by her place within her immediate family/community and the larger dominant, white, English society. The latter is important because as Anne McClintock contend, feminists, particularly white feminists, have failed to sufficiently acknowledge "nationalism as a feminist issue" (356). Hazel Carby goes so far as to charge that white feminists are not qualified to speak the stories of black women. Echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's claim that the west cannot speak for the subaltern, Chandra Talpade Mohanty holds that only third world women have the authenticity of experience to lend them creditability.

A Black Writing Tradition

Black British literature as a published tradition first emerged in the 1950s and 1960s when men such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, E.R. Braithwaite, Andrew Salkey came to Britain with the specific purpose of being published. They did this out of necessity – there were no venues for being published nor an audience in their home countries. Lamming later said that there was also the realization that they were writing for a white/western audience and to publish at home would gain them nothing because, as he writes, the mystery is not that a west Indian writer should leave home but that a such a

person should exist at all because west Indian society had been taught to refer all things English and found no merit in it "native" people. Thus says Lamming, "… a writer cannot function; and, indeed, he has no function as a writer if those who read and teach reading in his society have started their education by questioning his very right to write…"(38). Twenty or so years later, Salman Rushdie won the Booker prize for his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) but really sky rocketed into the public's consciousness as a writer who could be considered both British and "other" when his fourth novel *Satanic Verses* (1988) was protested by Muslims around the world and Rushdie received death threats which forced him to live in hiding for many years. Perhaps it was Hanif Kureishi who captured the popular imagination best after he wrote the 1993 television miniseries of his novel *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), which aired in homes all through the British Isles. Current Black British literature is therefore a continuum of the dialogue that Black British, mostly male, authors started in the 1950s. One such author is Samuel Selvon whose novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) is a seminal piece in the canon of black British literature. Selvon has chiefly been considered a postcolonial or Caribbean author but Nick Bentley makes the case that Selvon fiction must be "contextualize[d] … not only in terms of a postcolonial writing, but also in relation to dominant trends in the British writing of the period. This is particularly relevant given the fact that Selvon (as did many of the Caribbean writers of the period) felt his work could only be legitimized if it was presented through the colonial and cultural 'centre' of London's literary institutions" (Bentley, *Form* xx). Bentley further argues that Selvon set out to write for two potential groups of readers: the growing minority of Caribbean immigrants and the white audience who were presented with a tale that was slightly exoticized without being

necessarily threatening. Concludes Bentley, white audiences received the "text as a kind of reportage novel, recording an essentially alien experience through the articulation of otherness" (Bentley, *Form* xx). One way in which Selvon accomplished this was to write characters that were slightly exaggerated and to write in a dialect that was accessible. Selvon himself has commented concerning *The Lonely Londoners*, "I wrote a modified dialect which could be understood by European readers, yet retain the flavour and essence of Trinidadian speech" (Fabre "Interview" 66). Perhaps Selvon was wise in doing so because his book was published and found acceptable by his white British audience, something that Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) hasn't achieved.

Too often, when it comes to determining literary merit, a standardized, formally accepted language and dialect seems to be a sticking point. For too long variations of the English language was considered subpar – at least before the high modernists T.S. Eliot and James Joyce and all those who followed in their wake made such notions not only antiquated but absurd unless the writer was white. As Chinua Achebe chronicles in his essay "The African Writer and the English Language" (1952) there is an ongoing debate as to what constitutes African literature and how to evaluate its authenticity. Achebe advocates the idea that English serves as a national language of Africa because to write in a native tongue (say Swahili) automatically limits the audience and makes the literature *ethnic* instead of national. The problem of finding an audience and distribution remains, seemingly, tied to the English language. Years later Salman Rushdie in his introduction to *Mirrorwork 50 years of Indian Writing 1947-1997* (1997) laments, "The lack of first-rate [Indian] writing in translation can only be a matter for regret" (ix). However, Achebe goes on to qualify his statement that "a new voice [is] coming out of Africa,

speaking of African experience in a world-wide language" (433). Achebe affirms that African writers can be African and still write in English but "the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English that is at once universal and able to carry out his peculiar experience. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different to say" (433). This is a precarious course for black writers to follow. A cautionary tale is the case of G.V. Desani an Indian-born author writing in English who lived in Britain from 1926 to the early 1950s and had a reputation for being an excellent orator. His novel *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) centers on a hero on the quest for truth but couches the story in language that is lyrical, convoluted and more in the tradition of the spoken word. Anthony Burgess says in his introduction to the 1970 reprint of the novel "Desani had to be praised not as a dweller on a cultural fringe who did remarkably well when one considered his disadvantages, but as a man squarely set in the great linguistic mainstream." The novel received rave notices on publication and T.S. Eliot said of it, "In all my experience, I have not met with anything like it. It is amazing that anyone should be able to sustain a piece of work in this style and tempo at such length" (qtd, in Burgess 8). In praising the novel and the use of language, Burgess maintains

> "...it is the writing that makes the book, a sort of creative chaos that grumbles the restraining banks. It is what may be termed Whole Language, in which philosophical terms, the colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearian archaisms, bazaar whinings, quack spiels, references to the Hindu pantheon, the jargon of Indian litigation, and shrill babu irritability seethe together. It is not pure English; it is, like

English of Shakespeare, Joyce and Kipling, gloriously impure" (10).

However, despite these commendations the book still went out of print and remains underrated.[8]

If Desani and Randhawa have been shut out because their use of language defied classification, the poet and musical artist Linton Kwesi Johnson has met with a somewhat better reception. Just as Jamaican reggae was becoming popular on the world stage, Johnson became involved in the dub movement. Says Johnson in a 1977 interview with *Race* Magazine " 'Dub-lyricism' is a new form of (oral) music-poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on the rhythm background of a popular song…I heard music in language and I wanted to write word-music, verse anchored by the one-drop beat of reggae with meter measured by the bass line or a drum pattern; I wanted to write lines that sound like a bass line." Russell Banks who wrote and introduction to the 2006 printing of Johnson's work concludes Jamaican Creole was immensely suited to Johnson's purpose especially when paired with the King James Bible as both were full of lyrical imagery that led to effective story telling. After the *Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* defined dub poetry as "over-compensation for deprivation" Johnson wrote "If I Woz a Tap-Natch Poet" in response and the opening two verses read:

> If I woz a tap-natch poet
> like Chris Okigo
> Derek Walcot
> ar T.S. Eliot
>
> I woodah write a poem
> soh dyam deep

dat it bittah-sweet
like a precious
memari
whe mek yu weep
whe mek yu feel incomplete

In these lines Johnson mocks academia and its outdated notions of the canon that makes it easy for the establishment/dominant culture to dismiss the use of dialect as being non-standard and behave in a patronizing/dismissive way to authors who use it. His self-effacing "If I were a tap-natch poet" is said very much tongue in cheek as there can be no doubt Johnson is indeed top notch. Another excerpt of Johnson's poetry proclaims an anthem on race labeling:

African
Asian
West Indian
And Black British
Stan firm inna Inglan
Inna disya time yah
For noh mattah wat dey say,
Come wat may,
We are here to stay

Russell Banks reminds the reader, "In 2002 Linton Kwesi Johnson became the second living and the first black poet to have his selected poems published in England and in the Penguin Classics series" (ii). Thus Johnson has arrived because while not necessarily universally accepted, if one juxtaposes the OED entry and the Penguin Classics series, he

does carry the outward approval of part of the establishment.

If the language of Desani, Randhawa and Johnson can be critiqued for being too obscure or inaccessible the publication of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi presented a different view of what it means to be British and Black. His characters were far from the stereotypical mystical, conservative Indians of popular imagination and were portrayed instead as venial, immersed in pop culture, and spoke with accents that marked them not as foreigners but as firmly British. Kureishi seized the British imagination not just with the published word but through the televised version of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1993) and his films – *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), and *My son the Fanatic* (1998) – providing a medium that perfectly captures the incongruity of a dark-skinned person sounding like a Scot, a Midlander or a Londoner. Ten years after the publication of *Buddha*, Sukhdev Sadhu wrote in an editorial for *The London Review of Books*, "What, above all, made Kureshi a talismanic figure for young Asians was his voice. We had previously been mocked for our deference and timidity. Kureishi's language was a revelation. It was neither meek nor subservient. It wasn't fake posh. Instead, it was playful and casually knowing."

Kureishi plays with words and overturns what it means to be British Asian. British Asian can be gay, bisexual, irreligious, absurd, people filled with vanities and desires, in effect not so different from their neighbors and allowed a younger generation of Black British people to view themselves without limitation. This writes Rachel Donadio "has had a profound effect on younger South Asian and black writers" such as Zadie Smith. Meera Syal who played the lesbian Rani in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) has written the screenplays for *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and the novels (and

subsequent screenplays) *Anita and me* (1999) and *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* (2001). The legitimacy of the tradition of Black British literature has really been established in its grasp of the popular imagination. The films and televised serials of novels from the eighties and nineties have facilitated an acceptance in the white British imagination of non-white Britons and have contributed to the notion of Britain as a multi-cultural nation. In this regard, film is the great equalizer in that it can and does reach a greater audience as is evidenced by Gurinder Chadha's 2003 film *Bend it like Beckham* which bridged the gap between the national passion for football and a British born girl of Indian ancestry and *Bride and Prejudice* (2005) which appropriated the ultimate British icon Jane Austen and claimed it as her own, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Both films take it for granted that there is no incongruity for a person of Indian descent who was born and bred in Britain to have an affinity for British things. Not only were the films box office success, but it helped assuage the unspoken worry that South Asians and especially women, would never integrate. The women portrayed in the films were funny, smart, spoke English fluently and had jobs or interests outside of the home. This worry dates back to a stereotype that South Asians are insular – they live in their own communities, they keep their customs and language and marry among themselves – and not interested in becoming part of the larger, white, community[9].

Postcolonial Criticism and British Cultural Studies

Post World War II England was in shambles and in dire need of low cost labor to help rebuild the economy. In 1948 the Nationality Act was passed and men from the Caribbean enticed by cheap passage on the *Windrush* and full of a naïve hope came to

England en masse. This first influx of immigrants saw England as the mother country and considered themselves to be English. They had been taught to believe in English superiority and believed the English were educated and powerful. The reality these men faced were a London whose physical landscape had been destroyed during the war, continued rationing, a housing shortage and blatant hostility from the English who viewed the darker skinned with suspicion and dislike.

The men who came to England during the fifties and sixties banded together for survival. Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* opens with Moses, a veteran immigrant who has been in England for 10 years, going to Victoria station to meet a new arrival from Jamaica. Moses shows the new man how to manage daily life – finding housing, how to dress, where to go for employment. In Lamming's *The Emigrants*, he depicts a barbershop in a basement where men come to socialize and meet friends from back home. These men were continually on the move. The unspoken expectation was that they would do the job and leave to go back home. Housing when they found it was usually in undesirable spaces and temporary. Yet despite these conditions, many of these men not only stayed, but brought their families over too.

In a 2007 article, Peter Brooke contends that the personal papers of Enoch Powell show his objections to immigration were rooted not in racism but instead "in a seemingly liberal commitment to national homogeneity as a prerequisite for democracy." He further argues, the imagery, reasoning, and political context of Powell's speeches in 1968 demonstrate a striking continuity with his ideas of 1946. Powell's example suggests that British attitudes to mass immigration may owe more to the experience of empire than to

post-war changes in national identity. The irony of course is Powell's desire to preserve a hegemonic society was firmly rooted in racism.

In 1968 the Commonwealth British Act passed and essentially limited immigration of non-white British citizens, although the immigrants from the previous years who had for the most part stayed and established families remained. The children of these immigrants were 'second generation' British in their experiences, language and attitudes. Unlike their parents they didn't feel the need to be polite and started to demand rights. Dick Hebidge, among others, documents how the black population moved from the tenements and basements out in to the streets where they lounged against walls, wearing less their Sunday best than clothing that was a means of self-expression. The resulting tension between the white and black population resulted in riots in Nottingham Hill and Brixton. Being black became politicized and there were hierarchies in color. In Great Britain, people of African origins came to be tolerated more than South Asians who were subjected to general mockery, insults, house burnings, beatings and general fear mongering tactics. In the short story collection, *East End at Your Feet*, Farukh Dhondy includes a story entitled "KBW." Written for adolescents, the story is told from the point of view of a young white boy who misses his friend, Tahir Habib. The Habibs were recent immigrants from India and when a local white girl contracts typhoid the Indian family is blamed. Their house is vandalized and the slogan KBW – Keep Britain White – is spray painted on their door. When the girl dies, Tahir's family is attacked by a gang while the residents of the housing complex look the other way. Tahir's father is hospitalized, the family moves out, and the friendship between the boys is destroyed. The young white boy can't understand why his friend was hated so much when he is in effect

so ordinary. Thirty years later, Dhondy captures how the landscape in England has changed where suddenly being Indian means culture, romance and something to be courted. In the short story "Adultery" (2003) Sulfi is a failed academic and underappreciated poet living in England with his white wife, Joanna, a woman whose family had actively participated in the colonization of India. Her ancestors are buried there and her dream is to one day return and honor their memory and legacy. When Sulfi's poems are rediscovered and set to music, he finds himself suddenly courted by the same literati that had previously scorned him and almost accidently falls into an affair with a woman who ultimately leaves him for someone more famous. In the meantime, Joanna takes Sulfi's royalty check that was sent to her by mistake and goes to India only to find that the Indian who assiduously courted and bedded her was an industrialist who had dug up the graveyard where her ancestors lay to make way for a new building. Where Joanna had romanticized the past, her lover Harish was prosaic about "The memory of conquest and humiliation" and focused only on the future and progress. Disheartened by the betrayal, Joanna and Sulfi reunite in India.

Perhaps what Dhondy is chronicling in his fiction is the cultural shifting of attitudes toward places of origin. If Fred D'Aguiar claimed home was always someplace else, a home of the imagination, Dhondy's characters, both white and Indian create their own versions of home and come to a rude awakening. Both Joanna and Sulfi suffer from nostalgia when it comes to India. For Joanna India is a part of her family lore and her frame of mind doesn't consider imperialism and colonization. Sulfi who was born in India, suffers from the illusion that India represents art and purity. Hanif Kureishi also picks up on the theme of how the home of the imagination and the home of reality is

often not the same. In his novel *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) a formerly placid immigrant suddenly assumes a mystical personality and brings "culture" to the suburbs because he wants to capitalize on the attention and escape his humdrum life. There is an implication that the once foreign person has integrated into the dominant white culture so well that he becomes guilty of orientalism in the sense that he can reduce his own culture to talking points and stereotypical notes that can be packaged into sound bites.

The study of British Cultural Studies which attempts to assess and quantify the black experience in Britain is both essential and complicated because as John Storey states "British Cultural Studies is difficult to define because although it can be tied to Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson who are working within Britain, so much of British Cultural Studies comes from France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Switzerland[10]." He continues, as Antonio Gramsci has established, "capital industrialist societies are divided unequally in terms of gender, race, generation, sexuality and social class and so cultural studies argues that popular culture is one of the principal sites where these divisions are established and contested; that is, popular culture is an area of struggle and negotiation between the interested of dominant and of subordinate groups" (Storey 220-221). He further goes on to say, "The making of culture is complex and contradictory, not explainable by simple notions determination and manipulation" (222). Perhaps this complexity can be explained by how well the British have been able to appropriate the cultures, language, and customs of other nations –be those nations the conquerors or colonized—and made them uniquely their own. England simply put is an amalgamation that successfully passes itself off as unique and unchangeable.

Therein lies the difference between what has been occurring in academic circles in the United States where cultural studies focuses on "a highly disaggregated field composed of several dozen relatively autonomous subfields, whose numbers seemed ready too increase" but have no real recognized academic standing and has become a catch all for popular culture inquiries. (Leitch and Lewis 229). Third- and fourth-generation of Black Britons are now in a place where they are permitted or perhaps insist on celebrating and exploring their differences within the dominant culture and not apart from it. It is the double consciousness of being Black and British (or feeling black and British) but a feeling of identity that comes from a security of knowing that one belongs. The new crop of writers are also vocal about how they perceive themselves. Whereas Hanif Kureishi identifies himself as a Indian-British writer, the generation belonging to Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy, Monica Ali, are quick to point out they are not Caribbean writers, or postcolonial writers or Indian writers but writers. Their insistence on not being identified with an ethnic group seems to indicate that for this new generation of writers there is no longer an emphasis on assimilation but rather a critical position that states that the issue of being British is sufficient and no further qualifiers are needed.

Many years after leaving England as an English subject, I find it encouraging to see the celebration of West Caribbean and Indian culture and note that British pubs offer Cornish pasties filled with curried chicken or note that English people seem addicted to Indian food. However, the acceptance of a darker hued English citizen is more complex than the acceptance of food and music. Immigrants are expected to assimilate into mainstream culture whether it is expressed through learning the language, wearing western clothing or adopting customs or cultural codes. But at what price is this

acceptance achieved for immigrant populations in multicultural Britain? Is the perception of an immigrant who adopts the customs of her new country perceived as less threatening/foreign/more acceptable than one who resists? Does acceptance/assimilation/syncretism/hybridity always involve an individual compromise or self-deception? What role does communit(ies) play for a woman who is automatically categorized as being an outsider by the dominant community (i.e. white, western, English) because of her dress, skin color or religion? Georg M. Gugelberger says, "Postcolonial cultural studies is not a discipline but a distinctive problematic that can be described as an abstract combination of all the problems inherent in such newly emerging fields as minority discourse, Latin American studies, African studies, Caribbean Studies, Third World studies…" (757) and I would add women writers who are entering the tradition of publishing/producing literature are also facing a set of problems linked to their gender. What must be stressed again is that these women are claiming their histories, and that their experiences may mirror their male counterparts but don't duplicate them. In essence these women writers and artists are staking out a place for themselves.

In her essay "Finding my voice" the actress and writer Meera Syal declares she read feminist thought (Germaine Greer, Kate Milett and Simone de Beauvoir) but it wasn't until she started to read about the Asian female experience(s) that "my powers of expression and confidence on stage became more defined" (254). It is this finding of voice that seems to come through in the last twenty years of Black British literature, exemplified by contemporary British writers and directors including Joan Riley, Monica Ali, Zadie Smith, Meera Syal, Andrea Levy, Gurinder Chadha and the Women's Press,

who have started to address how women in England who are either immigrants or first generation are coming to terms with balancing their identities while straddling two cultures that often seem to be on opposite sides when it comes to views of female empowerment.

Elaine Showalter in the expanded edition of *A Literature of Their Own* perceives women as "being more practiced than men in interpreting inner space…" If Showalter's observation holds true that women are "more practiced than men" in living in an inner space, could this be the reason women are seemingly better suited to change in a new culture? This is not a question of essentialism. Women are not biologically equipped to adapt better than men. Perhaps because culture must be learned and this is done through formal educational and religious institutions, which in some cultures become an exclusive male privilege, "third world" women have not been sufficiently indoctrinated into their culture and feel little allegiance to it, or it may be more correct to assume that immigrant women are automatically better off adapting the cultural norms of the west. However, this line of questioning conforms to Mohanty's critique of assumptions that third world women are ignorant and passive. Thus, it would seem, there are other factors that either enforce traditional values or permit or encourage change.

The following chapters focus on the nature of these factors and through the perspective of Black British literature written between 1980 and 2005 establish two issues: first, how the women depicted in these novels and films are influenced by issues of gender-based roles, their wealth/education and social status, ethnicity and complexion and their internal and external communities; and second to understand how these influences shape their relationship with the dominant (i.e. white, English) culture. Using a

theoretical approach that includes third world feminism, postcolonial theory and cultural studies the dissertation will explore the nature of women roles and gender politics and immigration and colonialism as depicted in contemporary British literature and explore how it fits within the mythology of what it means to be English versus British and the degree of acceptance embedded in such nominal questions.

While the internal message absorbed by most British people that those of a darker skin tone born in Great Britain may be British but certainly not English, the new generation of female writers including Ravinder Randhawa, Andrea Levy and Zadie Smith are engaged in creating fiction that in the words of Hanif Kureishi "…[are] a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: a new way of being British after all this time" (38). This freshness is a reflection of their attitudes and chronicles that things are changing. Keeping the notion of freshness in mind, some framing questions for the following chapters of the dissertation include: What is the immigrant experience like for women of color in England when considered through the perspective of gender, generation, class and ethnicity in British Literature of the last fifty years? How are women affected when they are confronted with westernized concepts of independence and self-determination but come from an ethnic background that may dictate a more traditional even subservient demeanor? How does their self-identity and relationship to their communities affect their actions?

In the last thirty years postcolonial theory has shifted from identifying the tropes that made imperialism possible and establishing the nexus between imperialistic practices and the development of a formerly colonized nation to at least in Britain an established

cultural studies movement that reclaims the culture of the colonized and looks to see how the colonized "minority" is influencing and reforming the dominant culture.

As practiced in the 1980s, postcolonial theory focused on how the tropes of the Imperial west were continually reinforced, sometimes subconsciously, to devalue and reduce formerly colonized nations. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak published her ground-breaking piece "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) in which she detailed how England's imperialistic practices in India was predicated on the notion that English Culture was superior and that the Indian people (and women in particular) were in need of guidance. The English condemned such practices as Sati (widows throwing themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands) as savage without truly understanding the social, cultural and historical context. A generalization was made that all Indians practiced Sati and thus all Indians were condemned and an English law was passed banning the practice.

This "outing" of essentialism and reductive practices is important. Indeed Franz Fanon calls for a "violent overthrow" of imperialism (specifically he was speaking of the Algeria revolution in the 1950s) and writes it is only through the letting of blood that a colonized nation can be free of the colonizer's influence. This call to nationalism is important especially in the early stages of emancipation because it demands developing a sense of self worth and pride but it can also be problematic because a nation/culture cannot revert to is pre-colonial identity which is now lost to the collective memory and because it is impossible to know how the country/culture would have evolved without the colonizer' influence. The question then remains when one understands how binaries are constructed and employed (black culture is childish, white culture is civilized and must be adopted/emulated) how does one not diffuse them and yet still move on?

Homi Bhabha attempts to answer this with *Location of Culture* (1994) in which he writes there was some complicity in the relationship between the colonized and colonizer and that the colonized were complicit because they were attempting to achieve their own goals. The end result is a form of hybridity – a marriage of sorts between the cultures which, at least so Bhabha argues creates a third culture, which can yield positive results.

An Emerging Black Identity

Beginning with the 1980s postcolonial criticism really burgeoned, due mainly to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which exposed how the West had created the ideology of the Orient in order to impose and maintain imperial practices. The early work of postcolonial criticism was instrumental in reclaiming the voices of all disenfranchised people. In the thirty years since, postcolonial studies has evolved to embrace cultural criticism. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990) Stuart Hall identifies that it is essential that a formerly colonized nation – and he is speaking specifically of Jamaica but the thought is universal – understand its past and history in order to understand how its current identity is formed. If as Said has said a colonized nation is left with "humiliating wounds" then it is essential that the wounds be lanced through understanding of how they were received. Hall goes on to say that identity is constructed through cultural markers that are somehow reinforced by society and can then be in a constant state of evolution. This argument is slightly problematic for me because it presumes the cultural markers are universal and I believe that class, ethnicity, gender and religion may generate different markers and may not be readily transparent.

For some the term hybridity refers to migrancy and how immigrants assimilate/influence the dominant culture. Hybridity the term however is not without contestation. Robert Young in *Colonial Desire Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (*1995*)* observes that hybridity was used to identify the offspring of white-black unions and the label refers to a systematic rape resulting in a (negative) racialization of offspring. Young does not believe that the term should be allowed to evolve into a benign version. Spivak however is impatient with the hybridity debate because she believes that the bigger economic implications of migrancy are being overlooked and points out that diasporas who benefit from the capitalistic practices of their new country are now participating and promulgating the exploitation of others

Although hybridity has transmuted into a word with positive overtones, it has not escaped critical interrogation. Young criticizes the term because originally it referred to racial superiority. Moving away from etymology, Homi Bhabha posits in *Location of Culture* (1994) that hybridity refers to a "third space." Andrew Smith in his essay "Migrancy, Hybridity and Postcolonial Literary Studies" quotes Nestor Garcia Canclini as saying that the dominant culture – the patrimony – must be staged and one can rightly assume the "production" i.e. the resulting product is at best an idealized version of reality or more cynically an outright lie. This staged patrimony is important when one considers the prevailing nostalgia of what it means to be "English" and how the very classification of Black British implies an otherness in contemporary British society. One might well ask what is the significance of the black British woman's experience and how can it be so very different from the male's experience that it deserves further examination? Contemporary black British utilizing the female voice illustrates Susheila Nasta's

pronouncement that "issues of class and gender are as central to redefining Englishness as are questions of race" (175).

A critique of postcolonial theory as initially practice rightly pointed out that it did not look at the effects of imperialistic practices on women or the implications of current economic and globalization practices on "third" world nations. Ann McClintock in her book *Imperial Leather* criticizes Fanon because he placed the needs of women behind the needs of the emerging nation and the men. Third world feminism essentially delves into this unexplored assumption by looking at the plight of women who are neither white nor financially privileged and explores the ways in which globalization affects women of color. The need for a third wave of feminism or third world feminism is necessary because there are inherent difference between white culture (which is always by default considered the norm) and everyone else. Black women in England as Hazel Carby points out have different stories and do not want white women to speak for them as black women are perfectly capable of telling their own stories. Third world feminists such as T. Minh-Ha-Trinh, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Suleri all speak about how women of color (be they Asian or black) must demonstrate fluency in the language of whites and yet are also urged to revel in their difference be it skin tone or culture while at the same time try and not fall into the stereotype of what it means to be Asian, black, brown or Native American This is the burden forced on women of color by whites. If a woman of color doesn't act in the white norm, she is too often reduced to the role of " a passive victim" and the white feminist takes no time to understand the role of community, culture and tradition that the women of color are negotiating. As Third World Feminists have pointed out, white women can not speak for colored women because they are complicity

in the system that exploit third world women and they place value judgments on third world culture and tradition with no understanding of the context or how the culture and tradition operate. However, Sara Suleri has called for recognition that women of all colors are more united than different against the overall patriarchy. As Spivak points out the problem with narration is that the narrator leaves things out based on her point of view so it follows that multiple narratives must follow in order for something approximating the truth to be compiled. Their narratives being written by women in recent years capture the realities of capitalism and western globalization on indigenous women echoing Fanon's cry for bloodshed. These women are so disempowered that they must often relinquish their self be it mentally or physically in order to survive.

Keeping these concepts in mind and following Hall's argument that black identity must be put into context, the remaining four chapters are divided into the following broad categories: gender identification and role-playing; the effect of community and self-determination; perceptions of beauty and acceptance for the dark skinned, woman; and class and social status.

The second chapter discusses how immigrant men and women renegotiate and act out their roles as "male" and "female", explores the investiture women make in their roles, discusses how these roles remain fluid and states what occurs when their personal desire collides with the expectations placed upon them by their peers, immediate family and community and the larger, white dominant community. Part of the "other history" of immigrants is how they adapt to their new role as the outsider in a country they have always thought of as a "mother." Curdella Forbes, author of *From Nation to Diaspora,* a work that is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival masque as well as

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* argues that gender is conceptualized and is composed of allocation, investiture, assumption of role and identity and role as performance. Forbes argues that if you strip away a man or a woman's culture, then unexpected things may happen. For example in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) the Jamaican woman Tanty assumes the role of the "male" when she establishes order in her London neighborhood while the men are reduced to the role of boys. Conversely, Joan Riley's Novel *Romance* (1988) delineates clear lines of "male" and "female" roles in which the man dictates to the woman. Thus the character Desiree is condemned by her husband to housework and cooking for him at all hours of the night because it is woman's work and yet her children – females – are not expected to help with housework because they are to concentrate on their studies. When Desiree expresses a wish to return to school, her husband actively discourages her because he sees it as a sign that she will leave him. In general, Desiree accepts her role because she understands her husband has been diminished by coming to England and she is trying to preserve his manhood and by extension their marriage. Similarly, Andrea Levy in the novel *Small Island* (2004) uses the character Hortense to play with gender performance. Freshly arrived from Jamaica, Hortense performs her role of what she thinks an English Lady would be. She wears gloves and wears neat attire and pronounces her words with rounded vowels. This performance is not only rejected by the local whites but ridiculed – she is derided for her garish clothing and her habit of overdressing, and her accent is mocked. Worse still is the secretary at the school who dismisses her teaching credentials as not being acceptable. This cavalier treatment by the secretary causes Hortense to break down. Her investment in her identity has been devalued and it is telling that it is this degradation that is the

moment when she and her husband (whom she had secretly despised up until this moment) bond.

The allocation of roles can sometimes be a source of conflict between generations. For example, in the film *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003) the mother tries to enforce traditional roles on her daughters. However, this trope of the older generation imposing its value on the younger generation doesn't always hold true. In the novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1993), a young Asian girl purposely embraces an arranged marriage and tradition against her parents' advice. Thus, it would seem there are variants as to why, how, and when the female immigrant assimilates or resists the new culture. Gender roles are for the most part perception based on performance of that role and whether the performance is convincing enough. Legitimacy, validity and authority can be given to the person who is willing to take it, regardless of their gender. Unfortunately so deeply entrenched is the notion of gender which is subsequently bound with cultural expectations and ideology that black men and women living in England may often face a dual cultural expectation from both their immediate and greater community because of the expectations placed on their gender. Tellingly, the men in Black British literature are often expected to be act less with less authority and assume the status of "boys" within their new home – a reinforcement of the fact that they were neither wanted not accepted and that there is an inherent conflict between the values of their traditional cultural norms and the new dominant dorms. However, the women are often pitied as being overly passive and repressed and tacitly encouraged to rebel and expand on their roles. If gender is cultural conditioning then it follows that women and men can learn to overcome their

innate obstacles of expectation, character and inhibitions to control their identities, exhibit authority and learn to take charge of their fates.

As previously mentioned in the outline for chapter two it cannot be assumed that women automatically reject their traditions and embrace the new culture. The stereotype of the immigrant woman – and maybe of women everywhere – is a woman who holds the family together through self-sacrifice and hard work. As depicted in the film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) the older women still dress in traditional clothing and only associate with other immigrants. It is in their best interest to enforce traditional values and roles because within this framework, they have prestige and honor. According to Tarquin Hall, young Asian girls on Brick Lane adopt traditional dress in order to earn their parents' approbation in order to gain more freedom while good Muslim fathers wonder if they should educate their daughters or marry them off. What is evident though is that the members and connectivity of the woman's community become the deciding factor as to whether a woman embraces or refutes the community's norm. Chapter Three examines ways in which immigrant Women of color in Britain redefine their community and identity. For example, Tanya from Meera Syal's novel *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* (2000) is a successful TV producer but is pitied by her father's community because she is not married. A weak or absent immediate community is an incentive for a female immigrant to change and adopt new customs or ways of thinking. For example, Nanzeen from *Brick Lane* (2003) was for many years a model wife but after the 9/11 bombings she finds her Muslim community is under attack by neighbors who now view them with suspicion. She steps out of her traditional role in an effort to make sense of life for herself and her daughters and in doing so comes to understand the community was already broken and

she must make a determination of how she wants her daughters to be raised, even if it means putting her and her children's needs before her husband's.

If a woman's identity and role can be fluid, so too can notions of what makes a dark skinned woman attractive. Chapter four is concerned with the currency black women hold based on their skin color and perceived beauty and how this perception translates into their relationship with their communities, their sense of self identity and their ability to assimilate. Too often black women who are born into a white dominated culture are measured by "white" standards of beauty and as a result worry about their hips being too wide, their noses too flat, and their hair too kinky. This constant wanting of acceptance – in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) Irie longs to be thin and blond because she longs to be noticed by a particular man – and this denial – even when Irie straightens her hair, she doesn't win her love's regard – leads not only to a poor self identity but forces the woman into a position of always being "other." If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then immigrant women are facing several criteria in which their demeanor, physical attributes and skin tone are being measured and too often found wanting. For example, a lighter skin tone is considered more desirable since for the traditional community it denotes prestige whereas for the outside culture lighter skin is more palatable. In the novel *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee*, Chila a dark skinned woman marries, to everyone's surprise, a successful, lighter skinned man, and Kulwant from *A Wicked Old Woman* tires of trying "to rub off her brown skin." Even when a black woman receives sexual attention from whites it can be viewed with suspicion as in Joan Riley's novel *Romance* where Verona is condemned by family and friends for dating white men who they assume can't have true feelings for her. Finally, the fifth chapter studies the question of what happens

to immigrants once they have entered the mainstream society and how questions of wealth, class status (both self perceived and allotted), and race snobbery affect their attitudes. Not surprisingly, it seems that wealth and the assumption of a status of middle class, has made immigrant populations more accepting of the dominant ideology. Immigrants such as C.L.R. James who came to study in England in the 1930s recalls there was no talk of race and he was accepted by his fellow students at Cambridge whereas, as documented by Learie Constantine in "The Color Bar" (1954), the immigrants from the West Indies who came to work were resented by the lower classes because they were competing for the same jobs and housing and how black immigrants were victimized by institutionalized racism. Although the class system is deeply ingrained in the English psyche, white English people do not necessarily recognize class differences among blacks or fully understand that among black and brown people there is racism. Says Amrit Wilson in her piece "It's not like Asian Ladies to Answer Back" (1976) in the 1970s factory bosses failed to realized that Indians from India were of the peasant caste whereas Indians from Africa were chiefly middle class which meant that the latter would be emboldened to ask for more equity in the workplace. Now that several generations of im/migrants (to borrow Susheila Nasta's styling) have established itself, a curious status quo has established itself among the black population. As chronicled in Tarquin Hall's *Salaam Brick Lane,* Brick lane has been taken over by Bangladeshi landlords who think nothing of exploiting recent immigrants.

The Evolution of British Literature

The acceptance of modernism and postmodernism has opened up themes in literature that have hitherto not been made available. Bruce King sees the

internationalization of British literature in the last 30 years as the next dominant movement in British Literature. In his book on 1990s British fiction, Nick Bentley echoes this when he attributes one of the causes of such richness of depth to British literature as an emphasis on globalization, identities both regional and national. This trend can been seen in the richness and diversity of the works by Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, Brien Friel, James Kelman, Caryl Churchill, Monica Ali, Jackie Kay, Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali, Joan Riley, Ravinder Randhawa, Meera Syal and Gurinder Chadha.

In reviewing some of these names, one may be left with the impression that Great Britain has indeed embraced its multicultural nature and afforded equal status to all its citizens. Such rosy sentiments however, would be false. When it comes to claiming a place in history, the dominant cultural influence will always seek to impose its version over other dissenting voices. The balance of power is at stake and the fight to maintain power is not necessarily sexist or racist although it often takes that form. Those who "have" are unfortunately too invested in the dominant ideology to easily share with "minority or "subculture" factions. Tarquin Hall's gritty account of his year in the "new" East End easily bears this out as he recounts how Indian slum landlords cheerfully exploit new immigrants, mostly form Eastern Europe. If Britain continues to examine its Englishness and the movement of regionalism takes hold then soon being a Londoner a Liverpudlian, Glaswegian and so forth may very become the standard of identity, thus making skin tone and place of origin less of a pejorative and become a way to truly celebrate the multicultural nature of Britain.

NOTES

[1] In this speech Powell warned of the ruination of Britain because of its open immigration policies, warned immigrants will fail to integrate and concluded somewhat hyperbolic: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood' " (Freedom, 288-90.) Powell was subsequently dismissed from his cabinet position.

[2]My aunt who is of Indian and European stock, commented, "They [the British] called us Black but we *weren't*"

[3] See http://www.movinghere.org.uk/

[4]See http://whatenglandmeanstome.co.uk

[5]Stoppard was later disowned by his stepfather and discovered that he was of Jewish descent, a fact his mother thought best to hide. Presumably he still considers himself to be English.

[6] The writer and activist Ravinder Randhawa was born in India in 1952 and grew up in Warwickshire. She was the cofounder of the Asian Women Writers' Collective, which she has since left. The novel was published in 1987 by The Women's Press but was never a commercial success.

[7]Elaine Showalter at a lecture at the Free Library of Philadelphia, March 10, 2009.

[8]The book was republished in 1970 and then went back out of print. In 2007 it was republished under the New York Books Review Classics imprint and is now available through Amazon.

[9] Unfortunately while some of these stereotypes have faded, they remain in play when religion, especially the Muslim religion is a factor. Through a lack of understanding, there is a thought that women in particular are forced to leave schools, marry and live subjugated lives.

[10]See the respective works of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Mikahil Bahktin and Ferdinand De Saussure**.**

CHAPTER 2: RECONCILING THE AUTHORITY OF GENDER: WAYS IMMIGRANT MEN AND WOMEN RENEGOTIATE AND PERFORM THEIR ROLES AS "MALE" AND "FEMALE"

"But in proposing gender as a basic problem and an essential category in cultural and historical analysis, feminists have recast the issue of women's relative identity as equally an issue for men, who upon ceasing to be mankind, become, precisely, men."
- Myra Jehlen, "Gender"

"Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated. This "being a man" and this "being a woman" are internally unstable affairs."
- Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*

Since the late 1950s there has been a rich tradition of stories in Black British literature chronicling how a black man's identity is shaped through the immigration experience but very little on the dynamics of interrelations between black men and women immigrants. This started to change in the 1980s when a Black British Literature started to chronicle how immigration constructs and reconstruct both the expectations of gender and the authority of gender and how both men and women are affected. This chapter will look at several films and novels from this period including: Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Joan Riley's *Romanc*e (1988), Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Gurinder Chadha's films *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003) and *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and will investigate what happens to concepts of gender roles for men and women from Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds when the act of migration forces them to refute the cultural conditioning they have internalized and acted out from birth and develop a new self identification when it comes to providing for their families/self, establishing a

home and finding work. Without a doubt immigrant wives *and* husbands *and* children, regardless of color change, have become marked by the immigrant experience. However, the afore mentioned works capture an interesting phenomena in which the man often seems to cede his authority of gender when entering into a new society where his inherent authority is questioned and sometimes dismissed by the dominant norm and consider how this relinquishing of authority damages the male ego, stripping him of the role as provider for the family and setting up a conflict between the old cultural norms in which he is invested and the new norms which he distrusts and feels no allegiance to. This leaves a breach within the family unit, and sometimes the immigrant woman is forced to step into breach. I agree with Hazel Carby who says it should not be assumed an immigrant woman's life is automatically better because she moved to England. However in the stories that Chadha, Smith, Levy, etc. create, the women are forced into a third space primarily because of an essential passivity of the male(s) around them that enables the transformation for the woman to grow in ways that might not have been possible before.

To start, one must examine our notion of how we think about the concept of sex and gender. The dynamics of Judith Butler's argument that "male" and "female" are mere labels that are reinforced through cultural conditioning is illustrated in a scene from Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (*1885*)*. In the scene, Huck disguises himself as a girl and enters town to learn if he and his companion, a runaway slave, are still being pursued. He meets Judith Loftus who quickly deduces he is no girl not because his appearance is flawed, but his *performance* is. In deconstructing the scene, Myra Jehlen contends "[a]s a social construction femininity has its standard parts" and Mrs. Loftus is quick to tell Huck he has shown himself not to be a girl because:1) he cannot

thread a needle 2) is able to throw straight and 3) failed to use his skirt to catch a ball. Continues Jehlen, "The precision with which Mrs. Loftus describes how a girl does throw necessarily implies equal knowledge of how boys do it. She can detail femininity because she sees it as a role, which must mean masculinity is also a role. The logic of this is that anyone who knows the rules can play, boy or girl, man or woman" (268). Therefore, if one accepts this premise, the actual biological assigned gender has little relevance. Jehlen's argument reinforces Butler's assertion that since sex/gender is a performance the designation of what makes a man and woman transcends "normal" heterosexual dynamics. In other words, men and women can overcome cultural training to take on and put off at will the mantle of gender. This is not so outlandish when one considers how cultural studies critic Raymond Williams delineates the use of *secus* or *sexus* as evolving from meaning "the male or female section of humanity" to the implicit binary of the "weaker sex" the "fairer sex" the "gentle sex" or the "second sex" (283) when applied to women[1]. Thus the word sex evolved, as language often does, to codify the attitudes of the prevailing society and to reinforce its ideology especially when there are no real indicators that women are any less capable than men. A woman's role and how she should enact it is very much tied to her *perceived* function within the society rather than her *potential* function. As a young girl she may be feted and courted – assuming she has the combined attributes of looks and perceived desirability, which depending on the era or culture may be wealth, family lineage or hip size. Mary Wollestonecraft said it best when in 1792 she decried the fact that British middle class women were relegated to the status of soulless creatures "designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of

contemplation" (25). This stereotypical view of woman centers on her reproductive nature and centers on her function as a future wife and mother. Can it be possible that a woman's sole purpose in society is reduced to her reproductive function? Even when a woman biologically moves beyond this phase, she is still forced to live up to a gendered stereotyping and in some non western cultures as a middle aged woman, a woman may be valued for the nurturing and order she brings to her family or as an old woman she may be looked to as a source of wisdom, roles which continue the idea that she is the nurturer. However, women routinely do not meet these gendered expectations and in the case of migration are sometimes forced to redefine how they see and enact their role in their new homes as the works of Samuel Selvon and Andrea Levy show.

The "exile" novels published in the 1950s and 1960s by Samuel Selvon and George Lamming, established as Curdella Forbes argues, "the dissolution and reconstitution of gender [is] a feature of migration, or particular kinds of alien spaces" (77). Thus one can argue the authority of gender belongs to the person who has an understanding of it within its cultural context, feels invested in it and is able and willing to perform it convincingly. Forbes claims quite convincingly that Moses and the boys in Selvon's seminal novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) have ceded their masculinity by coming to England because gender is a construct that is 1) cultural 2) accepted 3) assumed and 4) performed. In her book *From Nation to Diaspora,* Forbes highlights in the "exile" novels – so called because they center on the journey from home and the harshness of life in Britain – how it is apparent that the protagonist moves from his native home which is warm, familiar and accepting to the harsh coldness of London where he is

not accepted as British or even as an equal and where he is ultimately stripped of his masculine role within British society.

Thus in Selvon's novel, Moses, a black man, leaves his native land and becomes a second-class citizen in England where he and his friends are reduced to the status of boys with little or no responsibilities and are thus free to gratify their basic needs without even the caveat of having to provide for the family. Moses and his friends are in a suspended state where the old cultural norms no longer apply. They have no family with them. They are unable to get decent jobs – they apply for engineering or managerial positions for which they are qualified but because of their skin color are, instead, given janitorial positions. Their housing, when they can find it, is always temporary. Without established homes, the men in Selvon's novel are constantly moving from basement to basement or attic space to attic space, the only spaces available to them through a combination of discrimination by white landlords and the general housing shortage in post World War II Britain.[2] They lack the means or the expectation to establish a family home in their present country; after all the last thing their white neighbors want is for them to stay and bring more people over and it is a message this group of migrant men have internalized. Although some of the men send money "back home" they are no longer required to assume the mantle of masculinity in British society and some of them prefer it that way. In essence their migration is an exile from an ordered society where their place was clearly defined to an existence where they have no responsibilities and nothing is culturally expected of them. Hence they spend their time working, drinking and fornicating with "easy" girls.

It is telling that in *The Lonely Londoners* the men only go with white girls who are

careful not to be seen with them socially but, who, for the price of a movie ticket or meal, return to their bedsits for furtive sex. The men avoid dark skinned women who are inherently dangerous because they hold possible expectations of the West Indian immigrants and might expect them to act like men and form real relationships, get married, and start a family instead of playing at being boys. There is a comical scene in the novel when Moses witnesses a fellow countryman's dismay who goes to pick up his mother at Waterloo Station only to realize she has brought along his aunt, his brother Lewis, the brother's wife Agnes and two children[3]. "Oh God ma, why you bring all these people with you?' he exclaims. Continues Selvon, "Tolroy start to shiver with a kind of fright" (Selvon 30). Tolroy's fright is more than the necessity of having to find lodgings for his family; it is the realization that now he will have to act the "man" and the fear that he will fail to perform successfully this role. The latter fear is well founded. Since Tolroy abdicates his responsibilities as the "male" it is Tanty, a woman who is not limited by the roles of mother or wife as she is neither, who assumes a masculine role in which she brings order to the housing situation and finds jobs for everyone. The argument could be made that Tolroy has been browbeaten into subservience by the hostility of being a black man in 1950s England, but Tanty, preoccupied as she is with finding living quarters and food for her family, cannot afford to allow her white neighbor's disdain to affect her. She sets about creating order to her corner of the world and reorganizes her new neighborhood to reflect Jamaican culture: she browbeats the local grocery store into stocking Jamaican items and talks the owner into extending credit, a custom he deplores but is common among Jamaicans. Her actions relieve Tolroy of the need to assume responsibility so he can continue to gad about:

"'How the family?' Moses say, remembering Waterloo.

'Boy, I not worrying my head,' Tolroy say. 'The old lady get a work at Lyons washing dish, and Tanty staying at home to mind the children and cook the food.'

Moses say: 'Your business good'" (Selvon 68).

The argument can be made that once the family unit is established it is imperative that a masculine role, one in which the "man" provides for the family and keeps the family unit strong be established in order for the family unit to flourish. In Tolroy's case, he has abdicated this role, in fact been stripped of it, on this arrival to Britain and it is perforce assumed by Tanty. Taking on the role of masculinity means that Tanty is free to act as she pleases, "Everybody in the district get to know Tanty so well that she doing as she like" (Selvon 80).

Not only does Tanty assume the freedom associated with the masculine traits of being assertive and confident, she consequently assumes the authority of gender in which she has the power to decide and act on what is and not acceptable behavior in her family. Tanty's nephew Lewis, newly arrived in Britain, starts to beat his wife Agnes because he suspects her of being unfaithful and only Tanty questions this behavior. The implication is that wife beating is not necessarily unheard of in their native Jamaica but what can be inferred is that what was once behavior that would have been allowed to pass by without comment because the male has the ability to enforce his will as he sees fit in his household is now under scrutiny. While it is highly likely that Tanty held a position of

respect and matriarchal power in her native Jamaica, she probably would not have interfered with Lewis if they had been in Jamaica because she would have been confined in her role of "female." It is a different story in Britain because by assuming the male role, Tanty also has acquired power to enforce her will on her immediate family and judge what is right. Tanty also redefines what is acceptable behavior for the men. Tanty considers the situation between Agnes and Lewis unacceptable: "'Why you don't leave that man for good?' Tanty say. 'He always beating you for nothing. Why he beat you this time?'" (Selvon 69).

Here the order of the words in this statement is significant. Tanty makes it clear that beating is not acceptable when "there is no reason." In all likelihood Lewis beat his wife with impunity in Jamaica but in England. Tanty questions such behavior not necessarily because she is accepting British cultural norms but because as a figure of authority she understands these beatings are an unjust act and that it is her duty to act. If they had been in Jamaica, Tanty would not have given Agnes advice to leave since she would have had nowhere to go. Using her newfound power, Tanty advises Agnes to not only leave Lewis but to take action against him. Tanty believes that the British legal system will protect Agnes and is quick to turn to it. Her arguments eventually convince Agnes. After Agnes leaves, Tolroy comes around to Tanty to tell her that she can send Agnes back to his house:

> '''Where Agnes?' he ask Tanty.
>
> 'Tell she is all right, she could come home now.'
>
> 'Agnes not here,' Tanty say" (Selvon 69).

Lewis instinctively accepts that Tanty is a voice of authority and if she tells Agnes to return, Agnes will. Unfortunately for him, Tanty does not do his bidding and Agnes fails to return. Stripped of his wife and any real duties to his family, Lewis' status as "boy" is solidified:

> Lewis went by Moses to learn how to be a bachelor. He ask Moses all sorts of funny questions, like how he does live alone, what he does do with dirty clothes, how to boil rice and peas. About a month after Agnes left him Lewis get in with a little thing and he forget all about married life (Selvon 71).

The above passage is a fair indicator of what Agnes' role was to Lewis. She was the one who cooked for him, cleaned his clothes and slept with him when he needed someone. He could say he loved her and that was why he was jealous of her, but essentially she was his possession and he wasn't about to share her, a fact he felt he needed to physically reinforce. Thus he condemned her unjustly and took his frustrations out on her knowing that she would understand that it was her place to forget and make up. But when she leaves, he is only momentarily nonplussed and quickly replaces her with another woman who will give him sex but does not expect him to play the man and be responsible for a family. Lewis' pattern of behavior is probably something Agnes would have accepted if not for Tanty who has decreed it unacceptable.

By assuming "masculine" traits, Tanty becomes self-determining and becomes a person of action. In the process she stretches her boundaries in ways that would not have been possible in Jamaica. One day Tanty needs to travel across London on an errand and

sets out confident that she can find her way alone: “But was plenty different when she find sheself in the station, and the idea of going under the ground in this train nearly make she turn back. But the thought that she would never be able to say she went made her carry on” (Selvon 82) No one would fault her for not making the journey but Tanty, an old woman alone in London, would lose face if she didn’t and tamps down her misgivings thereby exhibiting an almost male like sense of self-pride in which she defines herself by her actions instead of being a passive woman. Tanty is responsible for enforcing some Jamaican ways in her neighborhood i.e. by getting credit at the local store, and she feels comfortable in adopting “new ways” such as condemning wife beating when it suits her views. Tanty is selective in what she approves or disapproves and she never loses sight of her main goal, which is to provide continuity and harmony in her household. When offered “native” English food she exclaims, “‘What!...eat this English food when I have peas and rice waiting home to cook? You must be mad!” (Selvon 83). Here Tanty does more than all the “boys” in the novel have done: she has measured and found some aspects of English culture as beneath her notice. While the boys are busy distracting themselves, they have lost a core part of their identity whereas in direct contrast Tanty has established her parameters and standards and she will uphold them. She has assumed authority and will wield it.

To paraphrase Forbes, the character Tanty is a perfect example of how gender is conceptualized and is composed of 1) allocation: who gets to be the authority figure; 2) investiture: what the person gains or loses and how much of their self identity they invest in their role; 3) assumption of role: how successful is the performance of the gender role, and 4) Identity: the strength of the gender identification. In conclusion Forbes argues

gender roles are 1) cultural 2) accepted 3) assumed and 4) performed and that if you strip away a man or a woman's culture, then the unexpected may happen. Thus while Selvon's novel centers on the male psyche it has as one of its strongest and steadiest "males" a minor character who is biologically female.

Forbes is clearly influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the carnival. In reviewing Bakhtin's concept of the carnival, we come to understand that the carnival is held to be a space that removes barriers of economic structure and political ideology and unites people by allowing them to enter and assume identities or masques thus performing in a way unlike their normal selves. Moses, the protagonist of *The Lonely Londoners* has been in England for longer than he ever thought to be and expresses mild surprise that so much time has passed but exhibits no real intentions of moving on with his life or returning home. Presumably as Bakhtin describes it, this role-playing is a liberating experience providing the assumption of the masque is voluntary. However, the application of this concept to novels of black British fiction detailing the immigrant experience falls short of liberation. While it might seem like liberation for the men to drop their performed masculine roles, closer examination reveal the men are not united with the others i.e. British society at the carnival for the simple reason that the racial barrier has not fallen. The unity that occurs is between the whites that live in England who have united despite their class and economic divisions against the black men entering their society, thus forcing the black immigrants to assume and retain a masque not necessarily of their choosing and to perforce act the fool. Moses and his friends are an embodiment of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque, which is closely tied to the carnival, in that they are marking the passage of time by satisfying their desires for food and heat –

when they can afford it – and indulging in sexual liaisons with women who can have no expectation of building a relationship/home with them. Ultimately the men in Selvon's novel have been forced to cede their masculinity and have in effect become powerless to do anything but attend to their needs for sex, food, and evacuation.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) serves as a nice juxtaposition to *The Lonely Londoners*. Written some forty years later, the novel deals with immigration from the woman's viewpoint as Hortense comes to England in what is essentially a marriage of convenience, one she has engineered because she wanted to come to England. She paid for Gilbert's passage on the condition that he marry her and send for her when he has found a place to live. Here the gender roles are clearly delineated in Hortense's head. Gilbert is to act as the scout and in his capacity of "man" find them a home befitting her. An English teacher, Hortense, has a high opinion of herself and while she was waiting, she has planned for their new lives and household. She has waited for months to sail to England to join her husband and when she arrives finds herself alone at the docks with a too-heavy trunk that she has packed with everything they need for their new life. Her arrival is a cold, disorientating one. She hails a taxi to his place of residence only to find – in her eyes – a slatternly white woman who is the landlady when she had assumed she would own the place. Her husband's lodging is a poky flat up three flights of stairs and contains one bed, two chairs, a sink and a hotplate and with a shared bathroom on the first floor. She looks around in disdain and asks in anger "Just this? Just this? You bring me all the way for just this?" (Levy, 17). Her censure angers Gilbert, who understands she is actually questioning his ability to provide for her. He leaves the room to fetch her

trunk only to run into a grifter friend of his who suggests Gilbert sell the trunk. When Gilbert says he cannot because it belongs to his wife, Winston replies:

> "Me caan believe what me ear is hearing. You a man. She just come off the boat – you mus' show who boss. And straight way so no bad habit start. A wife must do as her husband say. You ask a judge. You ask a policeman. They will tell you. Everyt'ing in that trunk belong to you. What is hers is yours and if she no like it a little licking will make her obey" (Levy 19).

Winston's appeal to authority – a judge, a policeman – sums up the legalized gendered division in England during the 1940s. The man was to be obeyed and the woman was to obey. The fact that Winston is black doesn't bar him from understanding and reinforcing this "male" concept. It is Gilbert's failure to enact this "maleness" that is in a way his saving grace. He is an honorable man. He understands that being black in England is difficult and doesn't want to make Hortense, an almost stranger but the person he is committed to providing for, more uncomfortable. Perhaps what explains this dynamics of her questioning is that Hortense financed Gilbert's trip. Considering the economics, she feels she has a right to question the outcome of her investment and perhaps he feels she has that right also. He is passive, partially through apathy and partially through empathy at her plight his authority as a man has been battered in his sojourn in England and he doesn't want her to undergo the same, and he doesn't initially fight back. Levy uses the character Hortense to play with gender performance and to "talk back" to Selvon. Freshly arrived from Jamaica, Hortense performs her role of what

she thinks an English lady would be. She wears gloves and wears neat attire and pronounces her words with rounded vowels. This performance is not only rejected by the local whites but ridiculed: she is derided for her garish clothing and her habit of overdressing, and her accent is mocked. Worse still is the secretary at the school who with palpable relief dismisses her teaching certificate as unacceptable. Hortense understands that in this woman's eyes she will never be acceptable because of her color and the fact she was born in Jamaica. This cavalier treatment by the secretary causes Hortense to break down. Her investment in her identity and in Gilbert, whom she secretly thought was a step beneath her, has been devalued and it is telling that it is this degradation that is the moment when she and her husband despite transcending their self assigned roles of man and wife become people who are being wronged for the simple fact of their skin and accent.

While the initial encounter between man and wife immediately sets up a conflict in which the man feels as if he is being belittled, since she essentially is decrying the fact he has failed to live up to his role as "man and provider" and she feels he tricked her and is not willing to be a good wife and be quiet, good comes from it. By not being a quiet "woman" who is willing to let her husband direct her course, Hortense forces Gilbert to step up and be the "man." Gilbert who it has already been established is not a violent man, has started to drift and accept the fact that he is not an equal in Britain, but is willing to accept his wife's point of view in order to reclaim his manhood. At the end of the novel, the couple is truly united and have forged a real relationship, found a house and adopted a son, the mixed race child of their former white landlady Queenie Bligh, who had a brief affair with a Jamaican soldier. As Gilbert negotiates his new role as

father and husband, he is emboldened to strut his stuff as a male. When Mr. Bligh the husband of Queenie gives Gilbert grieve as they are leaving for their new home, Gilbert responds:

> You know what your trouble is, man? he said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man. White. No better, no worse than me – just white (Levy, 435).

With these words Gilbert carves a place for himself in his new home, a place where he can respect himself and think of himself as a man versus the "boys" who are so prevalent in Selvon's novel. Hortense, the mouthy uppity woman who had seized authority on her arrival, witnesses the moment of Gilbert's emancipation and subsequently acknowledges Gilbert's authority. He gains legitimacy in her eyes not only because he "talks back" to Mr. Bligh but because he has fulfilled his role of provider by providing her with a new home. Perhaps she also softens because their relationship has turned intimate but the mouth women who bossed her husband around rewards her husband by "allowing" him to perform his role. At the end of the novel, Hortense is waiting to go to her home and is looking over her new son when she realizes Queenie has secreted some money and a picture of herself into the child's clothing. She decides not to tell Gilbert about the money because "this man's pride would surely insist that the items were returned" (Levy 438). It is the first time Hortense exhibits any consideration of Gilbert's pride. Returning to

Derné's argument that women have diverse positions on cultural engendering, Hortense who had initially challenged the cultural assumptions, once she has gained what she wants, respect from her man, a decent home, and a child, voluntarily relinquishes some of her authority in order to protect Gilbert's pride as a man and ensure harmony in her new home. Hortense's performance as "woman" is found to be changeable and fluid. Initially she takes on male like tendencies to spur Gilbert into acting out his male role and when he takes charge of their family, she reverts to the more traditional role of woman-wife in which she nurtures his pride and implicitly acknowledges his authority.

If, as Raymond Williams argues, in the current terminology "sex" no longer refers to a section of humanity but the physical act of sexual relations, then one might ask as does Maria Mies what is the value of a "woman" in society beyond the pleasure she brings to a man and her potential for childbearing? (22). For Mies, the value of women, especially third-world women, lies in their function in the capital system. Mies argues the oppression of women is systematically carried out because in a patriarchal society the oppression of women fuels the ideology of capitalism, which is dedicated to pushing products and making a profit for the few at the expense of the many. Women become the living embodiment of Marx's argument that "The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and worker as commodity – and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally" (765). Women workers in general are cheap commodities. Perhaps this is true because the general cultural role of women is to be the nurturer to the children and serve the best interest of the household. It

holds true that when the majority of women enter the workplace they are paid less than their male counterparts and are expected to be grateful for it.[4] The irony is that of course, they often are, a situation Catherine Hakim concludes is "…a paradox in [the] women's labour force participation. On the one hand women are concentrated in the lowest grade, least skilled and lowest paid jobs with poorest employment benefits and prospect. On the other hand women report high levels of satisfaction" (101). As "third-world" women who are transplanted to Britain, Alsana in *White Teeth* (2000) and Nazneen in *Brick Lane* (2003*)* both under take piece work in which they sew clothing for mass consumption of the dominant culture - but which they themselves would never wear because it would not be allowed in their traditional culture and more importantly, nor do they have the desire to - and for which they are paid a meager wage. Yet this poor paying job becomes a source of empowerment for the women because they have been able to carve out a space for themselves in which they are enacting a different role and start to expand their expectations of gender. Perhaps if they had been the third world women still living in their native land as Mies suggests their lot would not be a happy one because the infrastructure of "third-world" cultures too often repeat the old colonialist hierarchy. As Mahasweta Devi relays in her stories "The Hunt" and "Douloti the Bountiful" once the white master leaves, the new brown master continues to exploit the people for gain. What Mies doesn't take into account in her statement is that poverty isn't completely gendered. In the caste system of India both men and women on the bottom rung are doomed to poverty. This changes for them when they move to a new country where they may be despised for their skin color, accent or point of origin but where frankly few people care about their previous social standing.

While it is true working for wages allow Nazneen and Alsana to perform beyond their limited roles of mother and wife, both women were already carving out their own spaces. The empowerment Alsana gains is an internal one. She willing defines herself as a wife and mother but on her own terms. Alsana rejects one of the tenets of being "woman" by voluntarily ceasing to be an object of desire to her husband Samad Iqbal. After the birth of their twin boys she refuses to sleep with him again; here it is important to note that *she* denies him sex and he accepts *her* decision. This is an important role reversal when one considers how the state apparatus of religion and cultural norms has traditionally and historically upheld the man's right to sexual congress within the confines of marriage. Nazneen on the other hand starts to question her role of wife, mother and lover when she finally realizes how her beautiful and alluring sister Hasina has been reduced to a body that must take lovers in order to survive. This realization is especially poignant for Nazneed in the aftermath of 9/11 when how she is perceived by others as a "Muslim woman" suddenly changes for the worst.

Alsana, a fat woman, is concerned with her own comfort and satisfying her appetites which do not require Samad Iqbal's presence. She cooks and wears what she wants without worrying about how her husband perceives her sexually because she is simply not interested. Alsana has literally unmanned Samad Iqbal who resorts to masturbation – an abomination in his religion – and, temporarily, to the even worst crime of having an affair with a white woman. In order to supplement the household income, Alsana makes garments that are destined for sex shops: crotch-less panties, vinyl trousers and corsets. These items are far removed from her life and, occasionally, her comprehension, yet she doesn't question them. Her practical streak focuses on meeting

her quota so she can make the money she needs.

Nazneen on the other hand is still in a physical relationship with her husband as she cuts his toenails and sleeps with him, and in the novel it is apparent that she and Chanu share affection[5]. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, serve as a catalyst for Nazneen, who had for the previous 17 years enacted the traditional Muslim cultural roles of wife subordinate to Allah and husband. While Nazneen's children, two girls, are torn between the two cultures and their father's erratic dictates on what they should wear: regular school uniform one day, trousers underneath them another, Nazneen is isolated and has no interaction with the larger/dominant white culture of her adopted home. However after 9/11 it filters through into her world to such an extent that she and her kind, people who seem to have Muslim ties, are considered suspect. She becomes involved in a Muslim fundamentalist group mainly because she is seeking answers and has come to realize that in the post 9-11 world she has everything to gain by learning about and constructing her own identity. Early in her marriage Nazneen came to realize that her manner of dress, her timidity and her lack of facility in the English language fed into the stereotype white people projected on to her; in a way she was smug about it because she felt her "true" self to be protected from their gaze. For a long while she was content to let first her father and then her husband dictate to her. Her decision to go to the fundamentalist group is her first bid for self-discovery. She is deeply disturbed by world events but has no frame of reference for them and for the first time she is not content with her husband's explanations. This first step leads her to a series of self actualizations: she obtains a sewing machine without Chanu's permission and starts a job sewing – thus

contributing to the household income and making him feel as if the roles of provider have been reversed, especially since he has just quit his job after failing to win a promotion.

As she is beginning to "liberate" herself from the confining role of good wife and mother, Nazneen finds herself in an almost clichéd relationship with a younger man. If Nazneen's motivation is lust or sexual release, any pleasure she experiences is temporary. He comes to her house for furtive sex in the afternoon, she cleans the room when they are done and fixes him a meal. He then collects the clothing she has worked on and leaves. She eventually ends the relationship with her lover Karim whose attitudes and physical appearance have grown increasingly more conservative as a reflection of his growing fundamentalist beliefs. Nazneen knows a life with Karim who assumes she will divorce Chanu to marry him will require that she be subservient to him and suddenly she is no longer willing to cede the authority for her life. It is also implied that Karim will always blame Nazneen for the adulterous affair the two had. Thus when Nazneen finds she is not willing to accept Karim's projections of her prescribed role as his wife, she breaks off with him. When they first meet, Karim is a young man who is more British than Muslim or black. He dresses in western clothing, prefers to speak English, but speaks his "native" tongue in a thick British accent, shows typical impatience with his father who constantly phones him on his mobile and is interested in moving on up in the world. After 9/11, however, he becomes withdrawn and distressed by how he is being perceived by neighboring whites[6] that view him with suspicion and he is angry with the youths who post anti-Muslim literature in his neighborhood. Theoretically stripped of his identity as a British citizen and the innate authority that comes with acceptance within the dominant white community, Karim in an attempt to refute his British-ness adopts orthodox Muslim

traditions – he grows a bead, changes his dress and seeks to regain his identity by enforcing his authority on his lover Nazneen. Nazneen's affair with Karim, which is undertaken for immediate sexual gratification, makes her more male like in the sense that she *acts* on her desires and doesn't fear the consequences, she is discreet but feels no guilt, and male-like as she doesn't confuse her body's needs with an emotional one. This clarity plus the willingness not to give in to the shame of being a woman who has know carnal lust, allows Nazneen the strength to resist making the relationship permanent and end the affair with no regrets. Concurrently her husband Chanu decides to return to his beloved India and when Nazneen refuses to go, he leaves Nazneen and her children in England. Chanu's decision to return to India is his last bid to regain the authority that he believes is his due as an educated man, a role he would define as being respected, admired and listened to. His life in England has been unsatisfactory. He has had a dead end job and been constantly passed over for promotion. His last delight was his home life – he had a wife who was a good traditional woman and two young children he could mold. However as his children grow older, he comes to understand he has no authority over them: they are British and share in British cultural values, something he will never be able to do because he can never be British. Chanu is forever the outsider the person who has come from elsewhere and his elder daughter has taken to mocking him for being such. He comes to understand that his good, traditional wife has cuckolded him. He doesn't confront her but he internalizes the realization that he has become impotent as an authority figure within his family. The move to India is his last ditch attempt to rid himself of the stench of failure and save face. It is something he has to do even at the cost of leaving the family behind when they refuse to come. He can no longer muster enough

authority to make them leave, but he can no longer stay. Ironically in his absence, Chanu not only preserves his dignity but becomes the male figure he always envisioned: one who is not a buffoon. Chanu and Nazneen continue to play out a variation of the male and female roles: she takes care of their children; he is the financial provider.

When Nazneen comes to understand that once she has stepped outside her prescribed role she is no longer bound by it, she chooses not to play the dutiful wife. One could also argue that in the process she becomes a better self realized person and a better mother because she has learned to listen to and nurture herself. With her husband absent and her lover given his walking papers, Nazneen echoes Alsana in becoming a non-sexual woman because she now has control of her own body - she remains in the marriage with Chanu without having to tend to his physical needs - and he still "provides" for her and their daughters thus preserving his authority of gender, man as provider. In addition, Nazneen who was taught to trust her fate is now writing her destiny; thus "male-like" she is making choices and is acting instead of being acted upon.

One unforeseen consequence of Alsana rethinking of herself as a gendered woman and refuting sex is her openness to other sexual choices. Her niece Neena is a lesbian. In the traditional model of what makes a woman and what makes a man and how the two should interact, Neena is an abomination because she has adjured the role of woman as mother and wife. Although Alsana routinely refers to Neena as "Niece-of-Shame" there is little heat in the epithet nor does she (Alsana) seem overtly scandalized. In fact, her niece is a frequent and welcome visitor to her house. It may be surmised that Alsana has ceased to judge women on their potential biological function and on a fundamental level her potent sexuality that is her attractiveness to her husband, is a

matter of indifference to her. Mimicking Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum," Alsana recognizes the familial relationship that exists between Neena and herself is a connection to be treasured for multiple reasons: (1) as women they, Rich would argue, are automatically sisters; (2) they actually have a familial relationship (niece-aunt) worth preserving; (3) they share a experience of being immigrants in a new land; and (4) they form part of each other's community especially since they are out of their "home" territory. Alsana's acceptance of Neena is also the recognition that despite her sexual proclivities, Neena still qualifies as a "woman." While her husband and sons suffer from carrying a legacy of living in a white dominant society, Alsana alone remains grounded because she goes by what her conscience tells her and doesn't pretend to a version of what her culture demands i.e. the quiet submissive wife who allows her husband to do as he sees fit. Alsana may seem silly but she has some good instincts and does not bow unquestioningly to male authority. She punishes her son Millat when he participates in a Muslim extremism group book burning because the behavior is reprehensible. She continues to love her son Magid who returns from his "exile" in India with a center parting in his hair, crisp shirts and a strident British accent, more "British" than when he left. She mocks her husband Samad for his boring stories of what he did in World War II and his pontification about faith because she sees him for what he is: a fat man who fails to own up to his own flaws.

Neither Alsana nor Nazneen embody the first generation immigrants Caryl Phillips writes about in *A New World Order* (2001) who quietly understand they are not accepted into the dominant culture and accept being mistreated in the hopes their children will be more accepted. Perhaps it is because they have arrived in England well after the

first wave of black immigrants or perhaps it is because they have no imagined relationship with England as a haven that will be full of expectations. Alsana retains her integrity by neither adapting to the "new" culture nor adhering rigidly to her "old" culture. She relinquishes romantic notions of her past and does not hold the white man as the scapegoat for her situation. Her house is nice, maybe not as nice as she would like, but still better than she could have expected in the old country and for this she is grateful. She is pragmatic and understands that people in her new country do things differently. Her attitude toward them is one of benign contempt. While her husband is railing against what could have been and should be, Alsana gets on with it. She makes peace with her life and while she stays in a relationship that to western eyes may seem traditional and typically third world – she cooks and cleans and is home centric, her husband going out into the world freely – it is clear there is nothing subservient about her and therefore she has redefined her own notion of what it is to be a woman within her cultural norms. Interestingly she is significantly younger (30 plus years) than her husband but beyond a mild confusion that he thought she would be "easier" to manage, he allows her to take the lead and doesn't really try to assert his role as dominant male. Similar to Chanu, Samad Iqbal has led a life of disappointment. His ancestor who according to family lore played a pivotal role in India's fight against the British has never been acknowledged and the British history books, when they mention him at all, castigate him as being a criminal; this Samad is on a futile quest to restore the authority of his ancestor and by extension his own authority. Samad Iqbal also considers himself a man of education but he has no recipients for erudite comments. He works as a waiter in his cousin's restaurant. He is a middle-aged man devoid of respect, admiration or any cultural authority based on his

male sex. Alsana's act of emasculating him is merely the last act of many within his existence. The Iqbals live at some distance from the rest of the South Asian immigrants and although the women consider Alsana uppity they are not really in a position to censure her. Thus Samad Iqbal's distance (he spends all his time with his white friend Archie, an arrangement that Alsana likes and in no way resents) and the physical distance between them and the other south Asians provides little resistance to Alsana's redefinition of her role.

In a similar way, Nazneen who as the good wife was so frustrated she would wake in the middle of the night and gorge herself on food comes to realize she isn't trapped in one notion of womanhood and can renegotiate her identity into something she can live with because she has a choice. Nazneen was raised to bear what could not be changed. She had been born prematurely and her parents left it to fate to see if she had survived. For four days she did not eat and on the fifth "clamped her mouth" on her mother's teat. Nazneen does not question and accepts her fate even when her father arranges a marriage between her and a stranger and sends her to England. She has no friends outside the few women in her building and seems strangely disconnected to her surroundings. On the surface she seems two dimensional – to western eyes a submissive, stereotypical Muslim woman. In the gaze of her family she is a good daughter, a satisfactory mother and wife. Yet she can't sleep at nights and gets up to eat solitary meals, trying vainly to fill an inner hunger.

For both Alsana and Nazneen unsexing themselves –and here I accept Williams' definition that the word sex has become indistinguishable from the act – allows them to find new freedom to express their desires and voice and gain the authority to act while the

unsexing of their husbands reduces them to impotence as male authority figures. While both Alsana and Nazneen remain in a husband-wife relationship they are distanced either physically or emotionally so that the traditional cultural trope of wife-female being subordinate to husband-male becomes moot.

Alsana's indifference to the requirements of her gender and her unwillingness to fit into the mode or social construction of devoted wife and nurturer of family and Nazneen refuting of her role of dutiful wife echoes Judith Butler's argument that the roles of "man" and "woman" transcend labeling and are learned behaviors which can be adopted or refuted at will.

Too often however, men and women practice gender roles as if they were fixed because the roles themselves are tied into a cultural norm and reinforced by society. So for example a man can hail from a society that defines "man" through an ideal of masculinity: hard drinking, womanizing, authoritarian in which the man becomes the "provider of the family" and anything less means he is less a man whereas a woman too often is trained and accepts the role of being obedient, and the facilitator and nurturer. When a person leaves one society for another in which his or her role is not valued (i.e. men are stripped of their inherent manhood and women are condemned for being too submissive) the resulting conflict between men and women and men/women and society sometimes leads to a change in how these men and women view themselves and their roles. And sometimes a woman realizes she is not locked into a specific role.

The allocation of fixed roles for "female" are also called into question in Gurinder Chadha's film *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003) and is the source of not only conflicts between generations of black women who are immigrants but also black women who are

British born; white women who can remember the rhetoric against immigrants; and, white women who have grown up with black classmates and not questioned it. The film also serves as way to lampoon certain cultural and sexist stereotypes. In the film, the Sikh mother Mrs. Bhamra (played by Shaheen Khan) tries to enforce traditional roles onto her daughters Pinky and Jessminder. She wants them to be demure and "nice" girls, which for her means they "appear" to be good and not shame her before her community. She also requires they learn to cook and make "suitable" marriages. However, the Indian mother's expectation is not so far removed from those of the white mother, Paula Paxton, (played by Juliet Stevenson) who derides her daughter for wearing sport bras instead of push up bras and laments "All I'm saying is, there's a reason why Sporty Spice is the only one without a fella!" Both mothers want their daughters to be happy. For them this means the girls *act* like girls and they simply cannot understand that not only do their daughters *choose* to play a game that is reserved for men but are good enough at it to earn scholarships. The film sets up a predictable triangle relationship between the Indian Jess (played by Parminder Nagra), the white Jules (played by Kiera Knightly) and the white coach Joe (played by Jonathan Rhys Meyers) in that both girls are attracted to Joe and while Jules might have a claim on Joe – they've know each other longer – he only has eyes for Jess and she for him. However the real tension in the film comes not from the romantic triangle but from the fact that each character subverts expectations of their roles within the norm of British society.

Jess, with her dark skin and long black hair looks like a traditional Indian girl but is born in England, sounds English and isn't a "typical Indian" girl because she has a love of football (Soccer) and idolizes Beckham. She respects her elders, is concerned with not

disappointing her family and even excels at her A levels so she can become a "top solicitor." Her mother is a stay at home mother. Her mother's ability to stay at home is not only culturally correct and traditional but signifies the Bhamra family's status. This wasn't always the case. As Jess explains to Joe, when she was a little girl she was severely burned attempting to make herself something to eat while her mother was working late. While Jess holds no ill will against her mother the implicit message echoes society's assumption that women should stay at home and tend to her children and if she neglects to do so, the children will suffer. Jess's father works at Heathrow airport and her sister is a travel agent. Jess is the embodiment of the immigrant's hope that the children will do better, get a white-collar job and become accepted in a society that doesn't always understand Indians and their customs. What makes Jess a standout character however is not that she is on the brink of fulfilling her parents' expectations but that she loves football and is good at it. Her parents had let her play when she was younger but disapproves when she tries to pursue it professionally. Initially neither parent approves of Jess' playing for an all-girls football team. Mr. Bhamra (Anupam Kheer) disapproves because he can't see the use of it and is afraid she will be hurt because the white Brits won't accept her and her talent (a cricket champion in his own country, Mr. Bhamra has not been able to forget the prejudice he experienced when he first arrived to England) and her mother scolds her because she considers playing football to be a childish occupation and wants Jess to understand that she is young woman and must act as such. Mrs. Bhamra urges Jess to learn how to make a complete Punjab dinner that will prove her worth as a potential wife. The last comment is telling because although the mother wants her daughter to have a career, for her it is all-important that Jess makes a suitable match with

a nice Indian boy and be a good wife (which includes cooking well, keeping house and being "respectable"). It is the latter role of wife that will define Jess in her mother's eyes.

When Jess meets Jules they immediately bond over their love for football and Jules recruits Jess for an all female team. The girls are now in a relationship of equality that surpasses racial or cultural barriers because they are striving against the same odds for one goal. Or as Yasmin Hussain says, "Chadha focuses on football as a culture and the significance of ideology and consciousness within it. She does this by exploring the relationship that football has with cultural formations of gender and race, by examining questions of agency and social constraints" (79). Although one is white and the other is Indian, both Jess and Jules are engaged in the subversive act of being female as they define it – self actualizing— and wanting to pursue a *male* activity by playing football professionally in football-mad England. At one point, Jules tells Jess that in the U.S. there is a football league for women and they dream of being part of it. Together the girls conspire to deceive Jess' parents so Jess can continue playing.

When Jules' mother meets Jess, whom she insists on calling by her full name of Jessminder, she is thrilled and coyly tells Jess she is lucky because her parents have probably already arranged a marriage between her and a nice doctor. The statement underscores Mrs. Paxton's cultural prejudices and her somewhat antiquated belief that being female means being dedicated to clothes and makeup and feminine enough to attract a husband whose occupation will reflect well on the female. Mrs. Paxton's dissatisfaction that Jules is an avid football player and eschews "feminine" things such as makeup and dating is a mainstay of her conversation. She momentarily looks on Jules' friendship with Jess with favor and asks Jess to teach Jules how to be a "proper young

lady" and to learn "respect for her elders." These phrases are clearly coded as being feminine. She sees Jess and codifies her as traditional – someone who is demure, nurturing, a good cook, respectful of her elders, accepting of her role to marry and nurture children and, unlike her daughter, willing to adopt a feminine appearance by wearing her hair long. Jess in her mind stands for everything she wants her daughter to strive for and it is clear that she has a fantasy that if Jules will only associate with proper females she will learn to emulate them. Jules tramples on her mother's dreams by telling her that Jess is a fellow footballer. Mrs. Paxton responds to this news by looking at Jess with doubt, as she tries to reconcile the physical attributes of Jess and her own stereotypical notions of what it means to be a female and Indian with the knowledge that Jess is also an athlete. Tessa Lovell reminds that when it comes to minority women and sports in England "The effects of racism are diverse and vary between different groups. … Asian women are often considered weak and passive, while Afro/Caribbean women are often depicted as aggressive and dominating." She goes on to assert "Sport, because of the nature of racism, is a more accessible leisure activity for Afro/Caribbean women than southern Asian women" (58-59). Thus Jess' involvement in sports shocks Mrs. Paxton because Jess is not acting the way she ought. However Jules is not in the least shocked by the idea a southern Asian girl can be good at football. The generational gap between Jules and her mother partially explains their different attitudes but frankly Jules loves the game and in the moment of recognizing Jess' talent she is able to let go of any stereotypical notions she may have harbored. Similarly Jess's mother is frustrated with her because there is no point in a good Indian girl wanting to be an athlete. The advent of non-white females into sports is something Ben Carrington welcomes hoping that it will

"provide a different set of cultural possibilities for Black Britons in challenging some of the masculinist assumptions of nationalistic sports politics" (155).

While Jess is willing to pursue her own desires i.e. football she also fails to be suitably female within her family as she doesn't let their wishes dictate her choice of boyfriend. While it is true she initially resists her attraction to Joe, it is not for fear of her family but because she thinks he belongs to Jules and she is abiding by a code of honor that says you don't steal your mate's guy. This lack of sexual competiveness is interesting because traditionally in books and films women are perceived to jockey against each other for a man's attention as if their only function was to attach themselves to a male because they had no legitimate existence outside of such a relationship. This is obviously not the case with Jules and Jess who have their eye on going professional with football.

The character of Joe, the third part of the triangle, is one that also undergoes a dynamic change that echoes Jess in the film. Also, an immigrant, he comes from Ireland and although white skinned understands he that doesn't have automatic status in England, where sentiment against the Irish denies him full white privilege. This lack of acceptance in some ways refutes any implied authority he may have as a white person in determining dominant cultural norms. Joe is also a physically damaged male. His knee injury killed his budding football career and he tells Jess he had pushed himself past his limits because he was trying to be "man" enough for his father. The injury leads to a breach between Joe and his father primarily because Joe felt he could never live up to his father's expectations of what his son should be and would only serve as a source of disappointment. While Joe is quick to blame his father for not accepting him, it is

obvious that Joe doesn't consider himself a whole man. He punishes himself for not being strong enough to compete professionally. To earn a living he bartends at a football club and takes on the job of coaching the female team because he has already lost standing among the other men, and so therefore undertaking such an act can do him no further harm. It is common knowledge however, that if the girls' team does creditably, Joe might be offered a "promotion" to work with the men's side.

The fact that Joe has fallen a little short of the role of strong, invincible *white* male makes him a little more sympathetic and a lot more attractive to Jess because he doesn't mock her or her dreams and also he is not truly in position to dictate to her because she feels morally superior on the question of how to be a good child. As they grow closer, she starts to lecture him on his role as a good son. She tries to instill in him how important her family is and why he should patch things up with his father. A titular figure of authority in her life as her coach, Joe lacks the ability to exert any real authority over her or her family in changing their attitudes toward her playing. In his "official" role, instead of serving as the dictator who has the final word he becomes the nurturer of Jess' innate talent and dreams. Ultimately it is only she who can decide if she is going to push forward with playing football. It addition, it is through Jess, a woman taking on masculine role, that Joe is able to redefine his masculinity and his ego, thus reinforcing the fluidity of gender performance regardless of skin color or race as well as mentoring Jess to redefine the limitations of her gender. When Jess gets into a fight on field with another player, he bawls her out before the team members because he 1) needs to maintain order and 2) doesn't want her to lose control, a loss of control and overly emotional being traits commonly ascribed to women. As soon as they are alone, Jess

takes him to task for his behavior and accuses him of not understanding that the other team player had insulted her based on her race. Joe's response is "Jess I'm Irish," an answer that doesn't truly pacify her but she understands he is encouraging her to control her emotions and consider the long-term consequences and to choose when to be assertive instead of simply reacting, qualities that are defined as "male". Joe wants her to feel and experience the emotion but not let it rule her actions. Joe doesn't feel as if he is in competition with Jess perhaps because he can't compete in the game and so he is able to revel and nurture her strength without feeling diminished. With these words, Joe shows he can see Jess for who she is and not as a cultural stereotype and she starts to see that he isn't just a (white) guy but is also someone struggling with his own demons. This ability to see beyond the cultural stereotype is as Jasbir K. Puar maintains not an impossibility but that in Britain the "dominant white gaze" too often falls into a monolithic view as first coined by Chandra Talpade Monhanty,[7] which assumes the Asian community is homogenous despite evidence that this "sameness" is very much affected by other factors including religions point of origin, gender, class and migratory experience (128). We see this in Mrs. Paxton, an older white woman, who assumes Jess will lead her life along pre-described lines and she clearly sees Jess as passive, docile, polite and submissive. As Hazel Carby declared one woman cannot "represent the voices of all black women in Britain, our herstories are too numerous and varied" (82). Puar further argues the white monolithic gaze also assumes that the second generation of Asians are automatically in conflict with the culture of their parents and "places [the] second generation within an either or framework" (129). And it is this latter trap that Jules and Joe initially fall into. When Jess tells Jules she can't attend practice because her parents

disapprove, Jules tells her to lie and say she has a job. By her actions, Jules makes it clear that she has no empathy for the viewpoint of Jess' family and doesn't truly understand that Jess is not interested in defying her family if the defiance could lead to a permanent break. Later when Jess tells her she can't play in a game because it is the same day as her sister's wedding, a game that is important because a scout is coming to see Jess and Jules play, Jules seems incredulous that Jess would put her family first before her desires. Jess' actions prove that she is not refuting her family and that her family and their happiness is linked to her own. She can't be cut off from her family nor does she wish to. Likewise after Joe finds out Jess has been secretly coming to practice in his capacity as coach he expresses disapproval that Jess was playing without permission but this does not stop him from visiting her family and attempting to persuade them to grant her permission. He fails, but tells Jess she must make up her own mind – thus reinforcing the either/or conflict and implying she is foolish for listening to her family. When Jess once again lies to her parents and goes with the team to play in Germany, Joe purposely looks the other way. "I don't want to know," he says when she arrives acknowledging she is there illicitly but implicitly approving her deceit. Before Joe successfully breaks free of the "monolithic white gaze" he also attempts to subvert Jess' relationship to her family's culture. When he presents himself to her family as the white male with some nominal authority (a coach and a male) and attempts to persuade them to change their minds regarding letting Jess play, there is a subtle subtext, which implies that he, the white male, knows best. He fails to succeed however and it is Jess who forces him to see she is not in a relationship of conflict with her culture, indicating his ability to evolve from his limitations.

Ironically in Jess' eyes, Joe is the conflicted one because he has ceased speaking to his father and has no ties, making him Joe less of man. Jess who had previously expressed the hope of finding someone just like Joe only Indian starts to realize his ability to change his concept of acceptable "male" behavior makes his color irrelevant. As a potential romance develops between Jess and Joe, Jess initially rejects the idea of Joe because she is already leaving her family for California to play football and doesn't want to distress them anymore and perhaps have them renege on their permission to allow her to go to the U.S. and because she feels that a long distance relationship may be too difficult to maintain. When Jess rejects Joe as a potential lover, he allows her to make and voice the decision. However, on the day she leaves, he tells her they need to know if could have something and with her cooperation, kisses her. In this act, Joe reclaims his masculinity by taking charge of the situation and making the woman respond not only to his desire but her own. Jess still leaves to pursue her dream but it is with the knowledge that he is waiting for her and that during her Christmas Holidays, they will face her family together. In the interim the closing scenes of the film implies, Joe makes himself known to Jess' family. The final scenes of the film show Joe and Mr. Bhamra playing cricket on equal terms. It is a significance subtext because twenty earlier, Mr. Bhamra had been laughed out of the clubhouse when he attempted to play cricket, an act that had damaged his ego, stripped him of his manhood and caused him to give up the game and any allegiance to the dominant white culture. Joe clearly flawed but still somewhat representative of the white race is willing to accept Mr. Bhamra and it is a clear signal that things change and the authority of maleness can have variations. Just as Mr. Bhamra understands Jess has a real shot at being a professional athlete, he accepts Joe as a suitor

for his daughter's hand because this man who could be condemned as being patriarchal, intolerant and someone who can't/won't assimilate into British culture really just wants his daughter to be happy. If Joe, damaged and not a "typical" male can extend acceptance and approval through their play, in return, Mr. Bhamra is extending to Joe his acceptance of the relationship between him and Jess. The two are meeting on an equal playing field where they acknowledge each other's authority – Mr. Bhamra as the head of his family and Jess will always seek his approval and Joe as the token white representative shows how the white dominant norm can change and evolve.

While the love story gives the film a nice arc, Jigna Desai points out that the primary relationship in the film is not the one between Joe and Jess but between Jess and Jules. Jess defends her actions of sneaking out of the house to play football by saying "'It's not like I am sneaking around seeing someone' just as Jules enters the scene" (Desai 214). Desai further argues the relationship the girls share is constantly sexualized and treated as something that can be voiced but then dismissed and this is done as a consequence of the fact that neither Jules or Jess are acting in a feminine way that is recognized as legitimate by their mothers and in Jess's case her community.

Jules mother's can't understand Jules' love of the game and when all her efforts to get Jules to go on dates with young men fail she leaps to the erroneous conclusion based on a misunderstood overhead conversation between the two girls, that Jules is a lesbian and has entered into an affair with Jess. Mrs. Paxton is beside herself and attacks Jess at her sister's wedding for pretending to be a good Indian girl while seducing Jules. After Jules tells her mother in no uncertain terms that she is not a lesbian, Mrs. Paxton's relief

is palatable. In turn the older generation of Indians are puzzled by Mrs. Paxton's accusation and respond "Lesbian? I thought she [Jess] was a Pisces."

In another plot development, Jules and Jess are seen hugging and laughing at a bus stop and their action has dire consequences. Jess is condemned for being a girl of loose morals who hangs with white boys, "a fact" which reflects poorly on her family and becomes the reason the betrothal of Jess' sister Pinky is called off. Jess is forced to defend herself and when her family realizes Jules is a girl, they dismiss Jules with the line "Those English girls have short hair." This comment by Desai is an acknowledgement of "gender deviance" - girls with short hair – that flirts with naming lesbianism only to dismiss it as a misunderstanding that can have no grounding in fact. Although there is some understanding of the concept of lesbianism in Indian culture – it is raised several times in the film only to be dismissed as not possible - there is no possibility of acceptance or discussion for homosexuality. This abhorrence, one can theorize, is based on the enforcement of the traditional male role of being strong and playing being a good father, provider and caretaker. Desai points out that homosexuality can't even be named.

This highlights the dilemma of the character Tony (played by Ameet Chana) in *Bend it Like Beckham*. Everyone in the family assumes that one day Tony, a nice Indian boy, will marry Jess. Tony admits he is mad about Jess but tells her he is homosexual. Scandalized, Jess responds, "You're Indian!" as if the two were mutually exclusive. And in some degree, they are as there is no role for a homosexual male in a traditional Indian culture. Sanjay Srivastava reminds that "Procreative responsibility is very important in the Indian ethos. The community-oriented locus of the individual in the Indian society is an important component of his/her identity. The dharma (duty) of a man address many

scales of the real of action (karma) – he must continue the lineage by procreating within wedlock, and conform to the group's normative elements i.e., he must lead a 'family life.' In this manner, he must also ensure the family's good standing "in the larger community (within the immediate geographic space), clan (immediate family space) and larger ethnic/religious/caste-group space. As long as a man should these responsibilities, he might generally consider his sexual intimacies with other men as allowable" (166-167). Thus Tony performs the part of the male. He is also mindful of his mother's standing in the community and so he hides his sexual preference and is protective of Jess' standing in the community. When he offers to marry her, it is his way of allowing her to please her family and still get her chance to pursue football. He is a good friend and son. With his male friends he swaggers like they do, he takes care not to ogle them when they strip un-selfconsciously before him and he plays pickup games of football, an approved male activity. Tony's performance echoes that of Huck Finn, but he is more successful at convincing the world he is a man and unlike Jess, doesn't have anyone questioning his motives. He looks like a man and acts like a man and people don't seem to connect homosexuality with him because such a notion is both improbable and implausible. Tony, however, does betray himself in his unequivocal acceptance of Jess' dream of being a football player. When she is forced to miss the playoff game because it is her sister's wedding day, it is Tony who tells her he can drive her to the game and back without anyone knowing. As someone who has had to practice deceit, Tony knows when he can successfully bend the rules. Jess is too nice to go along with the scheme but her father, the traditional authority figurehead, who ultimately wants her happiness, gives her permission to go. In the car she briskly changes out of her ornate sari into her football kit

while Tony drives. It is clear that once she learns of his sexual preference, Jess no longer considers Tony a male because he does not delight or is inflamed by her body but nor does she see him as a person with whom she might have to compete. Jess doesn't feel the need to hide from Tony because she is not in sexual competition with him and he wants nothing from her. Earlier in the film, Jess had been awkward in the female locker room – partly she was hiding her scarred leg and partly she didn't want the other women to size her up and find her wanting. Tony's sexual preference gives Jess the freedom to just get on with it without worrying how she is being perceived. Thus free of their traditionally assigned roles of male and female Tony and Jess develop a new casual intimacy.

Tony falls short of acting "male" in other ways. When he and his mates go to one of Jess' games, they are quick to ogle the women in their shorts and make sexual comments as they run across the pitch. Tony chastises them and attempts to treat the women as the serious athletes they are. After Jess wins a scholarship in Santa Clara she despairs that her parents will give their permission. Tony willingly sacrifices himself by proposing to Jess. He convinces her to announce their betrothal and assuming the role of the man who will watch over his future wife he tells her family he will only marry Jess after she's completed her schooling at the college of *her* choice, effectively overriding any objections they may have. Jess, however, repudiates Tony's sacrifice and, assuming the role of decisive and self-actualizing female, tells her family they won't marry but she wants to go to California. Her stance impresses her father who gives her his permission. Her mother shrugs: she won't gainsay her husband but her disapproval is evident.

Because Jess falls in love with soccer, a male defined activity, she crosses the invisible line between the genders and in effect by playing a man's game, becomes more

male like – she is confident and doesn't hesitate to voice her wants. This is not a case of her being in conflict with her traditional (Indian) culture because she is also in conflict with her British culture, which also doesn't recognize that women can excel in soccer. Jules is in a similar relationship too. Jess' ultimate reward is that she is allowed to earn her right to pursue her dream.

Since the film is a comedy and must end happily, Joe eventually prevails and he and Jess becomes a couple. Jules "forgives" Jess for "stealing" Joe, thus negating the competition which had sprung up between them – partly fuelled by sexual jealously when Jules thought Jess had purposely "stolen" Joe behind her back and partly by Jules' belief that Joe had been lying about the scout coming to see them and stringing her along romantically – and the two girls return to their previous camaraderie of fellow athletes. Pinky, Jess' sister, marries her lover and they quickly start a family. Only Tony doesn't get a happy ending because his story has yet to be voiced.

The maleness and implied authority of Joe and Tony is never questioned, despite the fact that they might feel they fall short of being "typical" males. Joe's authority over the girls he coaches is automatically accepted and he even becomes a source of sexual competition between Jess and Jules, thus attaining the status of "desirable" male although initially Jess expresses a desire to find a brown Joe, she overcomes her own inhibitions regarding his color. Tony is taken at face value because he successfully mimics his role to the extent that his culture never has a reason to question his sex. The implicit authority accorded Joe and Tony allows them to define their own version of what it means to be a man and they react to situations with open minds, but without comprising their standards or adhering to standards of maleness that make no sense to them.

Chadha's earlier film, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) establishes the premise that fixed gender roles and a rigid adherence to them can limit both men and women and be potentially damaging. In the case of South Asian males living in England, adherence to fixed notions of gender can clash with the values of the dominant culture. The character Ranjit (played by Jimmi Harkishin) in the film *Bhaji on the Beach* successfully apes what it means to be a man: he is tough, his word is law and he rules his household with absolute authority or at least the appearance of authority. Married to Ginder, also of Indian descent, a woman he loves and has self selected, he brings her home to live with his parents and two brothers. At his mother's continual harping to keep order in his house – by not letting his wife influence his opinion – and his older brother's obvious disdain with how he relates to his wife because any sign of affection or consideration is considered weakness. Ranjit starts to dismiss his wife's counsel and when their marriage sours and they start to quarrel, he beats her. The beatings serve as a visible marker of Ranjit's authority over Ginder and appease his mother and older brother but it is Ranit's dismissing of Ginder more so than the beating that bothers her the most. In their article "Empowerment through activism: responding to domestic violence in the South Asian Community in London," Gill and Rehman make the claim that violence in South Asian communities remains prevalent because 1) women are of an inferior gender status and 2) violence is considered acceptable if it preserves the honor or solidarity of the family (75). Gill and Rehman make the distinction that while most cultures value honor, the concept is applicable to both men and women and is not necessarily tied into perceptions of their authority or status within the culture. The same is not true in South Asian culture where the concept of honor is very much tied into the perception of a man's standing in his own

eyes, his household and his community. The man is expected to command respect and even be deferred to. Thus Ranjit's frequent beating of his wife causes little comment in the family but when Ginder finally leaves, the family is shamed and the community shocked. Ginder is either considered to be lying about the beatings or else deserving of them. Ranjit makes an attempt to win back Ginder. She still loves him and is willing to give it a try but when she tells him she wants a marriage of mutual respect, he loses his temper and tells her she is used goods – therefore no one else will want her ensuring she will be unable to fulfill her female role of wife and, ergo, she should stay with him – and knocks her down. The physicality of Ranjit knocking Ginder down serves as a metaphor of Ginder's status in his eyes. She is meant to be the subservient one, seeing to his needs and comfort and denying demands of her own. Ranjit is a victim of his own inability to let go of his perceived notions of what a man is. He acts the part convincingly but since he is not living in India, his wife is not forced to accept his outbursts. She has resources in the Asian woman's shelter and British mores on her side – where a woman can get by without a man and certainly does not need to put up with domestic violence – and removes herself and her son from his sphere of influence. The marriage ends in divorce and Ginder takes Ranjit's son away from him. Ranjit is left with his feelings of inadequacy in not understanding how he – the male – can be abandoned and is condemned to his own unhappiness and the disapproval of his family when he performed his male role with authority. Ironically his younger brother is also married but conducts his marriage very differently and does not heed the criticisms of his family. As a result his wife responds in a different manner and they enjoy a successful and loving marriage. Ranjit's failing is not that he tried too hard to be "male" but that he allowed the taunts of

his older brother and mother to goad him into behavior that he knows is reprehensible. As a consequence, his unswerving adherence to his role of "Indian male" has crippled him. While Ranjit played the part of "South Asian male" all too well, Ginder by refusing his authority in effect emasculates him. Thus the performance of gender no matter how well performed and projected, isn't valid until it has been granted legitimacy. Ranjit wanted Ginder to bow to his authority and play the submissive woman to his dominant male and his failure to school Ginder is what unmans him.

Although Ginder fails to play her role properly, Desiree from Joan Riley's novel *Romance* (1988) accepts her husband's authority because she empathizes with him and understands all too well how the very act of migration has eroded his manhood. Her husband John is seen as only another black man and is routinely disrespected by his adoptive home. In order to survive he draws clear lines of "male" and "female" behavior and Desiree aids and abets him. While John doesn't physically beat Desiree, Riley shows men have other ways in which to keep women beaten down.

Desiree is condemned by her husband to housework and cooking for him at all hours of the night because it is woman's work and yet her children – females – are not expected to help with housework because they are to concentrate on their studies. As children, especially children born in Britain, the girls are considered by their father to have more potential than their mother whose task is to serve him. Tired from looking after the house and children which are her assigned responsibility, Desiree is too scared to ask for change because she is being overly empathetic toward her husband and understands that the constant racism he encounters at work has left him feeling less like a man.

When Desiree expresses a wish to return to school after her marriage, her husband actively discourages her because he sees it as a sign that she will leave him or why else would she want to "better herself"? In general, Desiree accepts her role because she understands her husband has been diminished by coming to England and she is trying to preserve his manhood and by extension their marriage and their home. Her complicity leads her into the sacrificial and typical role of the woman who puts her husband's and children's needs first. It is an attitude that puts her risk when she starts to get ill for she is so afraid of death or some debilitating illness that will disrupt her home life that she refuses to see a doctor.

Desiree's sister Verona who lives with the family seethes with impatience at how her sister is being treated and the inconsistencies she sees within John: "It was strange how much John had changed. There had been a time when he was always urging Desiree on with her studies, arguing with Verona in an attempt to persuade her not to leave school. Now he wouldn't even let her sister go back to work part-time. He was forever talking about the role of African women and how the children needed a mother. 'What about a father?' Verona was tempted to ask" (Riley 23). Verona who has her own issues is still able to understand John is holding to some mythical cultural role – he isn't after all African, he came from Jamaica and she observes without understanding why John's views have only been recently adopted[8].

Desiree also understands that John is clinging to a myth, but loving John as she does, "She could see the tiredness in him, the way his shoulders drooped. Lines of bitterness, carved by years of disappointment and overwork" (Riley 25) and thus makes excuses for him. Yet when she tries to counsel John not to place too much hope in a

possible promotion he lashes out at her "Why is it every time I try a thing, all you can do is go on like I not good enough for nothing?...That's all I getting from the white man out there,' he continued, 'but I ain't taking it from you'" (Riley 26). And he doesn't have to take it from Desiree. While John doesn't physically beat Desiree he becomes somewhat of a dictator and because he desperately needs to redefine/reclaim his manhood in a society that seems intent on taking it away from him, he beats Desiree down emotionally. It is the only way he knows to retain control within his own household. His newly defined definition of a woman, or at least the one he is married to, is of a woman who makes no demands on him - she must never question him, must place her own desires ahead of his and must never trouble him with ill health - and is there to see to his every comfort. Desiree, he decrees, will cook for him, keep his house immaculate and submit to and support unquestioningly to all his hopes and aspirations. While Desiree chafes a little at the role designated for her, she for the most part, acquiesces to it. She tells her children they can't help serve a meal because their father doesn't like it. She defends John to her sister and calls him a good provider. She cooks for him and serves him regardless of the time of night he comes home. She also has some definitions of what it means to be female and her definition also places limits on what a woman can do. When her friend Mara tells her she weight trains, Desiree is shocked because Mara is slim and doesn't exhibit male like beefiness or overdeveloped muscles. She is further shocked but also impressed to learn that Mara is going to run a marathon. This evidence of Mara's physical prowess and emotional courage – for Mara has left her husband who had kept her under his thumb and returned to school to complete her degree - serves as a model for Desiree to start reconsidering what it is a woman can do. This reconsideration of what it

means to be a woman is much needed when Desiree learns she needs a hysterectomy. In the following exchange between Desiree and Verona, Desiree is clearly unhappy but Verona who has no children displays a little insensitivity to her sister and starts to berate her for the role she plays in John's life:

> " 'Des, are you…I mean, d'you feel very upset about it?' Verona said, sounding surprised, as her sister's unhappiness registered on her. Desiree nodded, staring at her hands.
>
> 'Yeah…well, I'm sorry,' her voice reflected her embarrassment, 'I just thought that, as you had Lyn and Carol…' She trailed off, realizing that she was making things worse. 'When you gonna tell John?'
>
> Desiree shook her head sadly. 'I just don't know. I'm hoping he gets that promotion he's after, then he might be more able to deal with it.'
>
> 'Des, sometimes you really make me mad, you do. Honestly…here you are, real sick, and all you can think about is what going to suit John. He really saw you coming, didn't he?'
>
> 'You don't understand,' Desiree protested.
>
> 'Oh, I understand all right. All I can see is John wiping his foot on you, and you just sit there. I mean, I'm not a feminist and that, but what I can't understand is how you take so much crap from him when you won't take it from no one else" (Riley 50).

Tactless as Vernona's statement might have been, it serves a purpose. Once Mara and Verona start to question John's authority and his version of maleness and overtly critique Desiree's enactment of " submissive female," Desiree starts to wonder if there aren't other models out there that she could emulate. In one respect John is correct about losing Desiree. Once she starts to question her role and wanting more – a part time job, going back to school, some consideration in the home – John does lose his submissive wife. However, unlike Ranjit, John shows an ability to adapt. He accepts the changes and the marriage survives albeit in a slightly altered form.

If a woman satisfactorily meets cultural expectations of what it means to be "woman" she establishes a self-identity that is culturally approved and gains a certain satisfaction in fulfilling her role. However, if this identity is questioned as it is often through migration the concept of self-identity is very likely to be reformed. Steve Derné reminds us that people, not structures act and "gender culture is constituted by the talk and other social practices of common people" (16). Derné also posits that women have "diverse stances toward gender culture" (17). Some like Ginder's mother-in-law promote it because it is a way to ensure they keep their personal power by restricting the younger women. The argument however, that adherence to the gender ideologue is a traditional stance typically enforced by the older generation, doesn't always hold true. In the novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987), a Kulwant transplanted Indian girl purposely embraces an arranged marriage and cultural gendered expectations against her parents' advice. Thus, it would seem there are variants as to why, how, and when the female immigrant assimilates or resists the cultural expectations.

Other women like Desiree in Joan Riley's *Romance* embrace the prescribed notions of "woman" in the belief that she is somehow benefitting from the cultural division of gender – John provides for her and the children, she in return keeps his home. In a similar vein, the character Chila, Meera Syal's creation from *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* (1999) attempts to fulfill her destiny through marriage and embraces an ideology of being the caretaker of the home and helpmate to her husband, Deepak. On her wedding day, Chila willing takes on the role of the traditional wife – the one who stay home while her husband is free to roam, the one who will keep his house and will prepare elaborate Indian meals from scratch, the one that will make her husband's life stable, bringing no demands or arguments into their interactions. Chila finds a peace she had never before experienced on her wedding day, "She realized, with a shock, what it was that had possessed her body. She was happy" (Syal 15).

For a while Deepak is happy too with his choice of wife and his role as the dominant gender. Yet he soon comes to resent the simplicity and narrow scope of the woman he has married and starts to yearn for his previous lover, Tania who had challenged him. Tania is beautiful and wild and rejects all the cultural expectations of what she should be as a South Asian Woman born in England. While Tania *is* in conflict with her culture, it is a self-imposed conflict – she is afraid of falling into the stereotypes and works hard at being contrary. Tania leaves the community for her own flat across the city, works as a TV producer and takes a string of lovers, mostly white men. When Tania films a documentary on love and marriage in the South Asian community she turns her camera on Chila and Deepak. What Tania captures isn't a happy relationship. Instead she reveals Deepak as somewhat of a boor whereas Chila comes across as venial,

materialistic, child-like and husband-obsessed, a person that Chila, who is present at the premiere, has a hard time identifying with:

> Chila sighed; if she had known the camera was going to be so close, she might have toned down the blusher and the gold eyeshadow. Still, her sparkly suit looked lovely. It was her face all right, but there was something about it, in her expression, that she didn't recognize as part of herself. Before she had time to register this, she saw that she was walking around her kitchen, pointing at various recent purchases. 'This is a multi-chef. It's got this really amazing bit that grinds, so you can have fresh home-made masala instead of the shop stuff…and my Deeps really loves his desi food.'… 'This washing machine is computer chip controlled and it's got this bit that…well, you put shirts in and they come out almost ironed! With the number of shirts Deeps goes through, 'cos you know he's quite high up in finance…No I don't know what he does exactly…funny that.'" (Syal 174).

The marriage, not surprisingly, doesn't last. Deepak gained a wife that fit his ideal of what a wife - Indian, needy, docile - should be but found to his dismay it wasn't what he really wanted. He starts up his affair with Tania again and Chila, by this time pregnant, is left to salvage her identity into something that is recognizable to her. In conclusion, I refer to Trinh T. Minh-ha who reminds us that:

> Woman can never be defined. Bat, dog, chick, mutton, tart. Queen, madam, lady of pleasure. MISTRESS. *Belle-de-nuit*, woman of the streets, fruitwoman, fallen woman. Cow, vixen, bitch. Call girl, joy girl, working girl. Lady and whore are both bred to please. The old Woman image-repertoire says She is a Womb, a mere baby's pouch, or 'nothing but sexuality'. She is a passive substance, a parasite, an enigma whose mystery proves to be a snare and a delusion (16).

The snare and delusion can be said to apply to the whole notion of gender and the perception of "man" and "woman." Gender roles are for the most part perception based on performance of that role and whether the performance is convincing enough. Legitimacy, validity and authority can be given to the person who is willing to take it, regardless of their gender. Unfortunately so deeply entrenched is the notion of gender which is subsequently bound with cultural expectations and ideology that black men and women living in England may often face a dual cultural expectation from both their immediate and greater community because of the expectations placed on their gender. Tellingly the men in Black British literature are often expected to be act less with less authority and assume the status of "boys" within their new home – a reinforcement of the fact that they were neither wanted not accepted and that there is an inherent conflict between the values of their traditional cultural norms and the new dominant dorms. However, the women are often pitied as being overly passive and repressed and tacitly encouraged to rebel and expand on their roles.

If gender is cultural conditioning then it follows that if women and men can learn to overcome their innate obstacles of expectation, character and inhibitions to control their identities, then they will exhibit authority and learn to take charge of their fates.

NOTES

[1] See *Keywords A Vocabulary of Culture and Society Revised Edition* in which Williams traces how the use of *secus* or *sexus* evolved from meaning "the male or female section of humanity" to the implicit binary of the "weaker sex" the "fairer sex" the "gentle sex" as applied to women.

[2] See James Proctor's *Dwelling Places* for a full discussion of housing and immigrants in post World War II Britain.

[3] In 1948 in an effort to answer the labor shortage, the ship Windrush carried 492 Jamaican men, many former soldiers, to England. While many of these men expected to stay no longer than a few years (hence Moses astonishment at his being in England for eight years) by 1955 18,000 Jamaican immigrants had moved to England. Tanty is representative of the fact that women and children were also arriving in Britain in large numbers, something not really addressed in the exile novels.

[4] The rational argument is put forth that women, regardless of their race or ethnicity, should be paid less because they are *choosing* to work outside the home and are not necessarily dependent on the income and nor, do they in most cases, have the specialized skills or requisite education as their male counterparts. The insidious part of this argument is the judgment that women are exceeding their roles of nurturer and homemaker especially if they are in a relationship in which the man has undertaken the traditional role of breadwinner for the household and that by entering the workplace, they are merely "playing at work."

[5] The film *Brick Lane* was released in the United Kingdom in 2007 and portrays the relationship between Chanu and Nazneen as a little less loving than the novel. Nazneen "endures" sex with Chanu but experiences multiple orgasms with Karim.

[6] There is an emergent body of literature and criticism on 9/11 that attempts to deal with the horror of the attacks and its aftermath. One such aftermath is the examination of the backlash many Muslims around the world experienced as misunderstanding and fear condemned all Muslims as terrorists. In *Brick Lane*, the 9/11 attack comes late in the book but Ali defines how Nazneen's community is harassed and condemned to the extent that young men like Karim who had identified as British become bitter and adopt fundamentalist militant attitudes to "fight back." In essence, some argue, the fear and backlash succeeds only in creating more militant Muslims.

[7] It should be noted that in an essay entitled "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggle" (2000) Mohanty made the following disclaimer on the word monolith: Here is how I defined "Western feminist" then: Clearly Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular or homogeneous in its goals, interests, or analyses. However, it is possible to trace a coherence of effects resulting from the implicit assumption of 'the West' (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis. My reference to 'Western feminism' is by no means intended to imply that it is a monolith. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers which codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western.I suggested then that while terms such as *First* and *Third World* were problematic in suggesting oversimplified similarities as well as flattening internal differences, I continued to use

them because this was the terminology available to us then. I used the terms with full knowledge of their limitations, suggesting a critical and heuristic rather than non-questioning use of the terms (Mohanty 1986, 334).

[8] Verona also represents a type of womanhood: the self-effacing martyr. She doesn't want to cause any trouble for Desiree because she believes she is not worth the bother. For her the impetus is love of her sister. Verona automatically understands that her troubles will cause other people pain and she has no business upsetting everyone. Not valuing herself, she puts on the masque of fatness – literal layers between her and the outside world. She takes the blame for stealing when she is innocent because she doesn't want the accusations to reach her sister whom she knows is sick. Ironically she has no problem rebelling against her brother in law on behalf of her sister.

CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITIES THAT REFLECT THE CHANGING IDENTITIES AND NEEDS OF BLACK BRITISH WOMEN

*"Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other types of social organization (*state, nation, society*, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term."*
– Raymond Williams, *A Vocabulary of Culture and Society.*

The term community in its various incarnations can be either banal or extremely subversive. If we examine Raymond William's definition we come to understand community is too often used in a benign way to perpetuate the "othering" of a subset of people not considered to be the "same" as the prevailing dominant community. By imbuing the label "community" with only positive overtones Williams argues that we accept the implicit binary and leave unquestioned any implied inequity between the dominant and subordinate sets. The danger of "community" then is that it is never critiqued or properly recognized to be a label that is not all-inclusive. "Community" too often assumes the subordinate group is somehow invested and dependent on preserving its inherent qualities of homogenous cohesiveness. By extension of this argument, the South Asian and Caribbean communities in Britain can be reduced to and celebrated for its exotic clothing, food, or music and the label of "community" heralded as multiculturalism while the darker and deeper roots of racism which fail to recognize that this systematic "othering" remains unquestioned. What makes the term "community" even more dangerous is the general failure to recognize that the relationships in communities which *can* be read as a set of relationships are made up of both temporary

and permanent connections that may occur between two individuals and/or an individual and a larger group of people comprising of family, friends and neighbors.

To further complicate the issue, these relationships come in a variety of permutations between individuals and individuals, individuals and groups, groups and groups etc. and these relationships are neither fixed in tradition and time or necessarily permanent. In other words, the implied critique of this definition as Williams states is that one can assume the mantle of tolerance and multiculturalism while with impunity designating a community as different (code for substandard or inferior) based on its ethnicity, race, socio economics or gender. The "community" then becomes a sub-community, one that is tolerated but never truly legitimized or accepted by the "Community." It is this lack of legitimacy that James Procter hints at when he writes in his anthology *Writing black Britain* that "in literary studies…there is virtually no sense of a community (albeit imagined) or tradition (albeit invented) of black British writing which makes it hard to characterize black fiction" (6). Since no writer writes in a vacuum, black British writers would undoubtedly be surprised by the implication they have no tradition or community.[1] The implication is the white dominant society has not yet fully legitimized the black community and its writing because it has yet to expand its definition of what it means to be a British writer to include black British citizens. The fact that white British society has not acknowledged the black tradition in Britain as being equal is hardly surprising but nor does it preclude people of color from claiming kinship to white tradition, culture, and the dominant (white) culture. For a fuller discussion of the term Black and its political overtones please refer to chapter one.

Dark skinned people born in England are automatically connected to both an "ethnic " community and the dominant "white" community. Men and women through work and most often through their children's lives, often navigate between the norms and traditions of each "community" and ultimately create, as a consequence, a hybridized, sometimes ephemeral, community that reflects their own needs, wants, desires and values. This constant shifting between the two communities allows for fluidity in how women in particular may view themselves, their traditions and priorities, allowing the individual to consciously create new communities, real or imaginary, as needed. This fluidity of movement also perhaps comes closer to capturing the black experience in the British novel – one that defies generalities because it is something that may be experienced, re-remembered, and reproduced in multiple ways and thus can't easily be formalized into "tradition" or packaged into a specific "community' nor can one experience become representative of an entire people. The idea of community treated so often in academic circles as solid, permanent and all pervasive is actually ephemeral, fluid and negotiable.

In his 1995 essay the "Extravagant Strangers" Caryl Phillips makes the claim "…in the last fifteen years…we have witnessed the full flowering of the tradition of the 'other' voice in British literature" (294). From his perspective in time and place, Phillips names those whom he considers the best of these writers – mainly men – and notes they are people who are born outside of England because they have a "discordant" relationship with Britain. Phillips' list of writers includes mostly men. He fails to acknowledge women of color who are born or live in Britain and who are equally engaged in a

discordant relationship with Britain but whose voices until recently have been less widely disseminated.

Thus the conversation of what factors may motivate women to embrace or reject assimilation into a larger community is both long overdue and necessary. As previously mentioned in chapter two it cannot be assumed that women automatically reject their traditions as binding and embrace the new culture. The stereotype of the immigrant woman is of a woman who holds the family together through self-sacrifice and hard work, a role that is culturally reinforced. On a larger scale, women, especially the older ones who have immigrated to Britain, are often the guardians of their culture. This is very apparent in the film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) where the older women romanticize the India of their youth and seek to impose their values on the younger women while the younger women seemingly respectful and obeisant secretly flout their conventions. It is not enough to assume that black women in Britain automatically share a bond based on their gender or race although these markers often help them create "communities" when a pre-existing community based on ethnicity or religion either breaks down or fails them. In *Bhaji* the community still exists despite the ongoing conflict between the generations because they continue to draw strength from said community and while they may be prepared to flout its conventions they are not interested in overthrowing it.

This chapter examines how women forge and re-forge their communities by specifically looking at ways communities real or imagined are created and how they subsequently function in the works of Gurinder Chadha, Meera Syal, Ravinder Randhawa and Monica Ali. What is revolutionary about these women artists is the idea that community is one of movement and adaption rather than one that is formalized, fixed and

unchanging. What these women artists do so well is tell stories of women who negotiate a place within their community that is not prescribed but is found, one that is not preconceived by the characters but is created. Often this is achieved through a break or disconnect between the character and her community followed by reconciliation where the woman comes to find her new space and acceptance within the community that expands to accommodate her. Further I attempt to trace how the female protagonists' desire/need for connectivity to the larger community, even if it is only a community of one, shapes how these women view themselves and how they accordingly construct narratives in creating their identities and sometimes act in a manner that may seem alien to the essentials of their self identity.

The question of identity as Stuart Hall points out is fluid and when one is engaged in reconstructing identity, he, borrowing from Jacques Derrida writes "… [Identity] like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Cultural Identity 395). It would seem the paradigm of identity only successfully works when a person is situated in a community that can provide a yardstick for the individual either as a form of approbation and validation or as source of conflict through which the individual carves out an identity by rebelling/reacting to the established cultural norms of the perceived larger national community. This approbation or disapproval of the community is what creates the "difference" and it is within this space that the individual has to stake claim to her identity. Without the larger community, the individual exists in a vacuum. Placed within the community, however, the difference between the individual and community makes for some interesting intersections. As applied to women, the formation of their

identity is influenced by the innate *desire to be connected* – be it spiritual, intellectual or sexual – to the larger whole. Here I do not make the assumption that men lack the desire to be connected to a larger whole, but reassert the claim that the majority of women are so preconditioned to want approbation from family, friends and the larger community that they are often willing to deny self in order to achieve it. In the west, there is the prevailing (mis)notion that western women are no longer limited to the traditional roles of wife and mother whereas women in traditional nonwestern communities – even if those communities exist in a modern place – are still strongly defined as wives and mothers. On the surface it may seem to be a truth and while it is not impossible for a woman to circumvent these traditional roles, in doing so she is often forced to place her own desires and wants first, putting her in the uncomfortable position of validating her sense of self at the potential cost of the community. Women who successfully do this risk incurring a heavier price than men for circumventing the mores of a community. It is this risk that sometimes keeps them acquiescent. However, this is in no way a fatalistic statement because as the literature in this study shows, many women successfully renegotiate their own identities and find that sometimes the guardians of their community are more accepting than they had been led to believe and that the benefits of following their own desires outweigh any perceived censure.

The process through which the woman lays claim to her self-identity and how she renegotiates her space within a community is in essence a reconnection between the woman, her desires and her community. It is an intensely personal experience and this what Chada captures in her film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993). For some women, the past is a source of comfort and a memory that is honored, romanticized and sometimes

recreated, as in the case of the older women or aunties who create for themselves a fixed and unchanging community. However if the women has no connection to the "past" or "tradition" either because they have no physical memory of it (i.e. children of immigrants as are the two young girls in the film) or in the case of Asha, because they question the traditional values as not being in their best interest, the vision of the future and the reimagining of the present can lead to a claiming of a new self and a newly re-imagined community.

If immigrants look to the past, as Hall as urged, in order to reclaim their present, it becomes easy to understand why some immigrant communities, especially Asians, band together. On the surface they are preserving their cultural norms as applied to dress and food and language in a bid to feel less of an interloper in a foreign land and also to retain their ties "back home." Incidentally such an approach also creates an infrastructure that allows this very group to have initial success in surviving when it comes to locating housing and developing means of income[2]. Andrea Levy addresses what a strong functioning community can accomplish in her novel *Small Island* (2004) by chronicling a Jamaican couple's attempts to find decent housing and well paying jobs in post WWII England. Levy closes the novel with Hortense and Gilbert and their newly adopted child(the boy is a hybrid with a white mother and Jamaican father who will be raised black for his own good) leaving their squalid bedsit for a house that has been bought by a fellow Jamaican. They plan to become caretakers of the property and in turn rent to other Jamaicans. Their dual roles as caretakers of both the house and a child born of a white-black union have earned them a respectable place in their black community, something denied them by the whites with whom they interact, and allow them some autonomy in a

land in which they are reviled because they are drawing on the strength of their community. Things may not be perfect but Hortense and Gilbert are no longer on the outside looking in and they have indeed become the guardians of the future.

This picture of hope is in direct contrast to the picture sociologist Sheila Patterson draws in her book *Dark Strangers* (1963) when she creates as James Procter says a composite picture of black housing as "large, ugly, dilapidated Victorian structures, semi-detached, with neglected and rubbish-strewn gardens…There is also a vague, all-pervading smell of ancient dirt, of inefficient and overworked plumbing, unaired rooms, cooking, paraffin stoves, sometimes of mice, and always of many people congregated together" and in this composition Patterson has essentially "mytholologised" black communities and dwelling places. (Procter*, Dwelling* 23).

While the strength of an immigrant community as an economic power can ease the way of newcomers in matters of housing and jobs, unchecked, these communities may develop inherent problems especially when they become sub-communities that run parallel to the dominant community. Echoing Raymond Williams' comment on how "dangerous" community can be, Gerd Baumann warns that in Britain community is "a polite term for 'ethnic minority'" and thus a means of continuing the "othering" of immigrant populations. Continues Baumann "The word [community] is so attractive, even to the detractors of ethnic minorities, because it appears to value people as members of a special collective. What is special about this collective is, in the case of ethnic minorities that they are readily presumed to share a culture in its reified form" (15-16). This populist view of culture and by extension community as something that can be codified and is predictable and unchanging is both false and dangerous. It is this very

subject with which the screenplay *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993*)* written by Meera Syal engages. Syal poses the question of what happens when an established community becomes entrenched in the "old" ways and how these notions play out for women (and obliquely for men). The film is ostensibly about an organized bus trip of multigenerational Asian women going to the beach and the conflicts that ensue among them. The script follows several women including a first-generation immigrant, two second-generation immigrants and two third-generation immigrants.[3] As directed by Gurinder Chadha (hailed by Sarah Street as the first Asian woman to direct a feature film in Britain [102]) the film is filled with visual contrasts: A group of women, older, and belonging to the first wave of immigrants arrive at the bus. They are dressed in saris and keep their long graying hair swept up in orderly buns. Although they have lived in England for more than twenty years, it is obvious they have done little sightseeing and almost never without their male companions. Gently excited, these women are aghast as a car pulls up and an Indian woman in a short, tight skirt, high heels, coiffed hair and full makeup steps out. Rekha is visiting England from Bombay with her husband, a businessman constantly in meetings. She declares she isn't waiting for him to see England and is coming along with them. (Subsequently, it is revealed that her brother-in-law has financed the trip and thus she has status as an "honored" guest.) There is immediate tension between the modern Indian woman and the older immigrants. Rekha is openly disdainful of the older women and their traditional ways and clothing as they are of her chain smoking and attire. At one point Rekha injects into their conversation about home to ask, "Home? What Home? How long is it since you've been home?"

The concept of home, as Tony Chapman asserts is "peculiarly difficult to define" and this difficulty arises from the fact that "home is conceptualized in the abstract…by *everyone*" (144). Jigna Desai further explains the nostalgia for home that so many South Asian immigrants feel for India as being less than a wish for the land and its community and more as a feeling that is linked to a particular time when things were familiar and not so foreign (134). Maintains Susheila Nasta "'Home' in these Asian British fictions therefore can no longer be a single place, but represents instead a series of locations, an imaginative ground fertile for new improvisations" (211). Thus while Rekha's question perfectly illustrates the gap between her perception of home/community and the immigrants' perception of the land they have left which is one of "memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" neither is wrong: they are merely speaking from a different perspective[4].

The older immigrants in the film are connected to a community that is founded on the traditional aspects of the communities/homes they have left behind. This is a home constructed of "personal memory" but as Chapman points out "homes that are lodged in collective or personal memory [are placed] in the context of shared or secret aspirations for the future" (138). This is certainly the case for the aunties who remember with pleasure and with nostalgia the India of their youth. It is this India they have recreated and maintained in England for the sake of their children – the future – and their illusion is a strong one. They have (presumably) raised their children and sit in judgment on the younger women who wear western style clothing, go to school and find jobs. When the older women disapprove of a behavior, they are quick to blame it on the influence of the English because it is easier to demonize the dominant culture than to accept their children

and grand children do no feel the same ties to "back home". The implicit irony is that the older women don't understand that they too are benefiting from the new ways and that the community that they have forged is unique to being rooted within British society. James Procter reminds us that "If the film is about a journey away from home (Birmingham), then the characters' participation in the cultural offerings of the traditional seaside resort display a certain 'at-homeness' within the English landscape" (*Dwelling* 92). Since a community of the imagination is one that is both illusionary and stagnant, the older aunties in *Bhaji* are quick to judge the younger members because they must preserve a fiction that all is well and their community is both without flaw and inherently strong because to do otherwise would be to require change.

The middle aged Asha allies herself with the older immigrants but is the only character who exhibits any doubts that her community's norms may not be the only or best ones. Chapman asserts that home is "…too often…regarded as a place upon which society impacts, rather than a place that impacts on society" yet "it is essential not to regard domestic as 'marginal' or 'peripheral' but instead consider its centrality in the study of power relationships in society" (136). Asha believes in "honor, duty and sacrifice" and as an elder should be in a place of power. Yet her grown children live at home and greedily expect her to wait on them hand and foot (which she does willingly) and she helps manage the family store without complaint but is prey to headaches and thoughts she can't control. She is conflicted by things she sees and hears among the younger women and is slowly being infected by the idea that her community is not an ideal one. The realization, however, only makes her angry and literally ill and she strikes out against the younger women because they are challenging her long held loyalties and

belief system. Ginder, one of the younger women on the bus trip, has sued her husband for divorce on the grounds he is abusive. Asha is disturbed by the lawsuit because she can't reconcile it to her notions of duty, honor and sacrifice that serve as the underpinnings of her home and community. Asha is reluctant to acknowledge the influence of outside "communities" and reacts badly to Ginder by scolding her for her actions. Later the older women question Asha as to the verity of Ginder's charges that her husband beats her and she responds that if it is true, Ginder must have brought it on herself. Her inflexibility and lack of sympathy is directly related to her desire to preserve her communal home because it is a place in she which has invested the better part of identity.

Similarly Asha is disturbed when she finds out that another young woman on the bus trip, a girl who is a "credit" to her parents is pregnant. Asha publicly exposes Hashida to the scorn of the older women, an action that immediately upset the younger women who jump to her defense. Sumi, the coordinator of the woman's center and organizer of the trip tries to intervene by reminding Hashida they are all sisters, a charge Hashida bitterly refutes not because she wants nothing to do with the other women but because she understands all too well that her actions go against the community norms especially when it is revealed that the father of the baby is black (his parents are from Jamaica). While the term black may be a political one meant to initially be inclusive of nonwhites in Britain, within the cultures, there are acknowledged differences between shades of color. Scandalized, one of the aunties asks, "Black? What is wrong with our men? It is not color, it is culture."

The aunties' scandalized reaction to the identity of the baby's father is yet more visible proof that the older generation's version of home and community is indeed in a fragile state that must be protected against the vagaries of the younger generation who are transforming and are one more step removed from the personal home that the old generation has constructed and who are seeking to reconstruct in their own self image and (in the case of the young girls) their body image.

Although there is a power struggle and some chaos within ranks, this particular community is not in real danger. The women need each other for strength and reinforcement and are not interested in overthrowing their community. This is seen through the character Sumi the organizer of the trip and coordinator of the Saheli Asian Women's Center. She essentially stands outside of the community – she is not a good daughter or wife – but is not treated as a transgressor. Although Sumi doesn't buy into all the communal norms, and is an open advocate for women, she is not perceived as a threat because she remains willingly connected to her community, flawed as it is, and doesn't embrace the white dominant community as being a cure all – indeed she is well aware of its less desirable elements such as racism. During her encounter with the white men who accost her at a rest stop, Sumi easily rebuts them and when in retaliation the men spit at her, Sumi incurs the sympathy of the older women, and by extension the community. Sumi in some ways echoes the community – she is privy to Hashida's relationship with Oliver and is openly scornful of him because she doesn't believe he can provide Hashida with what she needs because he doesn't have a cultural reference point. Sumi falls into the same trap of the older women of privileging her culture even when she works with women who are victims of that very culture.

What makes Sumi's relationship to the community palatable to the women at large is that she serves a very real need that is not openly acknowledged (providing refuge to Asian women in need). In addition, Sumi is not forcing the Asian community to be accountable, she is just cleaning up. To great comedic effect, Sumi starts the bus trip by welcoming the women and earnestly reminding them that as victims of the patriarchy they rarely have a free moment so she hopes they enjoy themselves. As she speaks, the camera pans and we see the women rolling their eyes. Through the eyes of the older women, Sumi lacks standing because she is someone not to be listened too—she is slightly *loco* and likes to hear her own words a little too much but means well. However, Sumi is earnest in her observations women should not bend to the norms of their community just because it's expected, especially if doing so causes them harm, which is something the younger women pick up on. Sumi's genuine belief that the women are all sisters is what saves her from being pompous and makes her a likeable character and a good confidante. Through her job, she helped Ginder leave an abusive relationship and provided Hashida with the pregnancy test. Sumi gives the comfort and support to these women when they have nowhere else to go and so while they may mock her, they accept her because they need her.

The older generation's blind adherence to traditional values in their community has led to a myopia that begets deceit and breeds conflict between the generations. This is immediately obvious in the boy crazy teenaged sisters Madhu and Ladhu who come along for the ride. Their mother has admonished them to behave in front of their aunties, which the sisters are willing to pay lip service to, not because they buy into the traditions of the community but because they want a free trip to Blackpool. Born and bred in

England, they have no memory of India and have little allegiance to a mythical community based on Indian values. When Madhu and Ladhu learn of Hashida's pregnancy they immediately and without judgment support her decision to get an abortion. Their very pragmatic approach is evidence they have been influenced by the western concept that a woman's body is her own and it is her right to choose if she will carry a pregnancy to term. Indeed when Hashida is exposed, Madhu cries naively, "She's gonna have an abortion anyway. So what's the big deal?" as if that was the end of the matter, which for her it is.

When they arrive in Blackpool the sisters quickly leave the tour group to change into sexier clothing and makeup and go looking for fun, which they find with two boys (white and thus non-vetted by the community) who buy them food and drinks. The episode remains sweet due to fact the participants are youthful and innocent and the encounter is limited to a few kisses. Yet with the arrival of Ranjit, Ginder's ex-husband, and his brothers the men facilely take on the role of "cousin" to chastise the girls and scare off the boys, casting the encounter in a more sinister light. If the older women on the bus are the judges of what is acceptable the men, at least these men, willingly take on the role of enforcer. Through their actions, the men have formalized the voice of the community and are swift to punish their unruly women who are obviously in constant need of guidance.

At the end of the day when Madhu makes much of a necklace "her" boy gave her when they parted, Ladhu questions why she must always chase white boys. Madhu reacts defensively by saying the brown boys are always chasing the white girls. Madhu has seen how time has stood still for the women who have become prizes – good daughters and

wives – but not flesh and blood women who may enjoy being courted and are not allowed to have fun without incurring the community's censure. These fictional girls echo the young Asian girls portrayed in Tarquin Hall's memoir who willingly adopt traditional dress because they tell him they are more comfortable with the "old" values. Hall, however, cynically wonders if they do so just to earn their parents' permission to leave the house where they can freely socialize with boys. If this is indeed the case, they are doing precisely what Madhu and Ladhu are doing: feigning compliance in order to get their way. The conversation between the two girls as filmed is a poignant moment because it captures the differences between third-generation immigrants who have learned the flaws of the community and are willing to adopt its norms as long as it serves their own end but do not take it too seriously and second-generation immigrants who desperately want to be accepted by their community even at great personal cost. It is evident the quality of the connectivity of the woman's community becomes the deciding factor as to whether a woman embraces or refutes the community's norm. In the film the women are suffering from various forms of "homesickness" which Desai argues encompasses "nostalgia, racism, Orientalism and displacement" (Desai 135). Desai goes on to say that the manifestations of illness is a deliberate attempt on Chadha's part to circumvent the "construction of women as motherland and family as nation" (135) and to avoid the representations of what it is to be a South Asian woman and "rather marks the ways in which these embodied positions are produced and performed among the multiple and shifting presence and performances of multiple bodies all dealing with varying degrees of homesickness – morning sickness, abuse, disorientation and dizziness, vomiting" (140).

Hashida and Ginder as second-generation immigrants haven't learned to follow their own desires at the cost of the community maybe because they both still believe in the promise their community holds out to them: they know they are somehow different from their white counterparts. The community holds out the promise that the difference is not a bad thing and indeed they are worthy of being watched and protected. Hashida is a victim of the "good girl" syndrome who wants to accept her community's norm because she desperately wants its approbation. Yet she has been having a longstanding affair with a fellow black student, whose family hails from Jamaica. If the white boys Madhu and Ladhu meet do not have the approval of the community, then a black man is definitely taboo. This internal racialism among dark skinned people manifests itself in a preoccupation with the texture of hair, the thickness of the nose and the shade of skin tone and is a lasting "legacy" as Robert Young puts it of racialism. The problem with racism is that it is not just whites against nonwhites. Rather racism today is heavily influenced by the pseudo scientific categorizations that occurred during the height of western imperialistic empires. Young states "Racial difference in the nineteenth century was constructed not only according to a fundamental binary division between black and white but also through evolutionary social anthropology's historicized version of the Chain of Being" (180) in which degrees of non whites were established and then packaged and sold as a bill of goods to nonwhites. So deeply is this ingrained in South Asian and Black populations that paler skin is almost always at a premium and darker skin an unfortunate circumstance.

Hashida might have circumvented this categorization but she is not so naïve as to not understand it power which is why she has been lying through omission about her

boyfriend to her family who love her and have "faith in her" and whom she knows will be "shamed" in the community. When she finds she is pregnant, she knows 1) she has betrayed her parents' trust, 2) she has shamed them in the eyes of the community and, 3) risks loss of status in the community. It is a daunting prospect and one she can't explain to Oliver, her boyfriend. Oliver surprised by the news and hurt that she has been hiding his existence, disowns the child they have conceived. Hashida momentarily puts the norms of the community ahead of her own wishes and decides on an abortion. When Asha "outs" Hashida, she effectively excommunicates Hashida but also gives her the freedom to follow her own desire.

The intergenerational conflicts that occur on this road trip is in essence, Desai argues, a way to break free of the binaries of the Indian/western story by presenting multiple and generational views of what it means to be part of a "fragmented British Asian Hybridity" (135) and a reinforcement of the notion that that the community is resilient and fluid enough to accommodate the women as they attempt to renegotiate their identities and when necessary to create spaces for themselves as needed. It is a case as Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose remind us, that the "imagined communities of women with divergent histories and locations" can be said to be "…spaces that are constituted through struggles over power/knowledge" and that "women's identity produce different interpretations" of said communities" (4-5).

What is evident about community is if a woman feels connected to it, meaning that if she is in a position to gain something, be it status, marriage or approval she is more apt to adopt or adapt to the community's norm. Thus the older women are firm in their conviction that their community is stronger for its traditional values that assume a woman

knows and stays in her place. For the younger women, however, their realities cannot be reconciled to this community of the imagination because it is not the community they imagine. They eventually face the choice of suffering in silence or trying to establish their own way. The conflicts that arise between the generations occur because the younger women are not invested in the imaginary community and cannot remain stagnant.

Standing outside the norm is a lonely place but falling in with the norm can be equally lonely as both Ginder and Hashida learn. Ginder loves her husband – they meet in college court and make a love match – but she can barely tolerate living in a communal household where they have little privacy and where she is treated as a servant who is regularly "disciplined." It is not the beatings that wear down her sense of self but the knowledge that her husband no longer listens to her or takes her wishes into account; she has ceased to exist as a person to him. He sees nothing wrong in his behavior and she worries that his example will subsequently infect their son. It is ultimately her connection to her son and a new generation (which she can presumably influence) that forces her to confront the established norms of a community that have failed her. Not only has the community failed to protect her from mental and physical abuse, but it also condemns her for leaving. Asha in fact conspires with Ginder's husband Ranjit when he follows her to Blackpool not because she wishes harm on Ginder but because she believes he needs a chance to talk to her so they can sort out their problems. Ranjit remains impatient and abusive during the ensuing encounter and his arrogance keeps Ginder firm in her resolve and finally wins her the sympathy of the aunties. In a seriocomic moment the older

women berate Ranjit for being a poor figure of a man and beat him about the head as they rescue Ginder from his abuse.

Similarly Hashida realizes that by giving in to her own desires – a relationship with Oliver – she has relinquished her rights to the community because they are unable to support her decision. She believes in the community and willingly hides the relationship but a potential child changes the dynamics. Such is her desperation to adhere to the communal rules, her first instinct is to deny the relationship, abort the pregnancy and resume her life as if nothing had happened. At the end of the film, Oliver comes after Hashida in Blackpool but unlike Ranjit who berates Ginder and tries to make her conform to what the community expects of her, Oliver offers Hashida a choice. She can be the penitent daughter of the "old" community (something she was planning to do until she was found out and decided not to go through with the abortion), she can refute her community and join Oliver's or she can try and form a hybrid community and create a space that is nonjudgmental of their relationship and baby. The latter is what she wanted but was too inarticulate to voice. By standing with Hashida, Oliver welcomes her into his community (which is willing to accept her - Oliver's father berates him for abandoning Hashida), provides her with the necessary moral support to deal with having to disappoint her parents and offers her a form of rapprochement with the aunties who may condemn her choice of boyfriend but can find some measure of approval for the fact Oliver will stand by her. Both Hashida and Ginder try to buy into the tenets of their community but find that once it fails them, they must make a choice: either conform to a narrow definition of what it means to be South Asian who happens to live in Britian or risk abandonment from the community. Both choose to overcome their bodily ills and strike

out on their own because they are looking out for their respective children. Like their elders, they are now in the process of constructing a home/community that is based on personal experience and one that looks to the future and learn that their central point needs not be fixed in the norms of a country they have real ties to.

Syal returns to the idea of community in her novel *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* (2000) but this time explores how communities are only as strong as the people of which it is comprised. Centering on three childhood friends, the novel tells the story of Tania, Sunita, and Chila. Tania is a successful TV producer but is pitied by the Asian community because she is not married and only dates (i.e. sleeps) with white men. Sunita has given up the promise of her earlier academic years for marriage and strives to be a good wife, mother and advocate at the Citizens Advice Bureau only to find herself increasingly unhappy.

Chila, the undesirable girl, surprises everyone by achieving status in the community through a good marriage. Considered the "dark dumbo" (i.e. too dark to be pretty, and not educated enough) Chila believes in her community and wants to be accepted. Her marriage to a highly eligible man – i.e. light skinned, educated, wealthy – satisfies her on many levels: she pleases her family, she gains status in the community, she can lord it over her friends as she can pursue her dream of being the perfect Indian wife. At the opening of the novel, only Chila is happy because it is only Chila who has a naïve belief in her community and for one shining moment she has exceeded its expectations of her even though her in-laws are less than thrilled with her – something her husband seems bemused by when he comments to her, "I could understand it with the white girls, he said, 'but on paper you're perfect" (Syal 27).

Syal also engages with the boundaries that exist within and surrounding the Asian community in Leyton, England. By doing so Syal establishes the truly artificial and fragile nature of such communities. The novel opens with an old man watching a wedding procession (Chila's wedding) and calls to his wife to come "Quickly! You hurry up and you'll see a …bleedin' hell!" (Syal 8). The man likens the Indian community to snow – gentle at first but eventually, like the Indians, it takes over everything. Immediately and effectively Syal establishes a sense of division between the people of Leyton (the whites are "hostile onlookers" and the Indians are figures of fun), the implication being that the people whose stories we follow will be different from the white folks. Yet beneath the colorful saris, and ornate jewelry, Syal's novel reveals that how women fashion their lives so they can live with themselves and their loved ones is not such a foreign issue. So if finding love and one's way is a universal theme, what makes this story so different? It is the presence of the Asian community that dictates morals and the women's ties to the novel. Here the community is not so much an imaginary one as India is in the past. This community is concerned with self-perpetuation. Thus it is important a woman is educated (because it reflects well on her in-laws) but she needs to understand her main priority is to marry and procreate. The themes of reaching one's potential, not being overwhelmed by your background/roots and the question of finding happiness are both intensely personal and universal. Much has been written in third world feminism on how western women too easily dismiss brown skinned women and assume they are "poor, ignorant, compliant."[5] Instead of listening to and attempting to understand their sisters, western women too often assume brown skinned women are compliant in their own fates because they don't know any better. Syal is reminding us that women who

are grappling with career and children, with a lack of education and economic resources, with abusive partners and anorexia can be any color and live anywhere, even next door.

It can be inferred that Syal is mocking the artificiality of borders between communities when whites and Asians live cheek by jowl and she does so through the use of stock characters. Tania is the rebel who only dates white men even though she loves an Indian man. She turns her back on Deepak because to accept him would mean, in her mind, having to accept the strictures of her community, dictating where she will live, what she will wear and whom she will speak with. Tania's temperament will not allow her to find a middle ground and she is very good at erecting boundaries between herself and the community. The choices she sees for herself are either the good girl or the outsider. Her lover mirrors her feelings and decides he wants a good girl that will be a credit to him in the community. So Tania kisses Deepak goodbye and sets him up with Chila, who marries him unaware of their previous relationship.

Tania is commissioned to do a documentary on love and marriage among Asian Britons, something she initially refuses because she implicitly understands that once again her "community" has been reduced to the foreign with curious mating customs offered up for the amusement of the dominant culture. While she instinctively wants to preserve the integrity of her community, Tania is also ambitious and comes back to her old neighborhood, reestablishing ties with her friends who agree to be in her film. It is this "soul chat" as Sunita terms their conversations, that brings a new dimension to their friendship and allows them the safety needed to start to question their established views on who they are and what they are doing. Sunita and Chila whose loyalties lie with the

greater community are open and welcoming to Tania, never considering she may have another agenda or is using everything they reveal as fodder for the documentary.

Tania has been fighting for so long against what she thinks about her community – oppressive and non-supporting of her endeavors – that she has demonized the community and refuses to feel any kinship with the women. She is driven by her quest for the perfect shot without stopping to consider that she is dealing with individuals who trust her and consider a friend. Yet as she films she becomes, through the lens, a silent observer and a silent witness to the women she despises. She films an encounter between a married couple and their therapist only to hear the wife declare, "I could end up like my mother. I'm supposed to because everyone says she's a saint, but she's sixty-three and I'm thirty-three, and I've already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet and I've got lots more years to live and I've already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet and I don't have any more time to wait…" (Syal 102). Although she is not ready to accept it, Tania is slowly seeing that she is not so very different from the women from whom she has distanced herself.

Tania's wholesale rejection of her community is also her downfall because she can't be sensitive to the men and women she is filming as she lacks compassion for their decision to live within the community. On the night of its premiere, the documentary is hailed as "showing the whole picture" and that Indians are "like any other bunch of people" (Syal 178) while Sunita and Chila realize they have been manipulated and their confidences betrayed. Tania defends herself by saying she "just told the truth." It is the inclusion of the word "the" that serves as a boundary between her and the community because she has imposed her gaze – here literally film footage that has been edited in a

specific way – without understanding that there is no one truth. What she has captured is only *a* truth not *the* truth. Through her actions she has not only made herself the outsider but she has also re-colonized her community by packaging it for public (i.e. white) consumption. Tania's actions have shaken the foundation of her belief system as well as her friends. She had been slightly contemptuous of Sunita and Chila for remaining in their community but it turns out Tania had believed in the power of the community as a force that she needed to fight and distance herself from. She may have rejected it but she took comfort in knowing it was there and had even told herself that releasing Deepak was a noble gesture because he wanted to live the life prescribed by the community, something she herself isn't willing to do. Deepak confronts her after the film premiere and asks her if in her bitterness she was willing to destroy everything, and Tania responds by asking him why he is punishing Chila. When he starts to deny it she confesses "I only saw it through the camera. I only admitted it then. You torture her [Chila] for being exactly what you wanted when you married" (Syal 180). Finally, Tania lets down her boundaries, she is stripped of her illusions of what the community is and what if any her place was within it. It is not an invincible object that she must fight against or ridicule or only view through the lens of a camera. It is made up of living breathing people who are just doing the best they can. As Deepak and she kiss, a kiss that is witnessed by Chila, Sunita and Tania's boyfriend, Syal writes "All the ties snap one by one with discordant twangs, duty, loyalty, family, security, but not, as one would expect, tradition…"(Syal 180). The tradition Syal writes about is not the tradition of being Asian or an Asian in England but of being a woman trying to make the best choices under less than ideal circumstances.

The second friend, Sunita, is the most balanced. A harried mother of three, over worked with a husband who no longer seems to "see" her, she soldiers on. Like Sumi from *Bhaji on the Beach,* Sunita knows life can be unfair but strives to work within the system. She is a feisty character and declares "It's [life's unfairness] always got to me, which is why I ended up doing this job. Except now I understand why Justice wears a blindfold. And on some days, I'd kill for her sword in the bottom drawer" (Syal, 77).

Sunita learns early there are no guaranteed happy endings but she continues to fight for people because she refuses to give in to disenchantment. She sees the ugliness of her community that condemns a divorced woman because "[d]ivorce was one of the English diseases" but she tries to negotiate and understand the good about the community too. Of the three friends, Sunita's relationship with the community is the most organic and is based in a reality where she can see the community's strengths and weaknesses but still wishes to be an active participant. Her personal unhappiness stems from the multiple demands of being a wife, mother and overworked career woman. While in one community (the Asian) she can be praised for being a mother, she sees her university friends (a community of highly educated, thin, childless and vibrant women) have far surpassed her in their careers and feels left behind. Once she refocuses on her own wants (rekindling her marriage, loving herself, her husband and children) she finds peace and is able to find her path within the community again: once again she becomes the crusader, the good friend, the advocate who can be relied on to bring support and comfort to those who needs it and in renewing her role and her energy she also recreates her role as lover and beloved for her husband and finds a semblance of happiness.

Chila is not equipped to deal with adversity. Although of Indian descent she was born in Africa and moved to England and carries with her the sense of her own "unbelonging." As a child Chila had written a prize-winning essay on spring in Africa. Her father had been saddened after reading the essay and become nostalgic for his lost paradise. As a result, Chila had spent the rest of her life turning in mediocre work because she never wanted to see that look again on her father's face. She never again wanted to make anyone sad again and it didn't matter her lack of effort earned her a reputation for being soft headed and stupid. She embraces her life with Deepak who looks after her and augments her status in the community and she is prepared to be blissfully happy. She believes in the dream of love and basks in the community's approval – her mother's delight, the envy of her cousins and girlfriends and her own inner imagination of love. When Chila realizes Deepak has resumed his affair with Tania she remains typically silent. Chila hides her pain from the community because she doesn't want to lose face but after she gives birth to her child, she is transformed. She is no longer bound by what her mother or mother's friends think of her because she has found a place of belonging in her relationship to her new son. She leaves Deepak, whom she realizes has never really loved her, and carves out her own path as a single mother. Importantly, her mother and Sunita support her decision and help her raise her child. Even Tania finds redemption: while she was happy to conduct an adulterous affair with Deepak, she is revolted and outraged by the fact he came to her knowing his wife was pregnant. Her now frayed bond of friendship and sisterhood with Chila supersedes her love for Deepak. On the night Chila gives birth Tania learns her father is terminally ill; her brother comes to bring her back into the fold, and she willingly goe where she runs

into Sunita and Chila and the women take the first steps to a reconciliation. Tania reenters her community and while she is shopping at the local market an old woman grabs her wrist and asks "Are you Tedon-Sahi's lost daughter?" (Syal 314) to which Tania replies in the affirmative. Tania is a daughter. She may be lost and different but she is not disowned. If the community in Syal's earlier work was one that was rigid and unyielding, forcing women into positions of deceit and conflict, her latter work shows that the community is truly a changeable place that can embrace new ideals and provide support for its daughters in unexpected ways. A final word on the novel: while *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* follows the literary traditions of the South Asian Diaspora and includes the trial and tribulations of being South Asian in England and living as if one is in exile, Monika Fludernik doesn't believe the novel can be quite counted as such not because it "develops a panoramic picture of a happy diasporic community that is self-supporting and vibrant" but because the novel fails to draw a portrait of homesickness and longing to be restored to home. Says Fludernik "there is practically no communication with the home country and no nostalgia for it, nor can one observe exemplary hostility to the community in the host country, and there is no desire to return to India" (281). However, what drives the three women in the novel is the desire to be connected to their hybrid community *within* England: initially Tania fears losing herself within it, Chila yearns for its approbation and Sunita attempts to preserve it. Syal has created strong female characters that have realized a community that is 'vibrant' and accepting, sustainable and changeable. It the continuation of the journey that the women in *Bhaji on the Beach* are just beginning to undertake. Community is made up of living organisms and as such can be a source of comfort and acceptance or a place to fear. It can be a community of one or

a larger group and it can be recreated in new ways. How a woman works within the parameters established by her community is a deeply personal heartfelt matter and surely influenced by her circumstances. Black fiction in the last twenty years gives us an inkling of the complexity of these issues and deserved to be mined, so Syal seems to be saying, to reveal what it means to be British, nonwhite, woman and human.

The inherit duality of being British and being a woman of color is at the heart of *A Wicked Old Woman.* Published by the Women's press in 1993 the novel chronicles the life choices of two women Kulwant/Kuli and Rani/Rosalind.Kulwant (aka Kuli- pronounced coolie – which is a slur referring to people of Asian descent), the title character, has purposely embraced the values of her community – even though she doesn't believe in its values. She insists on an arranged marriage, trying to invent herself as the good Indian wife. Even as she strives to ally herself with her community, her strongest connection was with her girlhood friend, Caroline, a white English woman and it is this bond that is the longest and strongest in her life. Kuli may want to be Indian but she is at core English. Two themes are playing out in Randhawa's novel. First is the alienation of the community from the dominant white culture especially when it comes to language, dress and customs. This harkens back to Williams and Baumann's concerns about the dangers of the term community, specifically how these differences can seem insurmountable so that the dominant community can feel free to racialize the sub-community into the exotic other. The other is how some of the women within the community how become alienated because the very fluidity of their existence has overwhelmed them and they no longer know to whom they owe allegiance. It is interesting to note that both Kulwant and Rani (aka Rosalind whose assumed identity is

reminiscent of Shakespeare's Rosaline, a lady who was not above subterfuge and disguise) are a generation apart but suffering from the same malady.

One of the ways Randhawa captures this disaffection is through language or the inadequacy of language. Language is a way to forge bonds, tell stories and share experiences. It can also serve as a way to stigmatize people with the wrong accent or pronunciation or in the case of the young, a way of shutting out the old folk. One of the first requirements of any immigrant is to know the language. In a 1993 interview, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses the issue of hybrid speech in India. To paraphrase, Spivak says English can be heard readily spoken in public among Indians but depending on the education level of the speakers, the "lower classes" might use constructions that would not be immediately recognizable as "English." She goes on to say that it is laughable to talk about a hybrid English operating in India because it is a purely *unselfconscious* evolution of the language (Landry 19). Astutely, Spivak ponders whether if Indians were white, if any one would raise their eyebrows at their hybrid English. She notes the peculiarities of American English and Australian English have become acceptable standards because these societies have been granted legitimacy by the watchdogs of standard English whereas the bastardized versions that exist in brown speaking countries are considered backward. It could then be inferred that the withholding of legitimacy has less to do with the quality of the English spoken as to the skin color of the individuals speaking it. Kuli's skin color firmly places her on the outside because white people look at her and assume they know her and enables them to make assumptions about her knowledge of English and her life. Randhawa's novel succinctly captures how language is used as a weapon powerful enough to both erect and remove boundaries. The opening

scene of the novel focuses on how Kuli, born in India but a long time resident of England, is still considered a foreigner and a national health care nurse who "speak[s] slowly and carefully wanting Mrs. Singh to understand and go away" and mimics an action "hoping she'd understand the sign language if not the Anglo-lingo" (Randhawa 3). Kuli Singh has learned early the binding nature of language that seeks to reduce her: Michael, her childhood boyfriend – a white boy – calls her his "Indian princess" and the "matahari of his heart" while strangers write insults on the buses she rides. When she tries to erase the insults with an indelible marker, she is chastised by the bus conductor for being a trouble maker. Further, she is hurt by the knowledge that the very relationship between England and India always puts her at a disadvantage and makes her an outsider. At a party when a white boy insists that Kuli tells him where she's really from, he informs her that his father was born in India, boasts his forebears lived there for generations and brags his family visits India every year. Looking at him, Kuli is filled with hate "…consumed with envy, jealously and malice. Her parents could hardly afford to go themselves, let alone take the children. Intellectual glasses had probably seen more of India than she ever had." Prompted by an imp, Kuli asks the boy how he gets on with the locals. "You know how it is with ex-patriot communities…but I've managed to pick up a few words of Hindi from the servants…" (Randhawa 18-19). With these few misbegotten words, Kuli is reminded that she and other brown/black skinned people are not included in this boy's mind as being part of the community.

Kuli understands words sometimes pale before hateful acts. As a young woman she has witnessed a house burning in which an Indian mother and her children were burned alive while the father was working. But because of the power of words, Kuli has

chosen to live her life at a an emotional distance because she is labeled as different (brown in a white society) and while she could resist the hurt, she, echoing Chila from *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee*, doesn't want to be responsible for hurting others. Michael, her boyfriend, turns on her when she won't accept his ring and she can't sufficiently explain her reasons – "What did you think? You thought you'd find out the weird customs of the English…we're not animals in a zoo. And I thought you were the shy and innocent one" (Randhawa 25). To the dismay of her parents who want her to continue her schooling Kuli decides to her embrace her culture and request an arranged marriage. Later when she tries to tell her children *her* truth, her husband cautions her against it: "They won't understand or they'll misunderstand. Let them find their own way." Her children mock her as they grow older because "Mother's been hijacked by her rhetoric" (Randhawa 134-5.) Tired of speaking and not being understood, a middle aged Kuli assumes the disguise of an old woman in rags and a walking stick—"Stick-leg-shuffle-leg-shuffle. Stick-leg-shuffle-leg-shuffe."– knowing no one will want to tempt her in conversation, even though she is not free from words being imposed on her. In her new guise, Kuli encounters a young blonde woman who loudly insults and then dismisses her because Kuli "probably doesn't understand a word I've said." Kuli in relief that her disguise has worked (for she is not expected to respond), breaks into an exuberant "war dance" in which she celebrates her escape from the limitations of conversation. While she can reject language, she is not wholly free of people or their ties. Her sons try and pull her back into their lives. Her one son condemns her for being an embarrassment, her middle son wants to help her (come live with us pleads her daughter-in-law), while her youngest son is decidedly blue collar, much to the disgust of his elder brothers and

married to a white woman. Through her sons, Kuli has knowledge of how the supposed order of her community is disintegrating, especially when she finds herself in a room with her family including her ex-husband, his former mistress and now wife (for whom the sons blame her – if you had been a proper wife he would not have strayed) and their newly born child. Even more surprisingly, Kulwant's new disguise brings her to the women's center where she is forced to stop being an observer and become a participant. Ironically she becomes a participant when she stops trying to make herself heard and starts to listen. At the center Kuli is drawn into the stories of the other women there: the mother who has willed herself to be blind because her daughter has runaway; the family of women forced to fend for themselves after being abandoned by the father who preferred his white mistress; the silent girl lying in the hospital, accused of a terrible crime. As Kulwant becomes drawn into these stories, she lets go of the emotional distance with which she has surrounded herself. The result is that she becomes her own person, open to her family, her husband's new wife and the larger community. She is no longer the "dark horse" who doesn't fit either in the white or Asian community. In donning her disguise, she has shuffled her way to a potential truce between herself and her various communities.

Paralleling Kuli is the character Rani who on the night of her sixteenth birthday leaves her home, breaks the lines of communication to her community in which she feels ill-fitted to be a member and changes her name to Rosalind: "Rani is now Rosalind of mythological fame. She wrote the home address on an envelope, the telephone number inside. Sealing it well, she stood on the embankment and posted it into the River Thames" (Randhawa, 41). At first the family afraid of gossip, keep things quiet, but then

in increasing desperation go to her school and talk to her friends only to find that their much loved, too loved daughter was a stranger to them. Shanti, the mother who is metaphorically blinded to her daughter's needs and now in her willed blindness able to see, recalls with clarity, "At that time the police made many enquiries. And they said do you know how many runaway Asian girls there are? But you know they say it with delight, as if she has done a wonderful thing. The papers also. If they could, they would encourage every Asian girl to leave home. For what? A bed-sitter? A strange man's bed? Social Security? Freedom? How happy are they with their freedom?" (Randhawa, 40). The malady between Rani and her family/community was so great she could even begin to describe want she needed or begin to justify it. Yet she is thirty years younger than Kulwant and her experience a more assimilated one – she would (or should) be considered less exotic than Kuli. Rani was supposed to be more adept at shuttling back and forth between the communities but found herself caught in a no man's land because she could not vocalize her own desires and not yet gathered the strength to create her own space within the community. The much-petted daughter of an Indian immigrant family she indulged and allowed perfume, makeup and small jewelry and leaves a suffocated existence where she knows what she is prescribed to do act and say. On her 16th birthday she is allowed a girl's party (no boys as decreed by her father) and as a treat allowed to go to the cinema with her girlfriends, but instead she runs away. Her mother laments that her daughter's fate is either one of loneliness, cut off from her community or else in the bed of some strange man. These two scenarios are the limit of what the mother can imagine and perhaps it accounts for Rani's inability to understand that she had the power to imagine and create a new role within her community and why she feels she must

escape in such a definite way. Rani ends up a squatter with the outcasts of the white society where she doesn't have to share her story and where she is largely ignored and can live on the edges of both white and south Asian British society. Years later she finds herself injured and in trouble in with the law and this brings her back into her community where to her surprise she finds understanding and support. *A Wicked Old Woman*, proposes Christine Vogt-William, can be read as "*Bildungsromane,* which trace the developments of the protagonists while exploring in varying degrees of complexity the issue of taking freedom on one's own terms and not giving in to the condescension of the dominant culture, which is more often than not based on … racist stereotypes" of South Asian women as being submissive, docile, passive (390).

Kuli and Rani are the by-products of strong communities: Kuli's community is the immigrant community that is banding together for survival in a hostile place – a little piece of India in England, where men are the protectors and providers and women are the homemakers and docile. Rani's community is the established community that holds on to its cultural markers and feels slightly smug that their cultural mores are better than the white dominant society. It is a community that in its smugness doesn't see that not all of its daughters are flourishing. What makes this novel so powerful is that both Kuli and Rani are not typical rebels who throw off their community and embrace white mores. However both women from a very early age are rooted in their individualism and try to carve their path. Kuli, not liking the vastness of her world in the "white" community because she doesn't understand how to get on, seeks to entrench herself in tradition only to find she can't earn acceptance because she is not willing to remake herself – she is as she once told her then husband an Indian wife but that Indian wives come in many

varieties. It is Kuli's insistence on individuality that is her downfall. She could not be Michael's princess because that was a lie. She hoped the arranged marriage with its scripted roles was something she could live with but found herself chiefly indifferent to it. It is her hard earned ability to move forward into a space of her own creation without seeking approval of the said community that ultimately frees her. Similarly Rani finds her community – specifically her family and their expectation for her life (marriage) and strictures - too confining. She rejects wholesale her parents' world and seeks a new identity as Rosalind where she gains anonymity as the brown exotic woman even though she doesn't actually engage in casual sexual encounters. Rosalind doesn't internalize her reasons for being chaste –are they a carryover value of her traditional upbringing or born of a desire to hold herself apart so she doesn't fall in the role of sexually exotic? – but her physical distance between herself and the men who live with her in her squat mimic Kuli's emotional distance from her community. When a would-be rapist attempts to breach Rosalind's territory – her body – she reacts with violence and defends herself by killing him but subsequently lands in the hospital where she slips into a coma. It is only after Rosalind is "discovered" by the Asian women from the center that she regains entry into the black and white communities she has rejected. Kulwant and her white friend Caroline "arrive each day bringing food and thermoses of tea. Caroline dead certain that what it did for her it will do for Rani" (Randhawa, 180). These women and other from the Asian community come and sit with Rosalind and tell her stories about snow queens and magical third eyes, stories that offer wonder and magic and possibilities and acceptance. The acceptance is more than just emotional; the women piece together the gritty story of how Rani landed in hospital. Once the truth is uncovered, these women rally to her

defense, becoming her advocates and seeking legal defense for her against the pending murder charges. Akin to the princess in a fairy tale who is kissed and brought to life from a wicked spell, Rosalind is finally reincarnated and participates in the community of her imagination, one that is neither segregated white or Asian, and one that will openly accept her as she is.

The novel however, doesn't include a facile fairy tale ending. Once Kulwant learns to reach outside of herself she attempts to repair the damage inherent in her relationships with her daughter-in-laws. One is too busy to listen, the other suspicious when she offers to babysit. "Broken bridges," Kulwant thinks "take a lot of preparation and labour to repair" (Randhawa 183) but she is committed to trying. Rani/Rosalind is going to face legal charges. Both women are being held accountable for their actions. Randhawa is clear in her purpose that being "ready to try" is the most important thing for a woman. Kuli and Rani thought they were participating through their rejection of one community (Asian) and non-acceptance of the other (Kuli rejects Michael; Rani lives on the fringes of white society) but they were really abstaining. Their actions, when they finally acted, had consequences but were also the key in their finding their places within the community, places they got to define instead of having imposed upon them. With this last imperative, "The Director shouts ACTION!" Randhawa ends her novel. Randhawa is talking less about the film crew who come to document Rani/Rosalind's case than charging the women shuttling back and forth between communities to make their stand, act, find their places and meet the consequences.

Action seems to be the watchword when it comes to accepting, refuting or redefining community. As has been previously discussed women are too often willing to

give up their sense of self because they seek approbation. What happens when a woman finds herself without community and how does she re-fashion a yardstick that she can then use as she negotiates her way?

As shown in *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) and *Bhaji on the Beach (*1993*)* a weak or absent immediate community can be an isolating and even debilitating experience for a woman. To survive she is forced to change and adopt new customs (perhaps the dominant community or another found community) and ways of thinking. Similarly, fragmented, broken communities are at the heart of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). The novel centers on two sisters and their respective fates through marriage; one (Nazneen) marries according to her father's wishes and moves to England and the other (Hasina) marries for love only to plunge into prostitution after she is cast off by her father and forced to leave her increasingly abusive husband. Hasina and Nazneen never meet again, but Hasina writes frequent letters to her sister. These letters serve as a bond between Nazneen and Hasina and creates a place of the imagination between the two that is part nostalgia – for the lost innocence of their youth— but also a safe haven so that Hasina can write a chronicle of action and a redefinition of their past. Through Hasina's letter, Nazneen finally confronts the truth that their mother commits suicide because she [the mother] could no longer accept her fate. The letters serve as substitute for a function of community i.e. supportive and accepting for the two women and allows them the courage they need to live in their respective presents. In essence, the two sisters set up a parallel community, one that is of the imagination but nonetheless extremely powerful that sustain them through the years as they both endure a form of exile: Hasina is no longer acceptable to polite society while Nazneen has yet to find her place in England.

The inclusion of the letters in the novel is somewhat problematic. Hasina's letters are full of broken English and abrupt sentence structures. Criticism[6] has been leveled at the semi literate letters because they seemingly portray Hasina as backward and uneducated and cause the "reader to stumble." A closer reading of Hasina's words, however, reveals that they have an inherent beauty and that her awkward words can paint vivid and powerful images that tie Nazneen to her homeland. For example Hasina writes about a child who has come into her life:

> Daisy after long time fall asleep and I sit down with head still rest on shoulder. Back of head is curls. If you see those curls! How pretty the face. I kiss her with very care. I feel like hold the breath sometime when I look at Baby Daisy. Is like have soap bubble on the hand catch light with thousand beautiful color.
> Zaid come out and he say, "Dont make the mistake. She is not for you."
> He has bruise on jaw color like brinjal[7] and cut on left arm above elbow.
> I do not like him then. (Ali, 246).

In light of Spivak's comments concerning pidgin English one could view these letters not so much as a broken patois of a poorly educated person (which makes the chief of the complaints against Ali's inclusion of them) but as a way for Hasina, who is not constrained by the rules of proper language or acceptable behavior, to be free to speak her mind in a way Nazneen is not. Hasina's seeming ineloquence can be taken as a direct contrast to Nazneen, who while a traditional Muslim doesn't, on the surface, seems overtly oppressed or powerless. While Monica Ali is on record as not caring for

questions from over eager students on her "intent" in writing the novel she does admit to deliberately using language to capture the loss an immigrant feels in crossing a new boundary. Says Ali, "My mother is a white English woman who grew up in this country and went to Dhaka to marry my father. She couldn't speak the language and she used to tell me what it was like. It's that sense of social dislocation. I thought about that a lot when with Nazneen."[8]

On the surface Hasina seems powerless because of her situation yet it is Nazneen who is truly stripped of power because she never speaks or thinks to express an opinion. While Nazneen is sheltered in her marriage, Hasina, speaks of wife beating, women forced to sell their bodies and babies that are burned alive not with outrage but with a calmness – she is actively engaged in the fight, paying for a friend's surgery, looking after children and not being a talking head. Outwardly Hasina seems oppressed and without voice and a caricature of Indian women (if they don't submit or have protection then they will become a victim) but her words and her insistence on using them free her of victimization. Hasina has been stripped of the approbation of the community – her father has disowned her, Nazneen keeps Hasina's promiscuity largely hidden from her husband and daughters, while the factory women who are "decent" no longer acknowledge her. However, she has reformed a new community. It is one that is comprised of women who are battered and in exile like her sister Nazneen. Hasina sees that she is free to vocalize not in a prim and proper English manner but in her own private language which only Nazneen a fully-fledged member of the private community can easily decipher. Hasina's letters, while not elegantly constructed, are elegant in their descriptions of her life and can resound with hope despite her situation. However, the

very fact that Hasina chooses to write is telling. Her words are a continuation of the bond that she shares from her childhood with her sister, a bond she is careful to preserve. After she admits to seeing her mother preparing for her suicide, Hasina writes to take it back.

The reader is privy to only one of Nazneen's responses to her sister concerning her son, the first-born child, who subsequently dies. The letter is formal, impersonal and mimics well the conventions of British English:

> My dearest sister, I hope everything is well with you. The baby has been sick in hospital, but we expect to bring him home soon. Chanu has given up his job. I do not worry, and you must not worry. When the baby is home, I will write again. A long letter next time. Pray God keep you safe (Ali, 100-101).

If Hasina's responses are a form of self-expression, then one must wonder if Nazneen is capable of revealing herself in the same manner. The implication is that she cannot. Even after she begins her affair with Karim, Nazneen knew she would never write about him to Hasina. Her next letter, when she got around to it, would follow in the footsteps of the others: "We are all well. Shahana is getting top marks in her class, and Bibi has grown at least one inch. I tried again to make dhoie but it never comes out quite right, too much sugar I think, or not the right kind. I pray for your friend Monju and her boy*"* (281).

Even Nazneen acknowledges that such a letter would make a poor answer to her sister. Is Nazneen incapable of being expressive or is it a question of Karim not being worth the effort? In either case, Nazneen's contained existence is slowly being chipped

away. In an earlier letter, Hasina had noted **"**Something bit change in your letter. First time now I know more how the girls grow how different one daughter and another…" (Ali 246).The "something bit change" is an astute observation on Hasina's part. Something has indeed changed for Nazneen who has finally opened her eyes and is viewing her daughters not as a mother views them – creatures of constant demand – but as a fellow woman. She is seeing her daughters as people with distinct personalities and wants and needs. Acknowledging these needs also means that Nazneen must decide whether she is going to nurture them or quell them. Her relationship with her sister has been very nurturing and accepting. If she is going to extend the same trust to her daughters, then it is a short step to embolden Nazneen, who has been criticized for keeping herself to herself, to initiate a friendship with her neighbor Razia. Now Nazneen's community is exponentially increasing. Nazneen gains the desire/ability/willingness to listen to her daughters who are speaking in their own language – that of being British born and wanting the choice of not returning to a "home" land they cannot call home.

Housed in a tenement, Nazneen, over the course of years, comes to realize she can assimilate and live in England without her husband who rails at their daughters for not being traditional enough. Her community has become not one of men but of the women who have been left behind: her mother, who disappeared and is later discovered to have committed suicide, her sister, Razia, and her neighbor who has been abandoned by her husband and her daughters who are alone as they carve their own paths.

For many years Nazneen is a model wife and preserves the illusion of community. Although in an arranged marriage, Chanu and Nazneen have a form of affection and have

created their own community, even if it is flawed. Early in their marriage, Chanu, Nazneen and their infant son pay an unexpected social call on a Dr. Azad who has several times eaten at their house but never returned the invitation. They meet his wife who wears short skirts, cuts her hair, smokes, lacquers her nails purple and serves food that tastes "like cardboard in water." When Chanu starts to pontificate about the plight of the immigrant, Mrs. Azad interrupts and says,

> Why do you make it so complicated? Assimilation this, alienation that! Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like Westerners. Fact: that's no bad thing. My daughter is free to come and go. Do I wish I had enjoyed myself like her when I was young? Yes! (Ali 78).

While Nazneen considers the Azads slightly ridiculous, without community, tradition or roots, she secretly considers them to be less unhappy than she. She is drifting but content in her unquestioning.

This status quo changes, however, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S., a place that makes her feel the ramifications despite its distance from Nazneen's community. Franz Fanon reminds readers in *Wretched of the Earth* that "national awakening" is always a violent event. Similar Nazneen undergoes a personal awakening in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

Suddenly she finds her Muslim community is under attack by white neighbors who now view them with suspicion as not only different but potentially dangerous.

Alarmed, Nazneen finally steps out of her traditional role in an effort to make sense of what is happening. She is drawn to the Asian community meetings (surprisingly meetings she attends without her husband and daughters) that have been hastily called to discuss how they can best resist being turned into "hostiles" in their own country. There she meets Karim through whom she finally starts to work making clothing by the piece, work which brings her an income (much needed as her husband has quit his job out of frustration for being passed over for promotion yet again), some equity with her husband in the household, the regard of her daughters and self-fulfillment. As a by-product, this stepping out of her prescribed role also brings her an awareness of possibilities and she somewhat predictably starts an affair with Karim, who is several years her junior.

Nazneen's attempts to act and engage with the community make her a stronger individual who no longer blindly follows her traditions but starts to question the oddities she has been seeing but not observing. She starts to see some of the women in the council tenement she lives in have literally been abandoned by their husbands and forced to return to school and work to provide for their children and yet are condemned for their western ways. An elderly woman – Mrs. Islam – who is revered for her adherence to tradition turns out to be not only a busy body, but a loan shark who is defying Muslim law and exploiting members of her community without mercy. Nazneen gradually comes to understand that the community she was living in, that is now under attack by white militants, was already broken and she must make a determination of how she wants her daughters to be raised, even if it means putting her and her children's needs before her husband's.

A Muslim, Nazneen has lived in the same block of council flats since immigrating to England with her husband, Chanu, sixteen years earlier. Nazneen has always allowed the interpretation of others to define her. In England her husband keeps her isolated to save face – "Why should you got 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. Personally, I don't mind if you go out, but these people are so ignorant. What can you do?" (Ali 27). Nazneen was raised to bear what could not be changed. She had been born prematurely and her parents left it to fate to see if she had survived. For four days she did not eat and on the fifth "clamped her mouth" on her mother's teat. Nazneen does not question her fate even when her father arranges a marriage between her and a stranger and sends her to England. On the surface she seems two dimensional – to western eyes a submissive, stereotypical Muslim woman. In the gaze of her family she is a good daughter, a satisfactory mother and wife. Yet she can't sleep at nights and gets up to eat solitary meals, trying vainly to fill an inner hunger.

Nazneen's children, two girls, are torn between the two cultures and their father's erratic dictates on what they should wear (regular school uniform or trousers underneath them depending on his mood that day). Nazneen is isolated and has no interaction with the larger/dominant white culture of her adopted home until the after effects of the 9/11 bombings filters through into her world. The affair she drifts into offers no sexual freedom or self-empowerment; instead she finds herself in a parody of a conservative Muslim relationship. Her lover appears in the middle of the day for sexual congress; afterward she straightens the bed and prepares a meal for him. While she watches him, she is overcome with a malaise and has thoughts that she is "unable to act on."

Nazneen is the reverse of the women previously discussed in this chapter. She is initially without a strong self –identity or the willingness to act. She allows her father to marry her off and she follows the dictates of her husband who keeps in isolation. She has no friends outside the few women in her building and seems strangely disconnected to her home. The only lifeline she holds is the letters from her sister Hasina, who has always been determined and headstrong. Hasina marries for love and is cast off by their father; she leaves the marriage after it goes sour and ultimately ends up a prostitute. Yet Hasina never loses her inner purity because she knows who she is and she is pure in following her heart regardless of how she is viewed. Nazneen comes to realize that she, too, has the same opportunities and that in the post 9-11 world everything to gain by constructing her own identity. She breaks from her husband who returns home and remains in England to raise her daughters as citizens of England. She does this because of her love of her daughters and ability albeit late to finally listen to them and understand their viewpoint – her daughters take their fate in their hands and run away and Nazneen is forced to act and go after them – and she is able to consider what she wants for herself and them. And that is to stay.

Ultimately, she rejects her lover who has become increasingly more religious because even though he offers to marry her, she can see that he is secretly condemning her for indulging in their extra-marital affair and she resists this judgment and what it would mean for her and her daughters. For Nazneen, it took violence and its aftermath to understand that she too had choices in how she thought about herself but she ceases to be the dutiful wife or prospective wife in order to be herself and a role model for her daughters while incurring little or no censure. In her final act, she comes to resemble her

sister Hasina who all along has been chasing love and the right to dignity when her community condemned her for being a fallen woman.

The double consciousness (black/brown and white) plus one (wo/man) narrative is the fate of most colored women. Too often these women come from communities where the whole takes precedence over the individual. As members of these communities, the women have the specific duties and are expected to follow specific injunctions.

In addition there exists a larger/dominant community that has its own gaze of who these women are – submissive, weak, exotic or runaways. The colored woman must, to the best of her ability, navigate between her sense of self, her communities' expectation and counteract or at the very least survive the projection of the larger community. Whenever there is a break down in the immediate community, women are forced to reconcile their own needs with the perception of their immediate community and still endure the projected anticipations of the larger community.

How successfully assimilation occurs seems in part to depend on the immigrant having a defined cultural role. The works examined in this chapter have proven that community is not easily characterized. What is apparent, however, is that community can wane in strength, sometimes completely breakdown and sometimes have the uncanny ability to rebuild itself from very little and sometimes be as fragile as the next letter in the post. The novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) comes closest to showing a community that has fused to cross the racial divide of whites and blacks in England. Caroline relates to Kulwant as a woman not as a brown woman, she herself has accepted Kulwant's quirks and eats hot food and comes to the defense of a formerly homeless Asian woman accused of murder without question.

If the community is a solid one, then the traditional roles as established by the old world culture are reinforced as in *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee*. Women look to their communities for acceptance and for feedback on how their roles are defined. In of themselves these traits are neither good nor bad but they can evolve into situations where there is abuse and one gender automatically cedes rights because that is what is expected. When the transferred cultural norms conflict with the larger, dominant culture regarding an issue such as wife beating there is an inherent conflict between a person's inherent community and the larger community. If a woman is given the option of accepting physical or emotional beatings or fighting back (i.e. severing the relationship), even if such a resistance might be difficult or bring censure on her, the final benefits of being free of physical injury might prove too tempting. The act of immigration one may argue is not that the old ways become corrupted, but that new possibilities are offered. While Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* ends on a hopeful note when Razia says "this is England. You can do anything you like" (369), one should not make the assumption that the physical place of England and its cultural values are so superior to Nazneen's community. What Nazneen and all her fictional and nonfictional counterparts are offered is the ability to question her assumptions and refashion herself if she chooses to act – for it is certain that if the narrative chronicle the stories of women who do choose to act, there are other women who serve as background who have not chosen/cannot yet choose to act and so suffer in silence. It is this questioning and the call to action that is the byproduct of immigration: an act of entering a new place (physical, emotional or personal) and an attempt to reconcile the present to this idea of "anything you like."

As Hazel V. Carby reminds us "Female networks mean that black women are key figures in the development of survival strategies, both in the past, through periods of slavery and colonialism, and now… .Networks are re-formed, if need e with non-kin or on the basis of an extended definition of kinship, by strong, active, and resourceful women" (87). The very organic nature of community changes, and as Razia from *Bhaji on the Beach* reminds us, India (and here we can easily insert Pakistan, Mauritius, Jamaica, Guyana etc) is always changing. An immigrant community attempting to cling to past traditions creates a persistence of memory that serves as a balm for those who forever feel a sense of loss because they have left home while counterparts at "home" are changing with the times. This obstinate clinging to the past weakens the community and causes fractures but these fractures open new narratives and possibilities for action, repossession and ultimately a recreation of women immigrant identities.

NOTES

[1] I am using the term in its original meaning, which included British immigrants of Caribbean and Asian descent. While the term "black Briton" no longer exclusively means not white, I use the term interchangeably because much of the criticism that was written on Caribbean literature is application to Asian literature. Also for purposes of marketing, the two traditions are still labeled as black British fiction.

[2]This very cohesiveness is easily stereotyped (all Asians run Indian restaurants or as depicted famously in the American television show, *The Simpsons* convenience stores) and cause for animosity among the working classes of the dominant culture because "those people" are taking jobs away when in fact Asians are creating jobs albeit if only for themselves. Hanif Kureishi obliquely addresses this in his screenplay and subsequent film *My Beautiful Laundrette* in which the "Paki" Mongul establishes a business in a white depressed borough, much to the white nationalists dismay.

[3] Caryl Phillips writes *In A New World Order* that people of his parents' generation who emigrated from the West Indies to Britain in the 1950s were ultimately confronted with the knowledge that despite the fact they held British passports and considered England their "mother country" they would never be regarded as Englishmen because of their skin color. They were doomed to a life of poor housing, discrimination, menial jobs and a feeling that they were unwanted guests who needed to be on their best behavior. This reality killed the dreams of a generation who endured prejudice and ostracism in the futile hope that their children would some day be accepted. The result writes Phillips was *his* generation – a second generation of dark skinned people born in England who were not as polite and unassuming as their parents. These young people demanded recognition and

equality and their intractability culminated in the race riots of the 1970s. The tensions that occurred between this second generation and the white English seemed based on the fear that the English had something to lose, be it affordable housing, a better job or the biggest fear: their white women. As Phillips' generation grew older, their children, the third generation, inherited an "enlightened" if ironic legacy in which prejudice is clearly defined, categorized and practiced. Third-generation immigrants assume they belong in Britain and may even share in some of the same cultural markers as their white counterparts while accepting they will never be "English." Pride in culture and community has made it acceptable for black families who strive to keep the "old" ways and prefer their children not marry/associate with whites to voice such opinions without being labeled racists but white families are not accorded the same privilege of exclusivity.

[4]Rekha's position as an Indian woman of wealth places her in a position to transcend the traditional values that still dictate the cultural norms of India. The question of wealth and status and how they affect assimilation is explored in another chapter. What is revealing about Rekha's comment however is her assumption that being in England places the immigrants in a place of privilege and she is contemptuous of them for not taking advantage of it.

[5]Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques western feminist scholarship when she writes that western eyes:

> produces an image of an 'average third world woman.' This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read:

> sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.) (176).

Mohanty's critique of western feminism is based on the fact that such reductive thinking can and does lead to stereotypes that obscure real understanding. Echoing Spivak's claim that the west can't speak for the subaltern, Mohanty holds that third world women only have the authenticity of experience to lend them creditability.

[6] According to Haiser Kaq, Hasina's letters posed a technical problem for Ali. As Hasina has even less education than Nazneen, she is supposed to write imperfect Bengali. But Ali had lost her childhood knowledge of Bengali, so it was impossible for her to imagine the imperfect Bengali and translate it into imperfect English. She circumvented the problem by devising a kind of broken, pidgin English, which many readers found unconvincing.

[7]American English**:** eggplant / British English: aubergine

[8] see A Conversation with Monica Ali and Hanif Kureishi at the ICA recorded on Brick Lane DVD, 2007. For the full interview see Sunday time article by Brian Appleyard, "Brick Lane's reluctant queen of outrage*"* *Sunday Times* Nov. 18, 2007. <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article2889305.ece> accessed May 12, 2008.

CHAPTER 4: INTERNALIZED AND EXTERNALIZED CONCEPTS OF BEAUTY AND DESIRABILITY FOR BLACK BRITISH WOMEN

"Symbolic and virtuous white."
- Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*.

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"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."
- Hanif Kureishi, *The Rainbow Sign.*

Standards of feminine beauty have always been arbitrary, changeable and subjective. In the West, the "standard" of beauty serves as an implacable and harsh dictator that shapes how a non-white woman will 1) view herself and 2) how she will be measured and assessed[1] by others. The ideology of beauty is the primary marketing tool in advertising, the cosmetic industry, television, films and magazines which seek to maintain an economic engine by preying on the insecurities of women in order to sell their products. In this day and age of the quick fix, the woman who is deemed unattractive is told she can help herself if only she would buy the right product or changes her hair/body size/exercise routine. The ideologue of beauty however has more sinister purposes than making women purchase products since it is an idealogue in which women acquiesce and submit to an arbitrary gaze that dictates the preferred appearance of their hair, complexion and body size. Edward Said and others have written that the ability of the colonized nations to make the colonized exotic, different and somehow *less* enabled the colonizer to perpetuate its sometimes blatantly harmful imperialistic practices through dehumanizing people of color and categorizing them as inferior to the white race for no tangible, biological or rational reason other than one of appearance – a shade of

skin, the width of the nose or the texture of hair. Up until the not so distant past, the standard of beauty has been based on a white hegemonic standard, an example of which is the English rose – blond, fair of skin, an idealized woman, and celebrated in western literature and art. Unspoken is the reality that while dark-skinned women are far from the ideal few white women can meet it either as light or even white skin isn't always a guarantee of acceptance. Tracy Owen Patton concludes, "not all types of Whiteness are valued" and "Those Euro American women who deviate from this standard of whiteness are displaced like ethnic minority women for their departure from "pure" White womanhood" (80). For example, as the works of Jean Rhys prove, at one time white skin from the Caribbean was suspect because of the possibility of a color/racial taint i.e. that white blood might have been mixed with nonwhite in the past. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) Rhys famously re-examines Mr. Rochester's courtship and marriage to Bertha prior to her being locked in the attic as a mad woman. Her crime? An abundance of passion, a hint of madness and the probability of black blood. Similarly in Rhys' novel *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) the young and white Anna Morgan comes to England from the Caribbean only to realize England is both alien and cold – metaphorically and literally. Her white skin and physical attributes, without family or money, do not serve as an automatic entrée into British society and she becomes first an actress, then a rich man's mistress and then a common prostitute. Ultimately Anna's skin doesn't prevent her from becoming invisible to "polite society" and she like so many black women becomes a person to be used and discarded with little thought. In effect, Anna's lack of status has led to her becoming the "Other."

The systematic creation of the "Other" was a strong operating force behind imperialistic practices: the dark man was different, savage, a curiosity whereas the dark woman was perceived as sexually submissive and willing and who could then be subject to the "gaze" of the west, specifically men. We see this repeatedly in the literature and the practices of imperialistic Europe and America, and this attitude becomes codified into a pseudo science that characterizes the white man as the most advanced, civilized and advanced of all creatures. The Negro was traditionally at the bottom in the hierarchy of color but the other colored races were not that far removed. Famously in 1810 Saarti Baartman (1789-1815) aka the Hottentot Venus who had an enlarged labia and buttocks was put on public display. Too often in "Western" literature the black woman has been portrayed as exotic, nameless and without voice. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Kurtz's black, silent and unnamed mistress is considered by Marlow as a "barbarous and superb woman" and yet we know nothing about her, her connection to Marlow or her thoughts; it is a statement based solely on her looks. Similarly Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846) is a satirist's delight in which the protagonist is stranded on a secluded island and encounters a light skinned native woman who is available and eager to pleasure him or anyone else for that matter whenever the mood strikes she lacks an inner voice and is free of the constraints of "civilized" society.

The overarching implicit message perpetuated through colonialist attitudes and a postcolonial west is that dark-skinned women with their bodies and skin tone that don't meet the "idealized" standard of beauty are not on equal par with white women who are idealized and deserving of protection and indeed are not as lady like. While the experiences of black women from the United States, Africa, the Caribbean or Britain or

elsewhere cannot be assumed to be alike, there exists some shared purpose when it comes to the black woman reclaiming her identity. In her feminist-cultural discourse, Carol Tulloch points out, black women of Caribbean descent in Britain are shaped both by their existence in Britain and the transnational influence of African Americans. Tulloch argues that the phrase Black British women self identified as 'Womanist,' is a term coined by the African American author Alice Walker in a bid "to be seen and [be] taken seriously." The term 'Womanist' as defined by Walker is "A Black feminist or feminist of colour' a woman … who has moved into the… responsibility of womanhood; … thirsty for knowledge, a Black woman who wants to take control of her life and is purposeful and steadfast in this pursuit. Maintains Tulloch this term "can also refer to all women regardless of race and sexual orientation" (207). Tulloch suggests that by adapting certain cultural symbols such as head ties, dress or hairstyles, "Black British women [are enabled] to engage in a public embrace with African American, Caribbean and African women, and symbolize the ambitions and potency of the term *pan-African*." (212). It is in the light of this argument that I am emboldened to take African American criticism and apply it to Black British women.

While the dominant, white western society is complaisant in its belief that white skin is superior to black, the reading of skin tone is simply not a matter of black and white. In the colonial model, skin that is a lighter shade, less obviously black and more white is held to be more palatable, less threatening, somehow more "normal," but still not good enough, suggesting that there exists an unbridgeable gap between the races which makes colored skin a deficit. Based on this implicit assumption, Robert Young deconstructs the word "hybridity" when it is used to describe the children of two races

since the term implies "the different races [are] different species" (9) – and of course the binary always places white on top as being beautiful and desirable and black as ugly and insurmountable. Thus the concept of female beauty is proved to have only a tenuous tie to a pleasing countenance: it is in fact nothing than a series of characteristics that when publically approved grants women power. If approval is withheld, then the woman is shut out of the dominant ideology. Perhaps this is why beauty *publicly acknowledged* (by the dominant culture) is such a sought after prospect. A woman who embodies the standard of beauty *en vogue* is automatically accorded validation and acceptance and with acceptance comes the power of influence. Murray Webster Jr. and Kames E. Driskell, Jr. affirm "…[perceived] attractiveness produces a wide range of effects, beautiful people have a great many advantages over ugly people—and those effects have a great many advantages over ugly people – and those effects appear among diverse populations and in a wide range of situations" (143). Woe to women everywhere who fail to meet these standards or worse yet who because of their race or ethnicity simply can never achieve public approbation and thereby carry a burden of being a misfit because they are considered ugly. This binary between white and black and its corollary value of beauty and not so beautiful is perhaps becoming less important in the current generation of Black Britons and black writers who are taking on this concept of beauty, blackness and otherness. For example, in Zadie Smith's third novel *On Beauty* (2005) beauty is an illusive thing, mostly hidden, and precious in which ultimately "Smith's characters are left to negotiate [and reconcile] contested ideas of beauty and truth in order that they might seek their own [personal] definition" (Tew 136). Smith is firmly in the camp that Petra Tournay describes as being, "in a 'post in-between situation' in which they are not

"in-between Britain and the Caribbean ... just … British" (Tournay *Gender*) Thus British writers such as Smith no longer feel the need to heed the old binaries of black vs. white and instead attempt to strip beauty, when applied to non-whites, of its political underpinnings. Regardless of how successful they are, the fact that they are attempting it means this current generation of artists are not as Bronwyn Williams termed "troubled and conflicted as it attempt[s] to create identities that defy the borders of the modern construct of the Western nation/ state" and in fact has moved into a "post-post-colonial state" (Tournay 2). In addition, Chris Weedon maintains the impact of feminism in Great Britain has allowed for "texts" to be discovered and our concepts of beauty to be expanded. Continues Weedon, "One of the key concerns of this writing ['new' text] has been to redefine hegemonic versions of women's 'otherness' whether this be constructed in sexist and/or racist terms" (224). Finally, Farah Jasmine Griffin offers a counter discourse of hope: "If white supremacist and patriarchal discourses construct black women's bodies as abnormal, diseased, and ugly, black women writers seek to reconstitute these bodies" (521) by reclaiming beauty and demand acceptance of black women despite their perceived lack of beauty. One such black British writer who has been engaged in reclaiming positive definitions of beauty for black women is the Jamaican-born writer Joan Riley, a star of The Women's Press since the 1980s, who writes novels that do not sugar coat the lot of postcolonial Jamaica. By her own admission, Riley seeks to expose the veneer of Jamaica as the laid back holiday spot to reveal its seedy side. Her three novels *The Unbelonging* (1985), *Romance* (1988), and *Wait in the Twilight* (1987) are a stark portrayal of just how lost and unaccepted Jamaican women can feel when they seek to live in Britain.

"All dat respeck" mutters the dying old woman at the end of *Riley's Wait in The Twilight* (1987*).* For Adella, it is the lack of respect for her personage that has been the source of her problems and personal pain both in her native Jamaica and her adoptive home in England. The respect that Adella fantasizes about on her deathbed is one of a send off that pays homage to her life and reunites her with her female ancestors. It is the respect that should be afforded to a person who is valued despite being old and no longer physically attractive, despite being a person who is nonwhite and speaks English with an accent, despite being a person who cleans office buildings for a living. Adella is a stereotypical caricature of the immigrant who looks and sounds different and is unable to blend in while working in a menial position. Yet Riley imbues her with feelings and relates how Adella resents her lack of status and subsequent invisibility among the office workers whom she characterizes as young because they see nothing of value in her countenance.

In Riley's novels, women are reduced to their basic biological functions, to be used and discarded but never to be treated as equals by either their men or the members of the white society among whom they find themselves living. Riley's contention suggests that it is her gender that makes the black woman a matter of scorn for both white men who are either curious or disgusted by her and black men who make use of her body with little thought of her as a person in which any acknowledgement of her beauty or lack of beauty is irrelevant. It is a bleak, raw view that reveals the psychology of what happens to a people who are mined for use until they are used up and stripped of any dignity.

Adella was once young and attractive enough to attract the attention of men in

Jamaica, but her attractiveness did not ensure that she was afforded respect. She was seduced by a man who thought her good enough to be his mistress but not his wife and abandoned her and their two children because she took umbrage at his assessment of her. Adella follows another lover to England – being first seduced by moonlight and a passenger on the voyage over which results in another child. Once in England she has more children with Stanton, her "true" love but he ultimately leaves her for another, younger, woman. To feed her children, Adella acquires boyfriends and watches her children grow to hate her as they began to understand how the meat on their plates was earned. With advancing age, Adella can no longer attract a man's "protection" and lacking options she works double shifts as a cleaner where the young white office workers show her no respect. This lack of respect underscores the cultural disparity between her native Jamaica and adoptive home in England because in Jamaica her age would have at last earned her token respect. Adella swallows humiliation with humility in the knowledge that she can never demand consideration or respect because she cannot afford to lose her job and so lives out the twilight of her life as an undesirable. It is affirmation of the informal caste system that has been instigated and reinforced by the colonial empires that dictate who deserves consideration – whites – and who or what can be exploited – everyone else.

The notion of physical desirability and/or beauty in women may be in the eye of the beholder but it is also an ideal that is in the West massaged, packaged and sold wholesale to women. Beauty is obviously associated with a preference for a certain type of hair, facial features and body shape/mass, as every woman who has looked in the mirror and despaired can attest, but for women of color there is also the connection

between skin color and self worth. This chapter is concerned with several themes 1) the currency West Indian blacks and South Asian women hold based on their skin color; 2) how beauty is weighed and measured for non-white women, and; 3) how this reduction of self worth to skin tone and desirability affects these women's relationship with their communities, their sense of self identity and their ability to assimilate. Further, this chapter attempts to grapple with the nebulous notion of beauty and what physical characteristics make a dark-skinned woman more acceptable to the gaze of her community, herself, and the casual gaze of the dominant community with the assumption that these factors may at times conflict with themselves.

The internal conflict of trying to reconcile one's inner view with everyone else's is at the heart of Riley's first novel *The Unbelonging* (1985)[2] in which she chronicles the voyage of Hyacinth from her childhood and a picturesque Jamaica to cold, lonely, ugly England. In a paper presented in 2000, Barbara Parry Shaw maintains "In part, Riley writes back against white Western domination…by exposing the patriarchy, racism, and neo-colonialism inherent in both Jamaican and British society." Hyacinth is taught to distrust white people and their motives because as her father tells her, the English don't want "neagas" in England and she grows to despise the blacks she sees in England as being different from her and somehow tainted. This is an attitude that puts her on the outside in her perceived social sphere in England. The whites hate her - she is mocked on the playground and told to return to the jungle - and she hates the British blacks who also mock her and whom she categorizes as violent and uncivilized. Childlike, the young Hyacinth associates the treatment she experiences from her white teachers and schoolmates with all whites. In tandem, her father, his second wife and their children

seem to resent her and physically and mentally abuse her. The young Hyacinth understands only that she was once happy but now her life is filled with fear and this fear is manifested in a lost of bodily control. She becomes a chronic bed wetter, a circumstance that, in turn, only elicits more abuse from her stepmother and father so she comes to equate blackness with violence and eventually as a sexual threat. This lost of bodily control, argues Michelle M. Wright is merely a symptom of how Hyacinth's body becomes in white society a way for the "white male, black male and white female subjects" to achieve status by "overthrow[ing] an Other." Continues Wright, "Hyacinth's combined gender and racial status, Riley makes clear, render her an irresistible candidate for that role of Other" (24). After Hyacinth starts to menstruate, the dynamics of her household shift. The stepmother expresses for the first time concern for Hyacinth and makes conciliatory overtones toward her. Wary, Hyacinth rebuffs her stepmother who leaves the household taking her children. As she leaves, the woman warns Hyacinth to take care. Too naïve to understand her danger, Hyacinth is almost raped by her father and is forced to flee and put herself in the care of the dreaded white people. Hyacinth is the literal embodiment of what means to be alien. The eleven-year-old Hyacinth idealizes Jamaica and although it is a child's romance that is not based on reality, it is an idealization that she staunchly holds to. As she becomes older, this idealization of her homeland enables her to develop a specific myopia towards herself and black people. Her learned perception of black people – "She knew she was different from other black people, even if she did look like them. She was not violent" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 76) is a reflection of how she has internalized her time in England and the violence and danger she experienced in her father's home. This idea of black as undesirable is one that she

carries throughout her life and defines how she perceives her self-worth. At college Hyacinth initially makes friends with

> …a number of Indian girls at the college and she found herself gravitating to them…. They were nice people, Indians. They were not white, but they had long hair, and their noses were straight, their lips nice and thin. She liked their quietness and the way they stuck things out. …She always made a point of ignoring the black students, lifting her nose high when they come close to her, feeling the need to establish herself as different in other people's minds (Riley, *Unbelonging* 82).

The internalized message that Hyacinth exhibits is one that finds fault with blacks and accepts the superiority of "white" features and skin color. For Hyacinth associating with the Indians is a safe compromise because they serve as a facsimile of white traits (the ideal) and are distinctively not black (the imperfect). Her acceptance that there is something wrong with black people and that she is better than them is one that is deeply ingrained and which she doesn't even begin to see as ironic.

Hyacinth's assumptions reveal the presence of an undefined "other people" that she is trying unconsciously to satisfy. This "other" is clearly a white person, a person that has full legitimacy and acceptance within society. Despite her protestations that she hates whites, Hyacinth is very attuned to their perceived likes and dislikes. She acutely feels her lack of acceptance, her lack of belonging and she wants to be prove herself better than a "typical" black person because she hopes by doing so she will gain the necessary approbation. Hyacinth formed her ideas in childhood in Jamaica. As a child of the

colony she is as George Lamming has said been subjected "to the *idea* of England" which cannot be reconciled to the reality. Hyacinth herself is too immature to progress beyond prejudiced notions ingrained into her psyche. Her professed hatred of whites serves merely as a defense mechanism. She will hate them because she knows she fails to the meet the white ideal of beauty and assumes white people automatically hate her based on the color of her skin.

After she leaves her father's house and enters the foster home Hyacinth finds herself at odds with the woman who runs the place. She puts it down to Aunt Susan being prejudiced and decides, "Auntie Susan disliked her, and short of changing her colour there was nothing she could do about it" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 87). This facile statement is quickly challenged when Hyacinth meets a young black man who formerly lived with Aunt Susan and for whom Aunt Susan clearly shows signs of affection and pride. Faced with evidence that Aunt Susan could like someone black thus proving her assumptions wrong, Hyacinth can't afford to internalize that the problem might be her own personality or fears and so she demonizes Collin Matthews. She "reacts with shock and disappointment" to Colin Matthews and "hates him" on sight. Resentful, Hyacinth watches as he fits in where she can't, and condemns him for fawning on the white people and denounces the girls, the "confident and busty" *white* girls, who seem to like him so much.

In turn Colin Matthews baits Hyacinth and tells her "You're too ugly for my use…I like long blonde hair, something I can run my fingers through" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 88*).* This comment rubs Hyacinth raw and exposes her vulnerability, making her feel inferior and unconfident– although she isn't even aware or willing to

admit that she feels inferior to white people. Growing increasingly dissatisfied with her appearance, she develops the habit of compressing her lips so they will appear narrower and more acceptable to Colin, thus muting her voice. It is ironic and tragic that Hyacinth chooses to be silent in the hopes that her lips will seem thinner and more appealing. Shortly after meeting Colin, Hyacinth finds a salon claiming to turn "ugly ducklings into swans" that specializes in straightening hair. On viewing the salon Hyacinth ponders, "Could she be beautiful? Would she dare? God, it would be so nice not to be ugly" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 90). The fact that Hyacinth assumes she is ugly reveals how well she has internalized the gaze of the "other" in devaluing one set of physical characteristics (black skin, thick lips, coarse hair) in favor of another (white skin, thin lips, long hair). This ideal is a powerful motivator and she straightens her hair because she is deeply unhappy with how her looks are perceived in her adopted home. Since her hair is the only thing she has the power to manipulate, she readily does so in an attempt to regain some of the acceptance she has ceded since arriving in Britain. Adopting a tenet of the western ideal of beauty for some sliver of acceptance is for Hyacinth a worthwhile endeavor.

The fact of hair straightening is an extremely politicized and sometimes controversial act for women of African descent. Kobena Mercer acknowledges hair is perhaps the most processed part of our bodies through cuts, color and styling products. Further Mercer proposes "…when hairstyling is critically evaluated as an aesthetic practice inscribed in everyday life, *all* black hairstyles are political in that they each articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both social and symbolic meaning and significance" (115). Conversely, Tracey Owens Patton points out that if a woman of African origin chooses to

straighten her hair, such an action should not be considered automatically as subscribing to the dominant cultural standards of beauty. Continues Patton, research shows that far from being an emulation of white standards of beauty, hair straightening can be a sign of black pride and that trying on a new look, even one often associated with Europeans, does not automatically imply self-hatred (29). While Patton may have a point, from Riley's text, it is clear that Hyacinth is acting through self-hatred. For her the hair straightening is her way of attempting to fit the mode of what is accepted and beautiful. The act works because for first time since arriving in England Hyacinth feels good about herself because she feels less alien and more accepted.

As she leaves the salon, the hairdresser comments that Hyacinth's new style has transformed her into "a looker." Feeling happy Hyacinth waits up at the home for Collin who is pleasantly surprised, commenting, "I never knew under the skin, you had something there" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 91). What is implied in both of these statements is that Hyacinth in her natural state (dark skin, curly hair) is unacceptable and that she needs to work on becoming more palatable to white tastes in order to be desirable to the white dominant culture as well as to tastes of black people who reside within the dominant community and who have adopted its standards for beauty. She succeeds albeit briefly but now Hyacinth has Colin's attention she quickly becomes uncomfortable and shies away from the "lump" that he evidences at her new appearance. Hyacinth doesn't understand sexual attraction. She has never felt it for another person and, based on her experience with her father, doesn't understand how sexual attraction can be flattering, pleasurable or without threat of bodily harm. Hyacinth doesn't shy away from Colin because he is interested in her for the wrong reasons (she has become somehow less

black in his eyes): she is simply afraid by Colin's arousal, which she associates with violence. She remembers that to be desirable to a man, especially a black man is to put herself in harm's way.

It is telling that soon after this episode Hyacinth breaks contact with the home because Hyacinth's sense of self preservation is to cut and run whenever she is conflicted or being forced to question her own assumptions of black, white and the degree of acceptance based on color. She moves into an interim flat while she prepares for her second year at college. During this interlude she meets Mackay an older black man who is "civilised and tasteful" and they become friendly. Hyacinth for whom the code word "civilised" means safe and without danger of sexual congress, misunderstands the nature of their meetings – she thinks they are friends, he thinks they're dating.

Mackay doesn't understand her coldness and he accuses her of being a tease. Hyacinth's inability to understand her own worth[3] makes it impossible for her to fathom Mackay's motivation. She equates him as a threat like her father because she feels inferior and believes herself to be ugly. So intent is she on avoiding getting hurt, and so traumatized by her father Hyacinth doesn't credit either Colin or Mackay with stopping the minute she expresses discomfort. She is unable to recognize that she is not harmed or in danger and thus the men are nothing like her father. Her childish logic equates sex with violence and men with her father. Sex for Hyacinth is devoid of pleasure and is an act in which she is always at a disadvantage. Symbolically Hyacinth reminds steadfastly close-minded and unquestioning of her emotions and ideas. Her internal gaze is so critical she cannot let herself become close to any male. When she meets an African at college she views Charles and his country as an exotic specimen, which is different and somehow

inferior to her and her beloved Jamaica. It is the first time Hyacinth has felt superior to a man. The knowledge allows her to feel confident in his presence without worrying about her deficiencies of appearance. She can speak with him easily and even pities him. In the following exchange between Hyacinth and Charles she reveals how deeply she has internalized the myth of what is acceptable and desirable in white culture:

> 'One thing I feel glad about is that we don't get that in Jamaica…At home people really like their freedom.'
>
> Charles gave her an odd smile. 'But your country must still struggle against domination, surely?' he asked gently. 'You are still facing the problems of imperialism and neo-colonialism.'
>
> Hyacinth shook her head, confident in his presence.
>
> 'It's not like Africa you know,' she said confidingly. 'People are more civi…well, aware of what freedom and independence mean.'
>
> 'You were going to say civilised, and yet we are the same people, Hyacinth,' he said sadly. 'European civilisation is a poor yardstick for development.'
>
> Hyacinth shifted in embarrassment. She had not wanted to hurt his feelings by telling him the truth, as she saw it. 'I am not trying to say Africans are not civilised,' she said hastily (Riley, *Unbelonging* 126).

Charles understands with her choice of words how Hyacinth is betraying her ignorance of the context of Jamaica and the origins of her roots and is speaking as Stuart Hall says "from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific" (222).

Charles attempts to take on Hyacinth and get her to see beyond her narrowness but she is firmly entrenched in cultural superiority proving that one does not have to be white to adhere to the white standards of what is attractive and acceptable. The perceived inequality between her, a civilized Jamaican, and the "barbaric" Charles ultimately emboldens Hyacinth. Two years into their friendship Hyacinth sleeps with Charles but refuses to consider letting the encounter develop into a relationship on the grounds that they are too different. Charles for his part seems to genuinely like Hyacinth as a person despite her faults. He does not suffer from the Collin Matthews syndrome of privileging white skin over black. His frame of reference is that of a black man staying temporarily in England versus a black man trying to live in England and he seems unaffected by the dominant cultural preferences.

Although she is linked to Jamaica through her imagination, Hyacinth is continually in search of acceptance even when she is quick to dismiss people, especially other blacks. She may claim "'I'm not ashamed of what I am, even if the rest of you are… color don't matter, it's what the person inside is like that count'" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 84) but while she may say it with conviction, she doesn't believe it. Being Black for Hyacinth is a condition that automatically leads to shame.

Hyacinth's arrested maturity and compliance with the white dominant views of what is acceptable and what is threatening is also evidenced in attitudes toward sexuality. She equates sex with bestiality. Black men are "dirty" and possess a threat of sexual violence that is to be avoided at all costs. This is an attitude that is a holdover from colonialism in which white men fiercely protected their (white) women from the

ravenous appetites of all black men who were prey to their impulses. Stuart Hall reminds us:

> In racialized discourse the black male body functions as a terminal signifier – racism's degree-zero: trapped in fantasies of tribal or urban violence, immured in an exorbitant and pathological sexuality, petrified in nature as flies in amber. Franz Fanon unforgettably remarked that, 'when one abandons oneself to the movement of …images, one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis (Hall, *Contemporary Photographers* 39).

In Hyacinth's internal racialized discourse her encounters with men are similarly fraught with danger and melodrama. She is incapable of consciously flirting but is accused of being a tease. She longs for attention but rejects it when it is offered. Obviously she is damaged from her father's actions and judges all black men by his actions. Compounding the issue is that in Jamaica she was raised without the influence of men. She has no idea of how to judge men, specifically black men. She only knows she doesn't belong in England and thinks blacks don't belong in England. She knows she is not beautiful and that she is nothing like the busty and confident blonde girls who attract attention effortlessly and do not seem repelled or threatened by the attention of the black Collin Matthews. Although Hyacinth never wants a black man's attention she never even thinks about attracting a man of a different color. The thought is too alien.

In the denouement of the book, Hyacinth returns to Jamaica with the expectation that she will finally belong and that all will be well. She is unprepared for the changes that have occurred in her absence – her one childhood friend is aged before her time by multiple pregnancies and beatings from her husband, her other friend is long dead and her beloved aunt is an old decaying woman who drinks. The stench of poverty and despair frighten her almost as much as the understanding that she, Hyacinth, the long lost daughter, is not accepted by the Jamaicans. She is viewed as an interloper. "She felt exposed, her blackness ugly and rejected even among her own kind" (Riley, *Unbelonging* 142) and this ugliness makes her want to run and hide in her hotel room, which the typical Jamaican could never afford, where she cries for all her vanquished hopes.

Presumably Riley means us to understand that until Hyacinth heals and is accepting of her child self then she cannot find a place to rest. Hyacinth serves as a figurehead for Jamaica; she is the wounded child that was betrayed by the white bogeyman and belittled by the black man and which needs to understand and reconcile its past before it can move forward. Never does Riley give a full description of Hyacinth. As a reader, we cannot apply a standard of beauty and judge her — are her hips too wide, her legs too sturdy, her hair too short or too kinky, her lips too thick, her skin too dark or is she slender, graceful, tall, with a pale complexion? Does she fall somewhere in between? We don't know. We can't see how others view Hyacinth because she is so blinded by how she perceives herself and preoccupied with how "the others" view her that our view is distorted. We may feel impatient with Hyacinth, we may dislike her at times for her superciliousness but we can't judge her worth based on her looks because

we can't clearly define her appearance, which is precisely the point. By leaving the reader's in the dark concerning Hyacinth's physical appearance, Riley forces the reader to relate to Hyacinth as a person and not just as an object of desire or derision. Unfortunately, Hyacinth is unable to do this: she looks in the mirror, she sees and hears the "other" response and she has internalized it. She may say that it is the inside that counts, but she is clearly defined by her outward appearance. Interestingly the version of my book reprinted in 1995 shows a dark girl, slender but with defined breasts, shorn hair, heavy lidded eyes, deeply set, thick lips and a broad nose. I hesitate to read too much into this depiction of Hyacinth for the simple reason that it speaks more about the artist Emma Shaw-Smith's sensibility than Riley's. A version reprinted in 2001 of the novel shows a young dark girl wearing a cherise-colored dressed splashed with brightly hued dots and white sandals standing on a white beach looking to a calm blue sea holding sail boats. No other information is available about the child because her head is not in the frame. The latter cover comes closer to portraying Riley's vision because in Riley's world it is not how a woman looks that brings her sorrow but the simple fact that as a woman she is confined by other to limited, gender specific traits.

If the black woman is the ultimate "other" it is perhaps understandable that a white man's motives for being with a black woman could be called into question: on a cynical level it reinforces the trope of cultural domination of the white male over the black female. A black woman receiving romantic attention from a white man can be viewed equally with suspicion because it a) smacks of colonial systems in which white men could dally with impunity with colored women and b) because there is a lingering

suspicion that black women don't quite measure up to a white man's standards and thus a white man with a black woman must have some ulterior motive.

The latter is the reason why in Joan Riley's novel *Romance* (1988) Verona is roundly condemned by family and friends for dating white older men. They assume the men can't have true feelings for her and their assumptions indirectly belittle Verona and her physical attributes. Poor Verona feels as if she has no place - once again we don't have a clear description of her but we know that she was raped at the age of fourteen by her sister's boyfriend who over a period of weeks had engineered the situation so that he cultivate a good relationship with her father and sister and earned their trust to be left alone with her in the house. The grown up Verona creates a series of fantasies to get through her days. She buries herself in romance novels that are white-centric and where the aggressiveness of black men is absent and the heroine gets a "happily ever after" ending. Verona chooses white, older, mostly married, men as lovers because she likes to create the illusion she is like the white heroine of her books, deemed beautiful, desirable and worthy of pursuit. The fact the men are married prevents the fantasy from moving beyond the "happy ever after" phase because eventually the men move on and Verona isn't forced to cultivate a lasting relationship with them. If she uses the men to feed her ego, they use her too with her consent, for "She realized that men like Guy [her current man] were fascinated by her skin, finding the colour and texture alien and exotic. They were flattered by her attention. With them she was in control and could indulge her fantasy. She needed that control. It was her second line of defence, along with her huge size; and at the end of the day the men went home to their wives and nobody got hurt" (Riley, *Romance* 19).

The teenaged Verona had never revealed the rape to anyone for fear no one would believe her and in essence, her silence gives power to male attacker and fuels her belief that she is damaged. D. Kelly Weisberg addresses this seeming collusion of silence by saying historically "for black people, male and female, 'rape' signified the terrorism of black men by white men, aided and abetted, passively (by silence) or actively (by "crying rape") by white women (350). Like Hyacinth, Verona has at a young age ingested the belief that she is simply not on par with white women because she does not resemble them and therefore not deserving of the same respect or protection. In an episode eerily reminiscent of her rape, she confesses to theft at work and signs a paper admitting her guilt because she is afraid her employers will call in the police. She is innocent of the crime and as a result of her "confession" she loses her job, her good name and any chance of being able to find work as an accountant in the future. While Verona tells herself she just didn't want to bother her sister who is ill, another more pervasive reason is that she fears the police. She considers them to be the white man's authority and has a "legacy of fear" associated with them for she has heard talk and asks, "…how many stories had been reported of black women raped and men murdered, seriously injured or brain-damaged in police custody?" (Riley, *Romance* 30-31). So she lies to her sister, pretending to leave the house for work but spending her days in the library reading romance novels.

Although the reader can gain no clear idea of what Verona looks like, we know she places no value on her looks and has "lumpy folds of flesh" (Riley, *Romance* 1), Indeed her size becomes a refuge and the effort it takes to maintain her bulk becomes a consuming passion. Tellingly, Riley does describe Desiree, Verona's sister who is a closer match to meeting the requirement of the white standard of beauty than Verona.

However Riley makes it plain Desiree suffers from a malady and her physique is "wretchedly thin" and "stooped and shambling, giving her the appearance of an old woman, all vitality swallowed by long months of suffering" (Riley, *Romance* 7). The last is a hint that Desiree is in Jamaica might not have been considered attractive because she is too thin. In England her thinness is still not good enough because of her color.

Verona without voicing her observations on size, color and beauty is aware her size is not good thing but believes it makes no real difference because she can never be considered beautiful. At breakfast one morning, one of her nieces tells her that her schoolmates call Verona the "Michelin Man." It is plain the young girls have ingested the western standard of beauty and are already measuring themselves and others by this standard. The niece refuses breakfast saying she doesn't want to risk getting fat like her aunt.

Verona is addicted to sweets and her Mills and Boon romance novels, and after she hears her niece's hurtful comment, she interjects herself into the plot of the novel in hand, replacing the heroine so that the "stranger" is "following her [Verona] with his eyes. She could almost feel him watching her, drinking in the graceful sway of her hips, the slender beauty of her legs...the soft glow of her long blonde hair" (Riley, *Romance* 34-5). In her fantasy life, Verona has made herself over to be white, desirable, beautiful and a person who has worth.

Dissatisfied with her life, Verona fantasizes about the stranger (similar to Hyacinth's 'others') finding her appealing. In this particular passage Verona lost in her fantasy crosses the road blindly and is almost hit by a driver who calls her a "Bloody nigger" forcing her to leave behind the acceptance she gains in her fantasy and

reinforcing the fact that she doesn't belong and only makes trouble for the white man. With the terms "bloody nigger" and "fat" still ringing in her ears, Verona enters into the newsagent run by a "friendly" south Asian [once again in Riley's novel this south Asian seems to stand in for an acceptable substitute for white) in which she is a frequent customer and buys a very large amount of sweets in a perverse desire to punish/soothe herself.

Verona continues her affairs with a series of older married white men. Eventually she takes up with a white man who she believes genuinely likes her only to have him beat her and eject her from their flat when he finds out she is pregnant. It is the child that changes Verona. She does return to her sister's house but takes up room in a hostel. The dependency her newborn exhibits for her soothes and enriches her. Finally she has a male in her life that doesn't measure her by her physical attributes but by her capacity to love.

The link between a comely appearance in women and one of perceived worth is all too often reinforced in the west where television, magazines and photos reinforce an ideal of what it is to be attractive, accepted and desired. Women and young girls are subjected to societal standards of beauty and consequently they often feel outward and self- inflicted pressure to meet these standards.[4] When one considers that the human animal is a social one, it is not shocking to note women may suffer a correlating dip in their self-esteem when they fail to measure up. What bears consideration is that norms of what is desirable for a woman differ from culture to culture. While it would be naïve to assume that black women in the west are not also subjected to the same pressures as their white counterparts we have to consider that for recent immigrants, they may be operating under a different standard for beauty. If they continued to favor the "old" standard that

they may more readily meet, then they might be happier.[5] Unfortunately, immigrant women unless deeply immured in an enclave of immigrants, can quickly start to feel too inferior in relation to the dominant cultural norm's standards of beauty. Their daughters born in the west easily assimilate the western hegemonic ideal and unfortunately can internalize the message that they are just not acceptable. Farah Jasmine Griffin has been working with how African American women's literature can have "transformative possibilities" that "guides readers towards a consciousness about the manner in which white supremacy and patriarchy have constructed notions of black women's bodies as ugly and despised" (522). In a similar vein, Joan Riley although of Jamaican birth, recognizes that black women in Britain are also subjected to similar internalized messages of beauty and experience a lack of (self) acceptance. Her novels highlight the issues of Jamaican women who are riddled with self-hate and who are definite misfits. Riley's women suffer and in some case invite suffering because they are filled with self-loathing. Although other contemporary British writers such as Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy also engage with issues of perceived beauty or lack of beauty, by comparison Joan Riley offers bleak stories of the carnage that continues from bygone imperial policies and attitudes.

Therein lies the difference between how the British-Jamaican writers and South Asian writers portray the issue of a woman's skin color (which is a quite distinct issue from ethnicity) in British literature. For South Asian women the essence of being marketable and attractive in a societal system that still routinely promotes arranged marriages means the woman must meet certain criteria: be educated but willing to be domestic, be a good and dutiful, and be fair of face. For the family who possesses such a

daughter, she is a jewel, a prize on the matrimonial market and one who will have a certain number of choices and thus bring prestige to her family. For anyone who lacks the required fair face or intellect, the prospect of marriage can be daunting. Roksana Badruddoja Rahman conducted a study on the role of skin color among South Asian Hindu women living in New Jersey, United States, and documented that lighter skinned women reported feeling more attractive and confident and felt they had better prospects on the marriage market. If Colonialism brought the caste system to India, then it also reinforced the divisions along racial/skin lines. One may theorize the South Asian obsession with fair skin continues to thrive away from India in part because it is a deeply ingrained cultural norm that happens to echo and reinforce the Western preference for lighter skin and is reinforced through the Bollywood movie machine and cosmetic companies. While having a daughter with a lighter skin tone denotes a certain prestige within the family, the fact of a pale complexion is not necessarily something that is emphasized or even gains importance until the daughter approaches the prospect/possibility of marriage. This point is nicely illustrated in the novel *The Gift* **(**2007) by Nikata Lalwani which recounts the story of Rumi Vasi a girl living in Wales with a gift for mathematics and who is accordingly trained by her family to achieve the distinction of being the youngest student ever to attend Oxford University. As Rumi approaches the age of fifteen her family takes a trip to India. At the airport, Rumi takes extra care with her appearance and her mother first teases her and then says, "It's nice to make yourself look pretty. You are of that age, you know. There is a cream[6]in India called Fair and Lovely. You can't get it in the UK. We can try it, if you want. You are becoming a young woman" (Lalwani 155). Similarly in the film *Bend it Like Beckham*

(2003) the eighteen-year-old Jess is severely chastised by her mother after she is caught playing football and rough housing in the park with local Indian boys. Jess is guilty of the twin sins of behaving in such a way that her morals may be questioned – she is associating with boys who are not relatives, thus risking sullying her family's name and her reputation and also for literally exposing herself to the elements and becoming dark – ruining her fair complexion and possibly damaging the family honor. The fear of a ruination of beauty, which equates to marriage prospects and potential future security, is one that lurks in the previous exchanges between mother and daughter. As Kavita Karan states in her article, "Obsessions with Fair Skin: Color Discourse in Indian Advertising," Indian culture prizes fair skin and equates fair skin with beauty. There is a premium attached to women and men with fair skin who are cited as achieving their personal goals "such as marriage, success, empowerment, job opportunities and confidence" (1) more so than their dark skinned counterparts. Karan states that women acknowledge, "when they are young, mothers, grandmothers, and friends all look at and admire fair women… The fair person catches immediate attention. 'It's the Indian mindset, along with the advertising and the screen heroines who are all fair.' Ancient cosmetic practices are also invoked: "During marriages also, girls are asked to wash their faces with yogurt and turmeric to look fair on the big day." Therefore, the traditional cosmetic practices to look fair are extended with the application of fairness creams because "women are conditioned from childhood to adulthood to look fair" (12). While the Indian mindset seems to certainly privilege fairer skin, it is hard to pinpoint when exactly this obsession was cultivated – although it is probably rooted in colonization and miscegenation in which

lighter skinned Indians were accorded more privilege and where lighter skin was considered more compatible with white cultural standards.

It should be noted that not all Indians subscribe to this point of view. In the short story "The Hunt" by Mahasweti Devi the protagonist Mary Oraon, a quasi member of the Oraon tribe, is not fully accepted because she is tall and fair whereas the Oraon are physically short, dark hued with broad noses. A tribal people with their own language and customs, the Oraon are considered a minority in India and live off the land, apart from the cultural majority and apart from the standards of beauty that the cultural majority have developed. Mary is a mixed race child of a white father and Oraon mother and while she bears the name of the tribe she is not considered a full daughter and viewed with some suspicion.

It seems wealthier Indians equate privilege with lighter skin and continue to enforce the preferences of their white former masters, an attitude that is echoed by South Asians who immigrate to the west. This immigrants develop a preference for fair skinned women (if none existed before) because 1) it is an internalization of the western standards they are trying to emulate and 2) now they are in the west they have moved up the social scale and are deserving of "better." Fair skinned women are not only perceived as more attractive and marketable but in some ways there is an attitude that fair skin equates the beauty of face *with* character. In *Bend it Like Beckham*, Jess' parents are quick to believe ill of her for believing that she has behaved immorally with a white boy and yet do not question their lighter skinned daughter, Pinky, who is already having sex with her fiancé. Nor do the trio of girls who are "friends" of Pinky and are fairer than Jess but are clearly "boy mad" are not reigned in by their elders. The double standard applied

to the dark girl seems to be that she must, like Caesar's wife, be above suspicion of any taint of corruption to make up for her stained skin.

It would be going too far to say that darker hued South Asian women could not contract marriages, because obviously they do but they are made to feel a burden to their matchmaking mothers and made to feel their choices are limited. Chila in Meera Syal's *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* (2000) is too dark to be considered attractive and her mother despairs of ever finding her a match, even going so far as to consult an astrologer because her daughter has in essence bad luck. In a serio-comic episode in the film *Bhaji on the Beach*, the mother-in-law says that she knows that her son's dark-skinned wife who has filed for divorce would be nothing but trouble. Dark skinned women in mainstream India needs to work harder to achieve approval and sometimes the best they can hope for is to be invisible. In the 2005 film *Bride and Prejudice*, the character Jaya despite her looks is not accepted by her prospective sister-in-law, Kiran Bingley. Kiran judges Jaya and her family as not good enough for her brother and their circle of friends. Jaya's physical attributes are noted here because her level of attractiveness should provide her some leverage of status. As Webster and Driskell, have determined in their article "Beauty as Status" physical acceptance of beauty is a characteristic that can be associated with personal status. A person with physical looks that are accepted and approved by the prevailing ideas of the dominant society can also become a "status characteristic" of a person, in which the person is privileged because of his/her looks. As the authors further argue people deemed beautiful have certain strong advantages, including an expectation of a happier marriage or multiple partners and higher grades because there is a prevailing belief beautiful people are more capable, deserving and smarter than "ugly" people.

Webster and Driskell conclude these "are advantages similar to the advantages conferred by other status characteristics such as sex and race" (164). Although here I must point out the prevailing notion of beauty is subject to change and establishes that beauty, unlike race or gender is not a fixed characteristic because at least in this day and age of plastic surgery, spa treatments and cosmetics, beauty is both malleable and obtainable. People of great wealth and power are almost always considered more attractive, a phenomena which may be explained by Webster and Driskell's acknowledgement that other status characteristics may determine perception of beauty. Specifically they cite how the looks of children with middle class status are preferred over children whose parents are working-class (162). The latter seems to be the fate of Jaya whose beauty and personality can't at least for Kiran Bingley overcome her roots.

Nazneen the protoganist from Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* can be considered to be an invisible woman – one that has few choices because of her lack of perceived beauty within her culture. Soon after her marriage, she overhears her husband assessing her as

> …[n]ot beautiful, but not so ugly either. The face is broad, big forehead. Eyes are a bit too close together…Not tall. Not short. Around five foot two. Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, … to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied….What's more, she is a good worker. Cleaning and cooking and that….As I say, a girl from the village: totally unspoilt (Ali, 9-10).

While Nazneen is slightly affronted by Chanu's comments and wonders why a man who is as misshapen as he would find fault in her, she says nothing because she understands

that as a man he isn't subjected to the same gaze and could have done better.

Chanu is willing to overlook a lack of beauty because Nazneen is "unspoilt" by nature and in body. For him this means a girl untainted by the west, someone who will be a traditional helpmate. For years, Nazneen remains the unspoilt wife. She reacts with mingled horror and contempt to a colleague's wife who has shorn her hair, wears mini skirts, smokes and eats frozen dinners. Nazneen takes pride in her role as wife and mother and she is "happy" with her designated status in her tight-knit society. She also takes solace in the fact that she is not beautiful and sought after and that she is not "seen." Her sister who is very beautiful has not profited by it and Nazneen is grateful that she has a husband who doesn't beat her and provides for her. The cloak of invisibility is also Nazneen's way of coping as an alien in a foreign society. If she can't be seen, then she is in no danger. Once early in her stay in England, Nazneen ventures out alone and becomes lost:

> Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination. A leaf shake of fear – or was it excitement? – passed through her legs. But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought. She began to scrutinize. She stared at the long, thin faces, the pointy chins. The women had strange hair. It puffed up around their heads, pumped up like a snake's hood. They pressed their lips together and narrowed their eyes as though they were angry at something they had heard, or at

> the wind for messing their hair. A woman in a long red coat stopped and took a notebook from her bag. She consulted the pages. The coat was the color of a bride's sari. It was long and heavy, with gold buttons that matched the chain on her bag. Her shiny black shoes had big gold buckles. Her clothes were rich. Solid. They were armor, and her ringed fingers weapons. Nazneen pulled at her cardigan. She was cold. Her fingertips burned with cold. The woman looked up and saw Nazneen staring. She smiled, like she was smiling at someone who had tried and totally failed to grasp the situation (Ali, 36-37).

Nazneen takes refuge in the fact she has no considerable beauty and casts no reflection. It gives a sense of power to be anonymous and since she hardly leaves her enclave, she doesn't feel inadequate or unaccepted. For her acceptance would mean being seen and she is not yet ready. However, when her world starts to disintegrate after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, she is forced to reevaluate how her community is being perceived by the dominant community. In the reckoning that follows, she openly admits she has no standing in the eyes of her husband and leaves him in spirit by taking a lover and later physically leaves him by refusing to return to India with him. When her lover starts to project his image of the traditional woman onto her, she ends the relationship. No longer is she satisfied with being invisible. She may not be beautiful but she knows who she is and is no longer willing to let her husband and later her lover project their reflections of "beauty" good wife, unspoilt, religious woman and so forth onto her. In voicing her wants and desires, Nazneen no longer needs to place reliance on her looks or lack thereof. She rejects the men in her life and since she is not interested in replacing them or entering the white dominant culture, which remains alien

to her, the emphasis on her looks diminishes. She finds acceptance through her daughters who are thrilled they will remain in England and through her female friends who are also building homes in Britain without men.

Too often black women who are born into a white dominated culture are measured by "white" standards of beauty. If these dark skinned British women have imbibed the British standard of beauty in their formula, they will worry about their hips being too wide, their noses too flat, and their hair too kinky. This constant wanting of acceptance or validation has a debilitating effect on a woman's perceived self worth.[7] In Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) the mixed race Irie – a girl who has wide hips, light eyes and a cocoa complexion but who perceives herself to ugly and fat with an Afro – longs to be thin and blond because she longs to be noticed by the man she loves. Although of Indian descent, Millat has ingested enough western culture through films to be attracted to the white ideal. In this regard he echoes the preferences of the black Collin Matthews who like other men of color internalize the same ideals of what is beautiful as their female counterparts. Regardless of how Irie massages her appearance, she doesn't win her love's regard or even his acceptance. He merely taunts her with her inadequacies. Irie's lack of belief in her normalness is also reinforced in countless ways. After she reads Shakespeare's sonnets concerning the "Dark Lady" and thinks his reference to "dun colored skin" and "wires in her hair" may mean an African Lady she is for a brief moment comforted by the notion that black is both beautiful and desirable. However, her teacher deflates her hopes by saying "Afro-Carri-beee-yans" didn't exist in historic England so Shakespeare's "My Mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun" can't possibly be about a black woman. The statement is clear. The quintessential English writer would

not have a) know a black woman b) found her in any way attractive or 3) wasted his time writing about her. Crushed, Irie feels as if she is slinking "back into the familiar darkness" of being alien and ugly in a white world. It is a sobering realization that she doesn't have what it takes leads her to path where she attempts to disown the white part of her heritage (her father is white) and adopt her grandmother's heritage – rooted in Jamaica. To extrapolate, the black woman denied acceptance in a white world to which she legitimately belongs through birth and ancestry puts her in a position of always being the "other," always on the outside looking in on the white norms. Irie feels very much on the outside looking in.

How are these norms of beauty standardized and who gets to decide what they are? Colin Mathews and Millat are emphatic that black is not beautiful. Millat doesn't date South Asian girls because he can sleep with white girls and he doesn't need to make do with the black Irie. Presumably Colin Matthews can claim that he should not have to bother with black girls since he can get white ones.

Obviously one can argue that standards of beauty is very much a patriarchal creation in which some men choose women based on how the women comply to a standard of beauty which then reflects on their prowess. Zadie Smith lampoons the business of black women attempting to beautiful for men through the character Irie who after torturing herself for "straight" hair runs into two lesbians who are less than appreciative of her efforts. In a poignant but funny episode in the novel, Irie, determined to have straight hair, visits a salon where the women drool over her beautiful *loose* curls that have brown patches. Irie is unmindful of their praise and only wails that she hates it and wants it straightened and red. Irie has little control over her appearance; no matter

how much she diets she can't have smaller hips or legs. She has inherited her grandmother's bulk and not her mother's sleekness. Tracey Owens Patton writes:

> As girls grow and mature and become women, one of the only items over which they have control is their hair. Perhaps the focus on beauty is to appear attract to the opposite sex or play the role for which women are socialized – concern for beauty…[Whatever the reason] hair becomes such a major preoccupation for adolescent girls… that self-esteem can actually rise and fall with a glance in the mirror (37).

As a result of Irie's preoccupation, her waist length hair is destroyed. To fix it the salon sends her to buy hair from a nearby shop so they can give her extensions. She is able to buy hair packaged as "6 Meters. Indian. Straight. Black/red." [8] After five hours the hair is fitted to Irie's head and she goes to Millat's house with hopes he will fall for her because "she looked straight, unkinky, beautiful." The first people she runs into are his mother who can't quite place what is different about her and his first cousin, Neena, a lesbian, Neena is dismayed by Irie's appearance and exclaims, "What the fuck do you look like!...You look like a freak! …What exactly were you aiming for?" Neena's girlfriend Maxine is also present and mourns, "What have you done? You had *beautiful hair*, man. All curly and wild. It was gorgeous" (Smith 235-6).

Neena and Maxine berate Irie for straightening her hair because they instinctively understand she did it because just to please Millat and satisfy his ideal of a desirable woman. Maxine even goes so far as to say Irie should concentrate on finding a man or woman who will appreciate her for who she is:

"You're a very sexy girl, Irie," said Maxine sweetly.

"Yeah. Right."

"Trust her, she's a raving dyke," said Neena, ruffling Maxine's hair affectionately and giving her a kiss. "But the truth is the Barbra Streisand cut you've got there ain't doing shit for you. The Afro was cool, man. It was wicked. It was *yours*" (Smith 237).

The phrase "It was *yours*" is heartfelt but falls on deaf ears because like so many heterosexual women Irie is willing to give up a part of herself just to attract or retain a man's attention. Neena and Maxine, as outside the heterosexual boundaries that dictate how men and women should relate and caring little for the patriarchal norms of beauty imposed on women, can see Irie not as a deviation but a variation to be welcomed. The phrase is additionally poignant because the women also understand that Irie devalues her appearance – in this instant her hair – to the point that its destruction is of no import to her. However their words fall on deaf ears. As women uninterested in the patriarchal construct and removed from its approval/admiration Maxine and Neena can tell Irie with conviction she is wrong to bow to the pressure of trying to become the woman *a man* wants but their words hold no weight since Irie is not interested in earning *their* approval.

Another novel that engages these patriarchal constructs of beauty as imposed on women is *Trumpet* (1998) written by the black Scottish female writer Jackie Kay. The locus of her novel is the relationship between Joss Moody (a trans-gendered, black, lesbian/transsexual woman) and Millie McFarlane (a white, lesbian/heterosexual, woman). The novel opens after the death of Joss Moody. Millie recalls the first time she

met her husband and how he was "well dressed, astonishingly handsome, high cheekbones that gave him a sculpted proud look; his eyes darker than any I'd ever seen. Thick black curly hair, the tightest possible curls, sitting on top of his head, lie on a bed of spring bracken. Neat nails, beautiful hands. …His skin was the color of Highland toffee. His mouth a beautiful shape" (Kay 11). Curly hair and brown skin are not prized as symbols of beauty by black women and perhaps for Josephine Moore the mixed race daughter of Edith Moore, a white Scottish woman, and John Moore, a black man with "very dark" skin, such attributes were indeed a negative. But when Josephine binds her breast, cuts her hair and changes her name to Joss Moody she becomes free to do what she wants and be what she wants. Self assured and operating outside of patriarchal standards of gendered beauty, Joss builds a life as a renowned musician, a husband, a father (he and Mille adopt a boy) and a daughter/son – he continues to send money to his mother. Joss courts Millie who is accepting of the fact that her husband is actually a woman. It is a secret they keep because they consider the biological nature of his gender to be irrelevant and it is only revealed after Joss dies. It is Millie's acceptance of the "Other" that makes Joss "normal" and their relationship "a part of daily life" (Stirling 166). Joss' race seemingly becomes irrelevant in the wake of society's shock of his biological gender. His son Colman also a black man is so repelled by the unsexing of his father that he collaborates with a ghost writer because "[t]he public might hate perverts, but they love reading about them. (Kay 264). Newspaper accounts immediately after the unveiling are full of salacious innuendo and pseudo analysis of what exactly motivated Joss Moody to masquerade as a man. Maintains Patrick Williams it is the fact of Joss Moody's gender (and performance of it) that cause the "biggest shock" and almost forces

questions of race to the background. However, Williams further concludes that although "race is not central to the questioning of identity which takes place" the novel by Jackie Kay's own admission is structured like jazz and so the "narrative of Black Identity" is a note that "occurs quietly" throughout the novel only to burst into a "thematic resolution" once Colman receives the letter[9] Joss left him. (Williams 47). Ultimately Colman comes to the realization that Joss acted as a man because he "liked it." Once he makes peace with this, his memories of his father are restored.

Black women living in the west are not are not only battling against a cultural white hegemonic patriarchal notion of standardized beauty, which they can't attain and are thus never accepted but also are being weighed and measured within their community based on their skin tone. Typically lighter skin especially in women has more currency and can result a higher rate of acceptance by both the white dominant culture and their immediate immigrant community and increased confidence and a sense of self worth.

When a black woman fails to match the newly adopted society's standards of beauty, she is being made to feel a literal outcast by the dominant community based on her appearance. While she is not disowned by her immediate community, she may not be valued as highly as someone with more desirable – i.e. lighter skin – attributes. The lack of physical acceptance immigrant women feel is evident in much of the current crop of Black British Literature. These women are concerned with ideals of beauty, levels of attractiveness and how they as individuals are influenced by the idea of what is attractive which is always determined by a certain body type and skin tone. This emphasis on the privilege of white skin is something that has over time become internalized in former colonies and has a tremendous impact on these societies and the perceived value of

people, women in particular. In her essay "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write this in Fire," Michelle Cliff chronicles her own childhood in which she was considered "red" – a pale skinned Jamaican – and the fact of her skin color plus the fact her family had land and status gave her a literal golden upbringing. Her friend who was darker than she was expected to be her sidekick and it was assumed Cliff would never visit her friend's home because she was a "lady' and ladies didn't associate with the darker Jamaicans. By adhering and privileging these western hegemonic standards on their own people who rejoice in their light skin Cliff argues, light skinned black people experience the possibility of being white and when they fail, they can blame the drop of black blood within themselves, thus demonizing the black without admitting any personal fault or admitting to the fact that their skin color is the result of institutionalized rape.

With this history between the whites and the blacks, it is perhaps not surprising that tension would arise between the two races at the possibility of reverse miscegenation. White men who had for decades been busy exploiting colored women for their sexual pleasure suddenly feared entering into a competition with colored men and ultimately losing. In his book *In A New World Order (2002),* Caryl Phillips addressed the nature of the competition white men feared from black men: It was the fear that black men would take the white woman and pollute the race in the same way whites and imperial practices had done to the darker races. As early as 1919 writes Phillips there were race riots in England, which the *New York Times* attributed to "'the Negroes' familiarity with white women'" (Phillips 244). Similarly in 1958 after the Notting Hill riots, Phillips says *The US News and World Report* wrote "'[in addition] to friction over housing and employment[,] the [riot was caused by] resentment of white men over Negroes

associating with white women. In London and other industrial cities it has been commonplace to see young Negro men with white girls…the association of Negro men and white girls has stirred jealously and resentment among young men'" (244).

As Michelle Cliff grew older she started to question the assumptions of skin color and the privileging of light skin. Echoing Homi Babha's concept that colonialism was only sustainable because certain colonized groups were complicit in their fate, Cliff comes to the bitter realization that light skinned Jamaicans have so far internalized the concept that white skin equals privilege that in essence "the house nigger became master" (359) and have seamlessly taken over for the colonizers, promulgating the idea lighter skin is better, superior and thereby ensuring that there are indeed degrees to being black.

This denial of the realities of colonial miscegenation and the difference between light and dark skin is also very much apparent in the novels of Andrea Levy, a British-born writer of Jamaican descent. It was only after she reached adulthood that Levy learned that her parents had been part of the Windrush generation of immigrants and her novels *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994) and *Never far from Nowhere* (1996) "focus on the renegotiation of identities fundamental both to migration itself and to the novels that attempt to recreate the subjectivities of children of migrants and on the patterns of migration and displacement that colonization initiates, and that neocolonial conditions have…helped maintain" (Lima, 56). With *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) and *Small Island* (2004) Levy's work can be characterized as novels that return to Jamaica and reexamines/rediscovers/reclaims the history of Jamaicans before the mass exodus of 1948. What remains constant however in all four novels is the emphasis Levy places on color of her characters. Maria Helena Lima succinctly points out: "the darker [characters]

may want to go back to Jamaica where they hope to belong, and only the light-skinned seem to feel entitled to stay in London" (58). Entitlement seems to go hand in hand with light skin. In *Small Island*, Hortense states bluntly she was born to a woman named Alberta out of wedlock but resembled her father in the following manner:

> My complexion was as light as [my father's]; the colour of warm honey. It was not the bitter chocolate hue of Alberta and her mother. With such a countenance there was chance of a golden life for I. What, after all, could Alberta give? Bare black feet skipping over stones. If I was given to my father's cousins for upbringing, I could learn to read and write and perform all my times tables. And more. I could become a lady worthy of my father, wherever he might be (32).

Hortense's disdain and unconcern for her dark-skinned mother and her grandmother is obvious; they are black, poor and uneducated and she can do better and indeed would be foolish not to advance herself. Consequently, she is removed by her father's family[10] and raised alongside her cousin Michael whom she secretly admires.

Michael, also a golden boy with a predilection for white women, is shipped off to England after being caught in *flagrante delicto* with a preacher's wife. He arrives just in time for WWII and uses the confusion of the war's aftermath to allow his family to believe him dead. Hortense is determined to find Michael and when she meets Gilbert, a man with ambitions for going to England she adroitly separates him from his girl and strikes a bargain with him: she'll advance him money for his passage if he marries her first and once established in England send for her. Gilbert being an honorable man, is true

to her word. Hortense who has a high opinion of her self worth – she is educated, speaks English well, has looks and the right skin tone – knows she will fare well in England and assumes it is only right she takes the opportunity.

Both Michael and Hortense's self-centered existence is attributable to their innate feelings of superiority that is in turn centered on the accident of the tint of their skin. Ironically it is this inflated sense of self worth that helps both of them to survive in England. Hortense is initially disappointed at the squalor of post war England but she never takes it to heart that people can't understand her when she speaks English because she assumes she is better educated than the common white man. She ridicules the white people for their method of dress she considers inferior to her own. Momentarily defeated when she realizes that the white people won't let her teach in their schools, Hortense nevertheless recovers. She is a little less sure of her reception in England but she remains she and Gilbert will weather it. Together they bond, forging a real marriage and a real future in England.

It should be noted Queenie's affair ends in pregnancy. She continues to rent out her house and it here that Gilbert brings the skeptical Hortense. The child when born is shows signs of its black heritage, a fact that will not be easily accepted by her husband who has finally returned from the war, or their neighbors who feel under siege by the blacks immigrating to England and are therefore particularly resentful of Queenie for renting to blacks. Queenie herself feels disqualified to care for the child because it is visibly dark and she doesn't know how to raise a black child in her white world and she understands the child would be happier with someone else i.e. someone with darker skin. She gives it to Hortense and Gilbert. The ultimate irony of the novel is that Hortense and

Gilbert are part of the new immigration wave into England, and are in a way re-colonizing England. The child they accept is partially white but shows no evidence of it. The child is the future predictor of how lines of color and heritage are blurring, something the white people in Queenie's world are very much afraid of but cannot ultimately prevent.

Unfortunately stereotypes of beauty and what is accepted still abound and what is even more distressing is that the non-white woman who migrates to Britain or any western nation for that matter internalizes the dominant cultural norms that too often contrast sharply with their own. Instead of making room for both cultural norms immigrant women and black women born in white cultures too often internalize their "failure" to live up to the dominant cultural idea of beauty. For British born girls who are not white of skin, this means living with a perpetual idea they fail to measure up and countless efforts to make themselves a little less alien.

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal piece "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she details how during the imperialistic expansions of the British Empire Indian women were subjected to societal pressure both from their "own" and the colonizers. One such example is the British assumption that brown women were passive and acquiescent to primitive customs such as sati and had to be protected against their primitive, barbaric ways by the British who knew what was best. Other feminists such as Hazel Carby and Barbara Smith have declared the black woman is best qualified to speak for herself and her needs because her exploitation has been something white men and women have profited by. There are many ways to silence a woman and make her into the "other." The ability to manipulate her appearance into something deemed acceptable is simply the

most personal and effective way to keep a woman down. Spivak's ultimate point is that the subaltern – the lowest of the low – black women – can speak if one cared to listen and if I might interject, get over their complexion.

NOTES

[1] Both white men and women take it for granted that they can assess a "black" woman and will freely comment as personal experience can attest: I have been told that I am too fat to be an Indian from India; that I must have a white father because I am tall; that my first name isn't exotic enough; that my hair, which I prefer long, is pretty but then all Indians have nice hair; and my personal favorite that I was beautiful but "them there Indian women are always beautiful."

[2] Riley's title for the novel is an answer to George Lamming's 1960 essay "The Pleasures of Exile" in which he writes, "The pleasure and paradox of my own exile is that I belong wherever I am." Hyacinth in her exile belongs nowhere.

[3]Here I am not making the assumption that only a woman who is attractive is deemed to have worth. However, women who feel good about themselves – whether it is because of their accomplishments, their physical appearance or in their lives– are generally more confident.

[4] Feminist discourse has led to criticism of the standard of beauty and countless studies have researched how all class, gender, ethnicity of females are adversely affected. One notable book is *The Beauty Myth* (1991) in which author Naomi Wolf argues the concept of beauty is a way to preserve the patriarchy and continue to oppress women in the West.

[5] Beth L. Molloy's 1998 study "Body Image and Self-Esteem: A Comparison of African-American and Caucasian Women" cited "To the extent that [African American women] interact mostly with other African Americans, they may be 'protected fro white norms regarding body styles." From this I extrapolate that the same could be said for immigrant

women or women born to immigrant parents who only associate within their community because they would establish and give precedence to their own communal norms. However, the literature under review clearly shows that the daughters born and raised in England are quick to understand they just don't look right when compared to white Britons.

[6] Euromonitor International, a research firm, estimates the $318 million India market for skin care has grown by 43 percent since 2001. Didier Villanueva, country manager for L'Oreal India, told the Times that half of this market is fairness creams, with 60-65 percent of Indian women using these products daily.

[7] The advertising and cosmetic industries have taken notice and some have changed their pitch to women. Most famous is the Dove campaign for real beauty.

[8] The fact the hair is Indian parallels Joan Riley's novel *Unbelonging* in which white is unattainable but Indian is second best. The implication is clear there is a hierarchy to color and ethnicity. If fairs skin is more desirable, then it is better to be Indian than black.

[9] See chapter entitled "Last Word" in *The Trumpet* for the contents of the letter.

CHAPTER 5: STASIS, STATUS AND STATUS QUO FOR WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE

The myth of the nation obscured class divisions and inequities and fabricated emotional cohesion. So, too, with racism, which invariably imagined a false paternal aristocracy.

– Philip Yale Nicholson
Who Do We Think We Are? Race and Nation in the Modern World

The weakness of the blacks stems from the smallness of their members, the 'less-ness' from the bourgeois cultural consciousness of the white working class. ...The blacks must through the consciousness of their colour, through the consciousness, that is, of that in which they perceive their oppression, arrive at a consciousness of class; ... inside every black man there is a working-class man waiting to get out.

- A. Sivanandan
"The Liberation of the Black Intellectual"

Perhaps one of the least tangible but most insidious indicators of what defines the British character is the ingrained class system that shapes the nation's social and political infrastructure. For many centuries the class a person was born into determined not only his lot in life but also preordained each person's place within the natural order of things. The peasants knew their place and the aristocracy held on to theirs. This self-imposed balance of the class system enabled William Harrison to start his *Description of Elizabeth England, 1577* with the assertion, "We in England, divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, and artificers or labourers" (2). Harrison goes on to delineate how each group is to be categorized, a classification that is intertwined with tangible assets of wealth, title, land ownership and profession. As the centuries shifted and Britain's infrastructure went from an agrarian based economy to an industrial one, some fluidity entered into the system. The usage of the word class started

to morph from meaning a system of classification to, as Raymond Williams terms it, a fixed way to name social classes i.e. lower class, middle class, upper class, working class. Williams further comments that the "…essential history of the introduction of class as a word which would supersede older names for social divisions, relates to the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited" (61). In spite of the idea that position could be made, no whole scale social revolution occurred in England and the class system seemed firmly entrenched and secure. Perhaps in part this is due to the fact that class is hard to quantify and means different things to different people. For example the cultural theorist Stuart Hall approaches discussions about class and race in terms of their economic and sociological tendencies, although he admits that such terms are both crude and not necessarily accurate. Briefly, the economic tendency may include both "internal economic structures, within specific social formations" or focus on an external economic relationship which may be defined as "developed/undeveloped; imperialist/colonized; metropolitan/satellite, etc" while the sociological may encompass "the social relations between different racial or ethnic strata or deal exclusively with cultural differences, of which race is only one, extreme case (Hall, Race 17). Hall admits that race and economics are tied together but that race and class disparity is not the only nexus because an improvement in economic factors does not result in a corollary improvement in racial matters. Thus Hall concludes that the debate for the "sociological theories of race" is not purely theoretical because factors "often experienced and analyzed as ethnic or racial conflicts are really manifestations of deeper, economic contradictions (18). In other words, sometimes race can trump class if sufficient class/wealth is present but often race can serve as a barrier to entering a certain class. It is

these inherent contradictions that this chapter examines. Chapter five looks at how the boundaries of class shape a black British woman's experiences as she moves through her life as daughter, wife, mother and oftentimes employee. The discussion is divided into three parts: the first include immigrants who are outside of the class structure either by choice or because they have been denied acceptance by the dominant culture. Although the status of "outsider" can have a demoralizing effect on some immigrants, this limbo status can also grant them freedom to subvert established class boundaries if they so choose. The second grouping is of immigrants who self identify as a person of status – it may be a person who expects to be treated better and demands political/economic reform or it may be a second or third generation Black Briton who self identify as British and expect to be treated as equals within the dominant white culture. The third grouping is of men and women who have achieved status and feel a vested interest in preserving the ideologies of their status.

The traditional view of black women held by the white dominant society is one of domesticity linked to motherhood. Hazel Carby suggests that this image is a white ideological construction that simply prescribes the role in which black women served white families as nannies and ayahs and ignores a black woman's relationship to her own family. This a myth that the white dominant society continues to perpetuate as they consider black women fundamentally unsuited to work. The implicit subtext is the assumption that black women are automatically given a lower social status than their white counterparts and as a consequence often lack the economic power to move upward. Another stereotype is the one of the black woman who is dependent on men. Once again Carby debunks this by pointing out that Afro-Caribbean men traditionally have a high

unemployment rate and there are many Afro-Caribbean households that are headed by black women who successfully manage their dual roles of mother and breadwinner. This creates the harmful and erroneous systematic belief prevalent in the white dominant culture that black women are considered incapable of work and thus subsequently devalued for lack of status.

Carby further points out not only are black women able to work but were historically actively encouraged to do so:

> Afro-Caribbean women, for example, were encouraged and chose to come to Britain precisely to work. Ideologically they were seen as 'naturally' suitable for the lowest paid, most menial jobs" and while white women were given a prospect of being single and a career woman *or* married with a family, black women "were viewed simultaneously as workers and as wives and mothers" (85).

Aminatta Forna remarks that despite the large numbers of women in the work force, the dominant ideology is a patriarchal one that maintains that a mother should not only stay home with her child but also in essence become the sole caretaker. Anything less is deemed to be harmful to the child. This Forna indicates has never been how African - Caribbean women have approached childrearing nor is it something that they can economically afford to do and yet they are censured for not staying at home. Forna maintains that "In Britain, African -Caribbean women are blamed for the problems of young Black men and portrayed as irresponsible, sponging and overly fertile" (364). She concludes, "To raise their children in the way that white middle-class women do has

never been a possibility for Black women, or even white working-class women. It is an ideology which dictates dependence on a man and fixed gender roles, and is also built on ideas about femininity from which Black women have generally been excluded" (371). Here the irrational and insidious ideology is unmasked: the white gaze reduces black women to the role of mothers and condemns them to a poorer economic status while simultaneously castigating them for not being good enough mothers because they must leave the home in order to provide for their children.

In a similar vein, Pratibha Parmar also decries the systematic oppression of Asian-British women who enter the work force. Says Parmar "Asian women are confined to even more specific sections of the labour market. They are over-represented in the low paid unskilled and semi-skilled sector…" (245). As Parma documents, Asian women who were born overseas have to enter the workforce because they are often faced with high payments for rate and utilities in their new home, a desire to do better for their children and a desire to earn some independence (246). While one could make the argument some Asian women who have immigrated to Britain have a language and sometimes literacy barrier that forces them into low skill positions, the fact that little or no training is offered is once again due to the prevailing western notion that Asian women are passive, confined to their homes and are not interested in moving into the work world. White middle class women often have the opportunity to remain home with their children and are considered good mothers for doing so. If an Asian woman does so, she is dismissed for being traditional, passive and reclusive. Yet in *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003) it is evident that when the Bhamras were new immigrants Mrs. Bhamra had to work outside the home and worked long hours. But as they prospered in their new life, she was able to

stay at home which for her became a symbol of status. Her initial work ethic, based on necessity, indicates the reverse of the stereotype of what an Asian woman is, but her eventual domesticity satisfied her, an attitude that contradicts white feminism which often confers status on work done outside the home.

Despite Williams' assertion that position/class can be made, people born into a particular class designation don't for the most part question the limitations of their class - and by extension opportunities - as accent, education and wealth clearly serve as badges of self –identification especially in Britain. This is one of the issues Tarquin Hall, a white Englishman with a public school background, grapples with in *Salaam Brick Lane* when he recounts how after agreeing with a friend that the food in a local pie shop is not to their liking receives open scorn from the patrons for not considering "their" food good enough. Later Hall becomes a source of interest to an Asian immigrant by the name of Aktar who is trying to understand the English and hopes Hall will give him some inside information on cockneys. Hall politely disclaims any knowledge but Aktar persists:

> "But you are English?" asked Aktar.
>
> "Yes, but I didn't grow up here. I'm a stranger in these parts too. I have no more contact with the cockneys of Bethnal Green than the average Bangladeshi does."
>
> "But they are your people, are they not?"
>
> "You don't understand," I said. "I don't fit in. I've got the wrong accent, the wrong name. Everything about me sticks out. I'm perceived as being middle class….It's just that the British are class conscious, and sometimes people from different classes can be standoffish with one another. The fact that I went to public school makes me a toff in the eyes of many working-class people. That can

make them hostile" (Tarquin Hall, 216-7).

The hostility that Tarquin Hall notes among one class of British (working class) toward another (the upper class) is something that most immigrants and especially black immigrants encounter at some point as they move through the white dominant culture. To extrapolate, as they attempt to make their mark in the white dominant culture, the question always resorts to the struggle for power, status and inclusion. It is why Philip Yale Nicholson concludes "Racism conferred an artifice of nobility and privilege by birth. It joined otherwise hostile or dissimilar groups as landlords and tenants, factory owners and workers in imagined hereditary bonds based on physical and culturally related traits. The legally encoded aristocracy of race came with a license to abuse, expropriate property and labor, or destroy another group. …Racism is many things; it is always an artificial class war" (72).

The class war is waged on many fronts but is always rooted in the fear that one is at risk of losing status: be it money, jobs or daughters. After World War II there was a dearth of labor and black Caribbean men were invited to come to work in Britain only to be faced with hostility. It was made clear to these newly arrived immigrants that they didn't fit in to the status quo: they were drifters, without family, housing or an established community. It was hoped these immigrants would learn their place and remain there.

Typically metropolitan areas were allotted to the black British population. Brick Lane in London is one such place that has traditionally housed immigrants and is now home to a large Indian population. Today, reports Tarquin Hall, the locale has been taken over by Bangladeshi landlords and business owners who think nothing of exploiting recent

immigrants (a large number from eastern Europe) by hiring them to work in sweatshops and renting them vermin-infested flats with leaking roofs and inoperable plumbing. They see it as a "service" since after all where else will immigrants with little income and who incur the dislike of the dominant culture find a place to live or work? Lauretta Ngcobo sums it up succinctly when she says the desires of the immigrants and the expectations of the "host society" are the chief source of conflict in Britain and that the figures of authority simply can't understand why the black working class can't accept their fate in the same way the white working class has (18). Perhaps this lack of understanding is based on the folkloric stereotypes that continues to prevail in today's British public consciousness and stems from what Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi call a propaganda campaign started in 1947 in which the Ministry of Labour undertook a survey that categorized black workers as "mentally slow" and "unsuited to certain work." From the same questionnaire the following conclusions were drawn about the races:

> West Indians, particularly those from Trinidad and Guyana, were described as more 'stable' than West Africans. Unlike West Indians and West Africans, Indians and Pakistanis were said to be physically unsuited for medium and heavy work, but were reported to do well in light industry and capable of being trained to at least semi-skilled engineering standards. …Bangladeshis were described as of 'poor physique' and not well suited to industrial work" (Carter, Harris et al. 26).

The end result of the campaign promoted the idea that Black immigrants were somehow less capbable than whites and in the hierarchy of social status significantly

lower than the white classes. However, an interesting phenomenon occurred as the Black immigrants settled, raised children and created lives in England. They, unlike their white counterparts, showed a determination not only to question the order of things but worked hard at being upwardly mobile. In 2005 *The Independent* ran an article under the headline "Children of Immigrants Break Class Barriers" in which it reported, "Children of Caribbean immigrants who arrived in Britain in the 1960s, along with black Africans, Indians and Chinese are more likely to have entered the middle class by getting jobs as professionals or managers than working-class whites born in [England]. This trend in upward mobility however seemed to bypass "children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents" (McCormack). Perhaps an explanation for this upward social mobility may be attributable to religion. Typically Muslim communities tend to be more insular and isolated. John Rex and Gurharpal Singh in looking at the role of religion and self-identification conclude religion "…may serve to provide very important foci of identity [for black immigrants] which prevent identification with classes, estates, neighbourhoods and the status of citizenship" (110)[1].

In some ways, lack of foci characterizes Nazneen the protagonist in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). Nazneen is a devout Muslim woman who is raised not to question her fate or the men in her life. She is in an arranged marriage and she seems to fulfill the stereotype of the Muslim woman: she is dependent on her husband, she confines herself chiefly to her home and spends a majority of her days cooking meals and is unaware of the world around her. John Rex and Sally Tomlinson have talked about the formation of an "underclass" and how some Asian communities were becoming closed units. Partially this isolation was due to a lack of language. While West Indian Immigrants were raised

speaking English, many south Asian immigrants claimed another language and English was at best, a second language, thereby putting them at a perceived disadvantage. This idea of a national language becomes yet another symbol that, as Philip Yale Nicholson points out, people can rally around but which also serves as a perpetuation of the hierarchy that people in the name of country and nationality are so quick to preserve. Monica Ali picks up on language and its isolating qualities with Nazneen who moves to England and doesn't speak it very well. For the most part, her husband Chanu is her link to British culture. Chanu places great emphasis on his intellect and enjoys "educating" his wife whom he considers to be a simple girl. He continually quotes long passages of literature to her that she can't make out. He then gives her the quotation in English and tells her to translate it, a task she finds pointless because even translated they still hold no meaning for her – a subtle underscoring that Nazneen is not connected to British culture or ideology and remains apart not because she is passive or a subaltern but because she is deep down chiefly unaffected and indifferent. Chanu, however, has an opinion on everything including the class system in Britain, which he shares with Nazneen:

> You see," he said, a frequent opener although she often she did not 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 these people a

> superiority complex. The middle classes are more secure, and therefore more relaxed (Ali 21).

Perhaps the reason Nazneen cannot see or muster much enthusiasm for Chanu's enthusiasms is that she doesn't recognize her own place in the hierarchy of status. As Nazneen makes small changes in her life she enters the world. First she becomes friends with Razia and through Razia obtains a used sewing machine and starts working on piece work. Here Ali plays with the stereotype of a Muslim women not being capable of learning skills beyond menial work. In addition to learning how to sew, Nazneen learns to think and question the way of things. The catalyst is Karim who is British born and vocal about the inequalities he sees around him. He tells her stories of Palestine and how Muslims are generally mistreated and finally he asks her to come to a meeting to address these issues because he tells her he wants everyone to be represented including her. It is the first time any man has assumed Nazneen has an opinion worth listening to or who is worthy of representation. She attends without asking permission of Chanu because up until the last moment, she is convinced she will not attend. Although Nazneen's involvement with the Bengal Tiger is at best peripheral she becomes aware of how her immediate community is perceived on her housing estate where the Lion Hearts are conducting a campaign to take back England and watches the ensuing "war" with great interest: "The war was conducted by leaflets. ...The type size of the headlines became an important battlefield. After a much heated inflation and experimentation with tall but thin type and fat but squat titles, the Bengal Tigers emerged victorious by simply using up an entire page for the headline and relegating the text to the other side (Ali 186)". Chanu

receives the leaflets with his customary loquaciousness and Nazneen for the first time views him critically. By comparison she sees Karim as speaking with more purpose unlike Chanu who was "mired in words" and did not speak as a man. After September 11, the Bengal Tigers start to react to what they consider the unjust American persecution of Muslims and Nazneen sees how certain members of the group are infusing the group's mission with an ideology of hate and political rhetoric. By now she is embroiled in an affair with Karim and can only wonder why he doesn't see how things are going in the wrong direction. For Nazneen her focus on faith may make her indifferent to class but she is still open to humanity seeing them as the children of God and wonders why no one else can see such a simple truth.

Nazneen's emancipation comes not because she seeks a higher status or wants to assimilate into the dominant culture but because once she starts to question her status and judgment of the people around her, she find she wants to live a life that is peaceable and nurturing for herself and her daughters. The woman who is considered low skilled by the dominant culture has developed her moral sense to the point where she can seek independence of thought and the resolution to pursue her own path on her own terms. She may not have obtained physical wealth or the prestige that comes with wealth, but she has inner riches. When we evaluate the idea as suggested by the Marxist critic Volosinov that what is problematic about the class struggle is that it is conducted in one language by all but that the language does not have the same meaning for all, Nazneen is a perfect example of a person who is satisfied with her efforts of equality when by another's standards, they would be very trivial markers.

Many Black Britons experience a sense of difference and a lack of acceptance by the dominant culture (as does Nazneen's husband) and this difference feeds into their self-identity. Conversely it is perhaps not surprising some black Britons willingly reside outside of the class system, as inclusion would indicate acceptance of the dominant society and its ideologies. This outsider status can allow black immigrants a greater latitude to move up the social scale with fewer constraints, an idea that is echoed in Meera Syal's 1999 novel *Anita and Me.* Syal places her teenaged narrator, Meena, into a rural working class community somewhere in the early1970s. Meena's family is the only Indian family in the neighborhood and is generally tolerated because they are the only non-white family in the village but Meena is achingly aware that she is not perceived as English and one of her main goals is to be more English and have her family behave less Indian. As Amrit Wilson states, the lives of Asian women are not

> Separable from their families. Their spheres of struggle are interdependent. In simplified terms it is the racism they encounter in British society, which pushes them back into their own communities; it is the oppression they suffer from their own men which weakens them in their fight against racism and exploitation at work. And once again, it the effects of racism and exploitation on Asian men and children which makes such demands on Asian women that they are no longer free to think of themselves as individuals with individual needs (190).

This generational conflict in which the younger woman finds her desires at odds with her community's, is echoed in the works of Ravinder Randhawa and Gurinder Chadha in

which younger Asian British women seek to express themselves in ways they consider only natural only to find they are clashing with the cultural norms of their communities. *In the Wicked Old Woman* (1987) the character Rosalind is oppressed by the expectation of her parents and runs away to live on the fringes of society. In Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) Hashida, is also laboring under the expectation that she will become a doctor but falls from grace when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock with a man who is not of her community. Chadha revisits the same theme in a light-hearted manner in *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003) in which Jess chases the idea of becoming a professional football player. The fact she identifies more with this game and the British obsession with football than the concept of a good traditional Indian wife is both horrific and incomprehensible to her mother.

In the novel *Anita and Me* Meena idealizes the tough girl next door and longs to be like her – complete with cigarette smoking, short skirts, long blond hair and lack of parental interference. Serving as a counterweight to Meena's desire are her parents who are very sure of who they are and what they want. They may be the only brown family in their rural town – Meena's father says he loves the place because the view reminds him of home – but they have a strong kinship with fellow Indian immigrants and work hard at following traditional ways. Meena's mother considers her food to be both nourishing to the body and soul and superior to the frozen fish fingers the white mothers feed their children. Entrenched in their roots, Meena's parents find little to envy in English people and culture and remember the only reason they came to England was to provide a good future for their daughter. The narration in the book and subsequent film is through Meena's eyes and "[t]he village and its inhabitants are only seen from the perspective of

the narrator and they are often constructed as figures in a Dickensian gallery of working-class stereotyping, identified in terms of what Barthes called the semic code, a major device for thematising persons, objects of places" (Bromley, 145). Through Meena we meet loutish boys who wear boots and ride bikes, the suspicious hard-hearted shopkeeper who dislikes having to donate to black children in Africa but is kindly patronizing to Meena, the hippy vicar who preaches love and peace, and the loud, drunk neighbor who beats his fat, frowsy wife. Where Meena views these people as interesting, her parents see them as sad and doomed. The problem seems to be one of generation. Meena doesn't yet understand the nuances of British culture. She finds Anita attractive and wants to be like her. While Meena is groomed to study for her grammar school exam, she doesn't initially see her parents are encouraging her to improve her status. Mr. and Mrs. Kumars' conviction that Meena has "potential" leads them to instill within Meena an expectation that she can study and pass the test and shape her future. It is this expectation of being *able* to move upward within the class system through personal merit (i.e. education and good exam results) that Anita can't even conceive. As outsiders, Meena's parents are strong in their convictions and comfortable with being outside the British class system, chiefly because they already have a certain status when compared to their immediate neighbors. They both work and have good white-collar jobs. This status does not go unacknowledged because after Mrs. Kumar forbids Meena to associate with Anita, Mrs. Rutter confronts Meena's mother and asks if Anita has been shunned because the Kumars don't consider Anita good enough for Meena. Mrs. Kumar denies it and Meena is delighted that her mother is then forced into inviting Anita to their house for dinner. While Meena is considered in the village to be unique for her skin color, she and her

family are actually far more remarkable for their belief that being outside the petty tyranny of the class system, a system Meena doesn't understand and her parents don't believe in, allows them the ability to navigate and circumvent it, an idea the other white people in the village don't even consider. In effect the Kumars' placement in the community as being the only Indian family in the village has provided them with a way to overcome the barriers of class and to change Meena's "lot" in life, despite Meena's initial reluctance.

This emphasis on education is something that is repeated throughout black British writing. In many South Asian British communities there is such an emphasis on education and a push for Anglo-Indo sons and daughters to become doctors and other white-collar professionals that author and comedienne Meera Syal wrote a skit for her TV show *Good Gracious Me* (1998) in which an Indian-Brit character asks "when was the last time you saw a doctor who was white?" Ravinder Randhawa in her novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) lightheartedly refers to the DEAD bunch, The Doctor-Engineer-Accountant-Dentist (57), when it comes to choosing a husband for an Indian girl. The novel centers on an Indian woman, Kulwant. She has three sons: Anup is a university lecturer and research scientist and holds a Ph.D., Malkit is a researcher and the youngest, Arvind starts his own garage. Despite the fact that Arvind becomes a financial success and has a happy marriage with a woman who loves and supports him, he is an object of scorn to his brothers who barely associate with him. Recalls Kulwant, "Anup and Malkit, the older brothers, had once congratulated him [Arvind] on being a social phenomenon, 'Most people move up from the working class to the middle class – you must be the vanguard of a reverse trend'" (Randhawa 92). The two brothers can't see their younger

sibling as being successful in his own right because his job as a mechanic who owns a garage is beneath them and their perceived status. Their mother Kulwant instinctively understands her youngest child never wanted to be the "type of Indian" that his brothers were i.e. ambitious, hungry for status and with a need to prove their worth by becoming men of importance. Kulwant considers, albeit with some irony, her youngest child to be a "…real working-class Black-Englishman hero, with his white wife at his side" (Randhawa 92). Kulwant's three sons represent the professional and working class in England and helps illustrate the changing landscape of the class structure in England and the extent to which black Englishmen are reshaping the structure. Further the scornful comment of Kulwant's older sons encapsulates the nature of how class and mobility function for many Caribbean and South Asian immigrants and their descendents who believe that class/social status is not fixed and that something "better" can and should be achieved and once gained, protected. In some ways, Kulwant has become downwardly mobile. As a child she had identified with white culture, her best friend is a white girl and her first boyfriend is white. After a bad breakup, Kulwant finds she no longer wants to live in a white culture and concentrates on becoming "Indian," even insisting on an arranged marriage. To the white dominant culture, such a move is proof that Kulwant is a typical passive Asian woman. Yet strength runs through Kulwant. Her foolishness is not that she tried to be Indian but that she denied the English part of herself. Ultimately she is unhappy and it is only when she decides to eradicate her identity by adopting the disguise of an old woman wearing hand me downs is she able to be herself – neither just Indian or overtly British but an old woman who can be left alone to do as she will.

A concern for upward mobility and status is also evident in Andrea Levy's *Small*

Island (2004). Levy ends her novel with Gilbert and Hortense starting a life that is middle class – they have a steady income and house during a time when many white Britons do not. How does this shift come about? Hortense a light-skinned woman who was raised in her native Jamaica to be middle class has a healthy appreciation of her own worth. She feels no kinship with the whites she meets when she first arrives in England because she considers them low class. It is her expectation that she is better than the people surrounding her and entitled to more. This belief serves as the catalyst to move herself, Gilbert and their adopted son forward. Similar to the Kumars, Hortense is propelled to ask for better because she has no desire to be associated with the white working class. While Hortense provides the catalyst, it is Gilbert who becomes involved with a group of Jamaicans who band together to find and provide housing to fellow ex-pats. These Jamaicans understand they can't work within the white system since white landlords do not want to rent to them and they prefer not to live in attic and basement space permanently. As a result, they create their own housing co-op, thus bypassing the systems and creating their own opportunities. It is assumed this new system will be open to all Jamaicans regardless of their background and is not a facsimile of cultural norms from Jamaica. For as Stuart Hall who was born into a middle class Jamaican family is quick to remind us "class fractions and the colour fractions" which are a holdover from colonial occupation is very much still evident in daily life in Jamaica. Hall is a dark skinned man who as a young boy didn't look like he fit into his family who were paler than he. He recounts:

> My father belonged to the coloured lower-middle class family. His father kept a drugstore in a poor village in the country outside Kingston. The family was

> ethnically very mixed – African, East Indian, Portuguese and Jewish. My mother's family was much fairer in colour; indeed if you had seen her uncle, you would have thought he was an English expatriate, nearly white, or what we would call 'local white.' Both these class fractions were opposed to the majority culture of poor Jamaican black people: highly race and colour conscious, and identifying with the colonizers (qtd. in Chen 405).

In some ways, Hall gained relief from the consciousness of class when he came to England because in England no one cared where he fit into Jamaican society. Thus some Jamaicans living in England came to realize that regardless of their status at home, they were all considered the same, i.e. inferior in England that allowed them to band together and work toward their betterment. For example, in Levy's book *Small Island*, Hortense who has a firm belief in her superiority because of her education and lighter skin, encounters contempt when she attempts to find a teaching position. At first the secretary looks at her with disbelief and then relief after observing Hortense's teaching certificate is invalid in England. Hortense is humiliated, embarrassed and wounded. Yet it is this vulnerability that makes her more open to Gilbert and is the start of their building a true marriage. Up until this point she had been treating him as slightly inferior because he did not have light skin or a similar privileged background.

Hortense and Gilbert have an expectation they can dream and succeed and are able to do so. The same is not true of the folks in Joan Riley's novel *Romance* (1988), where there seems to be a lack of ambition. John falls into self-pity because he feels that he will never be given a break. Since he can't identify with the colonizer (his class or skin color had not been a privileged one in Jamaica), John is beaten down by the system but still

retains the dream that while he cannot succeed his daughters, born in England, will. There is a psychological factor that can shape and predetermine a man's destiny if he believes he is not worthy and does not try to. Kobena Mercer echoes this notion when he writes:

> Plantation societies instituted a 'pigmentocracy': that is, a division of labour based on racial hierarchy, in which one's socio-economic position could be signified by one's skin color. Fernando Henriques's account of family, class and colour in post-colonial Jamaica shows how this colour/class nexus continues to structure a plurality of horizontal ethnic categories into a vertical system of class stratification. His study draws attention to the ways in which the residual value system of 'white-bias' – the ways ethnicities are valorized according to the tilt of whiteness – functions as the ideological basis for status ascription (Mercer 114).

It seems for John, the need to gain status is tied in with a male-gendered goal: to provide for the family and to have both self-respect and communal respect. Because he can't respect himself because his situation falls short of the ideal, his pride/ego play into his frustration. This is not to suggest however that a person who is non-white and doesn't readily identify with the colonizer because they are of the wrong shade or class can't also have ambition and drive or self respect. As captured in another novel by Riley, *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) the protagonist Adella has very little identification with colonial power. She is neither light skinned or of a middle class background, nor is she young. She values having a home even if it is dilapidated and although she is old and has to work double shifts she takes pride in not taking handouts for the government. When there is a

rumor that there might be an early retirement in the offering she is cautiously optimistic that she could live on her pension and disability allowance without extra handouts, for "She could not lose her pride, become like brother Winston who had taken to drink and lost his job when his wife left him..." (Riley, *Waitin*g 4). In this handful of literary examples, one could make the argument that the women – Hortense and Adella – are forced to *act* because it is a question of providing for a family and having to face oneself in the mirror. Both Adella and Hortense are concerned with saving face whereas the men John and Gilbert seem to have given in to the perceived contempt of the white dominant culture and have ceded the right to fight back because somewhere deep down they believe they are not worthy. In Gilbert's case, he overcomes this inaction and lethargy because Hortense who is accustomed to the idea that she deserves better forces him to provide for her. John's wife Desiree empathizes too much with his pain and acquiesces to his tyranny because it is in some ways easier than trying to rebuild his ego. However, it is important to remember as Carby mentions that while black women cannot deny that family life can be oppressive, for the most part families have been a source of strength in the resistance of the white ideology. Desiree is not necessarily weak but she is standing by her husband against the greater evil.

The emphasis on education as a proven way to social mobility is clearly linked back to Lord Thomas Macaulay, who outlined the purpose of education was to form a:

> class of person, Indian [or black] in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit

vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (724).

And so the imperialistic England in essence turned out black Englishmen that could mimic being English even if they could never be completely English. While Macaulay has many detractors, recently there has been an attempt to reevaluate him and his effect on India[2]. The emphasis on education and learning English worked in the favor of some black men who came to England by instilling in the black man a sense that he was an equal and sometimes superior to the whites in England. This confidence may also though, in part, be a class issue. In India, for example, only the higher caste would have access to education and English.

The educated black man and woman found himself in an interesting position once he entered England in the 1950s and 1960s: relegated to menial jobs and treated with suspicion, the black man was supposed to stay out of sight. Lauretta Ncgobo in critiquing how class and status was manufactured to exclude black men and women concludes:

> We [blacks] were judged not only by our financial standing but also by our history and by our colour. To the host community we're ex-savages and the descendents of slaves. We walked into a situation where our "notoriety" had gone before us in the much heralded writings of adventurers and colonists… So we were readily shuffled into our "proper" social position to find our own level, a peculiar level set below all others – the working-Black-class. Things were put in motion to groom us for the British scene, to assimilate us, above all to make us accustomed to our new class (18).

But it didn't necessarily work. The immigrants worked hard and wanted their children to

succeed where they couldn't. Also, some of the better education immigrants found that their "betters" were actually not truly their equals. Hence in the novels *White Teeth* (2000) and *Brick Lane* (2003) you have two male Muslim immigrants – Samad Iqbal and Chanu Ahmed – who constantly profess their intellect and decry the "western" culture as being decadent and for whom they have no place because they are somehow of higher status than the people they interact with. For the West Indian born C.L.R. James, a man who had some status and education, his arrival in England to attend university was very different. James found acceptance among his intellectual peers and even recalls:

[w]hat surprised me the most was that I had read more and had absorbed more of English literature and history than almost every English person I met. My knowledge astonished them and I was astonished too because I thought I had been reading what the average education person in England read. I only realized the width of my reading and the range of my memory by coming to England and meeting educated people at the universities (60).

James' experience of being better educated and better informed than some of the white Englishmen was something that was experienced and remarked by various immigrants who followed in the 1940s and 1950s. James goes on to say that while at the time of his arrival in England in 1932 race was not mentioned, he did meet people who took up his cause because he was black and had specific expectations of how he should respond. In particular he recalls a woman with a "habit to talk to black people" who asked him if he enjoyed a concert they had just heard. He replied in the affirmative and then asked if the woman had enjoyed the concert only to have her end the conversation and walk away. James' conclusion was that the woman felt she had the right to ask

questions but he did not. A. Sivanandan confirms this experience: "even as the 'coloured' intellectual enters the mother-country, he is entered into another world where his colour, and not his intellect or his status, begin to define his life – he is entered into another relationship with himself" in which it is very clear that he is not truly wanted. Continues Sivanandan, "within British society itself there seemed no place for him [the colored man]. Not even his upper-class affectations, his BBC accent, his well-pressed suit and college tie afford him a niche in the carefully defined inequalities of British life. He feels himself not just an outsider or different, but invested, as it were, with a separate inequality: outside and inferior at the same time" (70).

Rarely do the women in Black British literature express a sense of frustration that they are better educated than their counterparts. It is not because they lack education – in Syal's novel *Life isn't all Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2000) are peopled with women with professional degrees, Gurinder Chadha's characters are young women who are well educated and well spoken and Joan Riley's Hyacinth in *Unbelonging* (1985) attends college. One exception is Levy's Hortense who is very proud of her schooling and how well she speaks English, which is with exaggerated rounded vowels. When she arrives in England and finds the people in taxicabs and in the markets do not understand her, she simply attributes it their poor verbal skills and low class status. Syal's Meena on the other hand comes to understand if moving up the educational ladder is her ticket to a higher social status and some sort of superiority, it is also a forced cultural and physical distance behind her and her childhood friends. Perhaps this lack of expressed frustration can be attributed to the fact that for black women they are measured by many standards, education not being the most important.

The problem with racism is that since it is a made up construct, who is being discriminated against can be at times be erratic and irrational and subject to change. Certainly, a mitigation of racism from the "lower" classes toward a black person may occur when no threat is perceived or if they are united by a common case. For example Tarquin Hall documents how while the residents of docklands in London view each other with suspicion they are willing to put aside matters of race and ethnicity and are united in their dislike against the yuppies who are moving into the area, because they buy condos in refurbished warehouses and drive up the price of living. Another such example occurs in E.R. Braithwaite's novel *To Sir with Love* (1959). The protagonist is an engineer from the West Indies who because he cannot be hired in the field because of his color accepts a job in a secondary school in the heart of working class London. Rejected by his "peers" he is accepted by working class parents of his students partially because they have barrows selling fruit and don't see him as a threat to their lifestyle and partially because he is a teacher and they afford him some respect since his position demands it.

However, the teacher has a student who is of mixed race and comes to realize the students (especially the females) in his class do not associate with him outside of school because it is would not be respectable. Here the teacher, an outsider is accorded more respect than the classmate because the parents have a very real fear that the mixed race British boy could grow up and marry one of their daughters. In 1954 Learie Constantine writes perhaps with some bitterness, "Most British people would be unwilling for a black man to enter their homes, nor would they wish to work with one as a colleague, nor to stand shoulder to shoulder with one at a factory bench. This intolerance is far more marked in lower grades of English society than in higher, and perhaps it disfigures the

lower middle classes most of all, possibly because respectability is so dear to them." (67). It is something of this attitude which Andrea Levy captures in her novel *Small Island* (2004) where the landlady Queenie is harangued by her neighbors for letting her place to black people post World War II because it brings down the tone of the neighborhood. When she becomes pregnant through her liaison with a Jamaican, it is Queenie's fear of what the neighbors will say that leads her to hide her pregnancy. She explains,

> I wanted to keep it from the nosy parkers – Mr. Todd and his horrible sister. Nudging, pointing, whispering. 'What a how d'you do? Poor Bernard [her absent husband], what did that blessed man do to deserve her? The darkies are bad enough but now an illegitimate child. Whatever next in that house of ill-repute?' I wasn't ashamed, I just didn't want prying eyes making it sordid (Levy 411).

Although Queenie is annoyed by her neighbors' attitude, she understands how they think because she is of their class. Ultimately she gives up the child, who is visibly black, because she is not willing to give up her respectability and her husband and keeping the child becomes impossible.

The social movements in the 1960s redefined the scope of what women could do. Benita Roth reminds us that while the feminist movement started with white women of middle class status who were seeking release from "gender oppression" that "class status did not mean the same thing in each community and across communities, and could not simply be bracketed from concerns with gender and racial/ethical status." (31). While Roth is speaking of the black and Chicana movements in the United States, her

arguments can easily be applied to women in England not because black women in the States and in England are the same or that their concerns should be categorized in a like manner but because race and ethnicity and communal expectations certainly influence how a woman of color regardless of her origin and where she lives understands and priorities her concerns.

Although the class system is deeply ingrained in the English psyche, it is not too surprising that white English people did not automatically recognize class differences among the non-whites immigrants flooding to its shores. In 1929, Valentin Nikolaevich Volosinov a Marxist critic ruminated that the different classes used the same language to talk about class but made no distinction for the varying referents. Thus he concluded, "Sign becomes an area of the class struggle'" (46). In some ways Volosinov's comments blends the economic and sociological tendencies to which Stuart speaks with the inadequacy of the language to illustrate another way race/ethnicity and class intersect. As C.L.R. James and George Lamming had already noted, the British people in general had a hazy understanding of geography, the legacy of the British Empire or the internal politics of British overseas holdings. A white person therefore might be excused for not fully understanding that among black and brown people there exists racism (the solidarity of the term "black" as a political force aside) or that that shades of color defines worth and status[3]. For some whites, all nonwhites are perceived as the same: the incomer, the foreigner, the outsider, with no defining individual characteristics. Recounts Amrit Wilson in her essay "It's not like Asian Ladies to Answer Back" (1976), in the 1970s factory bosses failed to realized that Indians from India were of the peasant caste whereas Indians from Africa were chiefly middle class which meant that the latter, already used to

status and wealth, would be emboldened to ask for more equity in the workplace. This latter correlation makes complete sense when you understand that a group of people who have been used to a certain status would be loathe to relinquish it and be more outspoken about regaining a semblance of their previous status. In a similar vein, one can advance the argument that a person or group that stands to lose status would have a vested interest in keeping the status quo.

The inadequacy of language to fully detail the relationship of race/ethnicity and class is also seen in current Black British literature which portrays how the acquisition of personal wealth and the assumption of middle class status have made the offspring of immigrant populations more accepting of the dominant ideology and cultural values i.e. the values and ideology of the white community. A man who is black but who has wealth might find himself with status and is of course invested in keeping it. A person who has enough wealth or fame or the right education may actually not be perceived by the classification of skin color, allowing another way in which a British person of color may acquire mobility and move beyond the limitations of race classification[4]. One such famous example is Munshi Abdul Karim, a servant to Queen Victoria who raised him to the post of "Indian Secretary" and it is reported she favored his opinion over the rest of her household. Iconic writers of black British Fiction such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi have transcended the limitations of ethnicity and been accorded equal status with other British writers without the limiting "black" in front of their names. We catch glimpses of this trend to surpass color and acquire status in current black British literature. In Jackie Kay's novel *Trumpet* (2000), Joss Moody is celebrated for his musical talent than his color although the fact he turns out to be a woman is cause for

comment – once again suggesting that women are assessed in a different way from men and that black women are not free to act in the same manner as their male counterparts.

Gurinder Chadha picks up on this question of color/race/ethnicity transcending class in two of her films. The first is *Bride and Prejudice* (2004). Based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), one of the most quintessentially *British* novels and generally characterized as a gentle satire of British mores, Austen's novel makes certain pronouncements and indicts concepts of the eighteenth century British class structure. Thus Chadha's adaptation and placement of a British concept to modern day India serves several purposes 1) it highlights the connectivity that still exists between the former imperial power and its former colony 2) it highlights the fragility of the class system as a social construct as evidenced in a more increasingly global economy 3) and it speaks to the condition of what it is like to be British Indian in twentieth-first century Britain. Says Chadha in a 2004 interview:

> I chose *Pride And Prejudice* because I feel 200 years ago, England was no different than Amritsar [a village in India] today. Believe me, the transposition did not offend the purists in England at all. The news that I was making *Bride And Prejudice* was welcomed with broad grins by everyone because it's such a cheeky thing to do. (Jha)

When questioned as to how she views herself and characterizes the film, Chadha responds "It is a British film made by British finance, obviously because I am British.

But it is a homage to Hindi cinema and to Hollywood musicals" (Jha). The subsequent film as Christine Geraghty reminds is:

> made in three continents, funded in part by the British Film Council and co-produced by Miramax…an extreme example of the layering of references on which intextuality depends. It makes explicit the hybrid process in which elements from its source in Jane Austen's classic novel are brought into a relationship with generic features taken from Indian cinema and British cinema and television, features that themselves are a product of interaction and change (163).

Chadha's *Bride* tells the story of Lalita and her three sisters who are of a respectable but not rich modern-day in family Amritsar, India. Lalita Bakshi played by Aishwarya Krishnaraj Rai the "Queen of Bollywood" is beautiful, hardworking and smart. She bristles at the way Darcy initially reacts to India as a backwater and rails against him for complaining about his accommodations at the best hotel in town. While Darcy takes his money and the buying power of his dollar for granted, Lalita is very aware of its value and the injustice of having money to throw away when others go in need. She reminds him that if he builds a hotel that will charge $300 a night, it will be more than most people make in a year. What makes Lalita an interesting character is that she doesn't envy Darcy the money or even seek to obtain it since she turns down a marriage proposal with Mr. Choley, which would be prosperous because she cannot like him.

A mélange of Bollywood and American musicals, the film sometimes strikes a

discordant note and makes one miss Austen's genius with the pen. The film plays out over three continents and thus small details are flattened into a broad farce on cultural (American vs. Indian) differences than class. However, at least one admirer makes a convincing argument that "*Bride and Prejudice* captures the novel's attention to the subtleties of class by combining it with culture, ultimately conveying, particularly to contemporary American audiences, the significant implications of a match between individuals from two different worlds." (Wilson 328). When you strip away the notion of cultural difference, the film much like Austen's novel is about class and the inherent difficulties of moving up the class ladder and finding acceptance. Lalita and her older sister Jaya (Namrata Shirodkar) meet their potential suitors at a wedding. Bairaj Bingley (Naveen Andrews) is a wealthy man of Indian descent and comes to India with the idea of finding a wife. His friend and fellow industrialist the American William Darcy (played by Martin Henderson) tells him he has no need to look in India since he can easily find the woman of his dreams in the United Kingdom or the States, thus setting up Darcy's assumptions that India is a backwater and can hold nothing that isn't to be found in the more advanced West. Similarly Bingley's sister, Kiran, holds India in disdain and it is obvious she doesn't consider herself "Indian" by the way she speaks, presents herself and her reaction to India and Indians. For Kiran, being Indian is to be a person of no account. Echoing the discourse of chapter four on skin tone and color, when Kiran appears at the wedding an older woman comments admiringly that Bingley's "sister is so fair" as if that accident of biology makes Bingley even more desirable as a potential spouse and father. As portrayed by Indira Varma, Kiran clearly enjoys her privileged lifestyle. She looks uncomfortable in her sari and is embarrassed when her brother joins the dance at the

wedding – she mockingly refers to him as the "MC hammer of India." As a side note, it is interesting to note that because film is a visual medium, the fact that Varma is by birth half Indian (her mother is Swiss), her lack of stereotypical Indian looks – height, lack of roundness, aquiline nose – reinforces her character's distance from Indian culture and solidifies that she is somehow superior to Lalita and her family. Chadha does convincingly portray how Kiran Bingley is able to distance herself from her "Indian roots" because she has the money to obtain, internalize and assimilate western notions of class and status.

Kiran is appalled by her brother's interest in Jaya and reacts quickly to protect her turf from being encroached upon. When the Bakshi girls and their mother find themselves in England they go to visit Kiran at her home. She takes pride in pointing out the original works of western art hanging on walls of her palatial home that clearly puzzle them. She serves them British tea and points out how they have a view of Windsor from her windows. This ostentatious display of wealth affects the women differently: Mrs. Bakshi is impressed by the display of wealth and this seeming proximity to British royalty and how it can all be her daughter's, Jaya feels even more insignificant and distanced from Mr. Bingley and Lalita is disgusted. Kiran's objective, however, is accomplished. She has reinforced her status in British society, where she has enough wealth to live in the shadow of the Queen's residence and to be insulated from the idea of race. As a Bingley, Kiran is not subjected to overt racism because her money and status within British society has cancelled out any question of racism connected with her color.

Further Kiran's lifestyle insulates her from the masses that might object to her color regardless of wealth. So Kiran's need to preserve her lifestyle is in part based on

self-preservation and in part on natural inclination. Kiran herself doesn't identify with Indians and doesn't associate with them. Her lack of warmth during Jaya's visit is also to be noted, because in the Indian culture making a guest feel at home is very much prized. A guest would be plied with an abundance of food and drink to his taste. Kiran by presenting herself as British and serving "British" fare reinforces the distance between the two families and her predilection for identifying with English manners. She dislikes the Bakshi family because they are "too Indian" and have no place in the hierarchy of how she sees the world.

The Bakshis continue their journey to California where they will attend the wedding of a family friend. They are introduced to Darcy's family and find that they are once again out of their league, class wise. Darcy tries to make Lalita feel comfortable. His mother Catharine, portrayed by Marsha Mason, comes across as arrogant and rude. Catharine says she was disappointed that the proposed hotel Darcy was working on didn't go through because she had always wanted to go India but dismisses the notion in the next breath by saying yoga and Deepak Chopra are now available in the US as if the latter sums up the entire Indian culture. She isn't purposely rude to Lalita because she is trying to discourage any potential relationship – such a thought would never even occur to her – but because she is so sure of her prominence in the world as a white rich American industrialist that she sees no value in anything not of her immediate class and culture. Suchitra Mathur sums up the film's discourse on class with the following comment:

> This reductionist re-visioning of white Britain's imperial identity is fore grounded in the film by the re-casting of Darcy as an American entrepreneur, which effectively shifts the narratorial focus from Britain to the US. Clearly, with respect to India, it is now the US which is the imperial power, with London being nothing more than a stop-over on the way from Amritsar to LA. …The spatio-temporal contours of the narrative require changes to accommodate the transference from eighteenth-century English countryside to twenty-first-century India, but in terms of themes, character types, and even plot elements, *Bride and Prejudice* is able to "mimic" its master text faithfully. While the Bennets, Bingleys and Darcy negotiate the relationship between marriage, money and social status in an England transformed by the rise of industrial capitalism, the Bakshis, Balraj and, yes, Will Darcy, undertake the same tasks in an India transformed by corporate globalisation. Differences in class are here overlaid with those in culture as a middle-class Indian family interacts with wealthy non-resident British Indians and American owners of multinational enterprises, mingling the problems created by pride in social status with prejudices rooted in cultural insularity (06-mathur.php).

When Mrs. Darcy finally realizes the depth of her son's feelings for Lalita, she engineers the appearance of an old girlfriend. Anne shows up wearing a sari and it is a subtle statement that people of the right pedigree and background can appropriate elements of the "poorer" classes or other subordinate cultures at will if it amuses them but the reverse is not acceptable. Lalita a genuine Indian girl will not be allowed to move

up into Darcy class if Catharine and Ann can prevent it because they have a vested interest in keeping her out and protecting their own interests.

Typically British films that deal with class issues especially working class issues focus on white males (Lay, 18). Chadha not only breaks this tradition by focusing on Indian immigrants in England but she realizes this through the eyes of female characters. Her earlier film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) also reverses the cultural shift. If in *Bride and Prejudice* the wealthy white woman, or in Kiran's case assimilated white, close rank against the encroaching middle class Indians, in *Bhaji* it is the wealthy Indian woman who is contemptuous of the working class Indians she meets in England.

Rekha**,** a wealthy Indian woman visiting England decides to sight see and joins a bus group going to Blackpool. The location of Blackpool writes James Procter is "an overwhelming white space, yet the Asian characters are more than exotic 'exhibits' within it. The second-generation characters, in particular, participate in a provincial, working-class tourism, from fish and chips and candy floss to deck chairs …" (192). Perhaps the person who is most on exhibit is Rekha, because her status is above her travel companions. Well dressed in a tight jacket, short skirt and high heels, Rekha has more in common with Kiran Bingley than her fellow bus travelers. Rekha's status is derived from her wealth and she and Kiran view working class Indians with disdain: Kiran dislikes the Bennets and Rekha equates the working class Indian immigrants as synonymous with being backward. She chastises the older women on the trip who wear saris and keep traditional customs and implies they are out of touch with India. Her comments have some validity since the older women have stubbornly resisted assimilating into British culture and cling to their remembrances of traditional values

without taking into account that all things change given time. As part of their resistance as previously discussed, the immigrants have constructed closed tight knit communities that recreate and preserve their view of their home. Yet it is clear from looking at Rekha, a woman who has adopted western dress, smokes, has coiffed hair, and is disdainful of her elders, that she doesn't represent India nor necessarily identify with it, despite the fact she lives there. Rekha may chide the older women for their obstinacy but when she asks them what they know of India, she is also revealing an ignorance about her own country. The immigrants who are shopkeepers and other working class people represent an India Rekha knows nothing of because her money has insulated her from the poverty and true conditions that exist in her country. She may be aware from reading a newspaper that poverty exists, but she has no first hand knowledge of it. One may ask what does Rekha know of India? She is really out of touch with what is occurring in most of her country and perhaps profiting by the misery of others. Her husband's wealth and status provides her with opportunities to wear western clothing and travel independently. She dismisses tradition as old fashioned and is openly scornful of the older women without understanding their connection to their shared home.

Now that several generations of im/migrants, to borrow Susheila Nasta's styling, have established themselves, a curious status quo has established itself among the black population in Britain and a hierarchy has formed that speaks to class and snobbery for newcomers regardless of their color. Established Britons of color have internalized the values of their culture, albeit a hybrid one, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to preserve their particular version of what England means.

The great expectation that some of these immigrants share is based on a believe that

their community will sustain them and if they work hard enough, amass money or status through sons and daughters becoming doctors and other professionals they will establish a place for themselves. A strong community is able to counter the lack of acceptance by the dominant community, allowing immigrants and especially their descendents room to circumvent established British notions of class. These communities not only serve as a haven for new immigrants, but also serve as a place to encourage and push their children to achieve and move forward.

Furthermore, as reported by Tarquin Hall, these Bangladeshi are also convinced that just as they themselves have gone through this trial of fire and come through it and, given time, so will the new immigrants. It is this latter idea that hard work pays off and that as newcomers they can make an opportunity to advance their economic wellbeing that separates some working class minority groups from their white counterparts and also serves as something an anomaly when you consider that some of these people hail from societies that have little room for improvement and rigid class systems in place. The hope these immigrants have that they can create an opportunity to better their lives sets them apart and make them in some ways revolutionary to the norm of how class in Britain for whites operate as well as making them impervious to the irony of their actions.

Tarquin Hall recollects one man he meets, Mr. Singh, who is so concerned about the influx of immigrants coming into England that he is prepared to join the British National Party. When Tarquin Hall questions Singh's allegiance to the BNP, a party that wants to get rid of all immigrants, he reminds Singh that he too is an immigrant.

> Singh heatedly replies, "Not immigrant! Thirty-three years I am living in Great Britain, paying income tax, voting Labour, listening to Queen's speech on Christmas Day. I am number one British citizen and patriot. Also, like all Sikh peoples, I am working day and night and raising one family of the most respectable order. …Why should we be compared to all these layabout fellows" (Tarquin Hall 81).

Adopting and promoting the dominant ideology is also a way to reinforce a claim that one group of people is better qualified to the title of "British" than others (a way for those who were there "first" to stake out their claim). This play for legitimacy and claim to power is seen in the encounter between Joyce Chalfen and Clara in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000) in which Joyce shows Clara old photographs she has displayed around the house of the Chalfen ancestors. Joyce embarks on a monologue lauding their intelligence and various accomplishments. The photos establish her whiteness, her roots in the dominant culture, granting her the legitimacy she needs to establish that she is better suited than Clara to be a English a citizen and mother. The latter is slightly ironical as Smith subverts the stereotypical link between motherhood and black women. While status has no real value in discussing the formation of class it does refer to rank (a rank that is stripped of associations with inheritance) and where rank once "had titles and ribbons, status has symbols…" and Raymond Williams cautions that "it is characteristic these [symbols] can be … acquired" (300).

At this point in the novel, Joyce is mentoring Clara's daughter Irie and is quick to preen herself about the fact that she as a white woman is a better parent to Irie.

Comfortable in her superiority, Joyce allows Clara to call her Mrs. Chalfen but addresses Clara by her first name, reinforcing a subordinate relationship. Here Joyce displays arrogance based on the assumption she is of a better than Clara. Such an attitude is similar to the one Cheryl McEwan documents colonial white women showed their black servants. Says McEwan the white woman's assumption of authority "was based more on class than race" (88).

Clara who is a strong-minded individual never thinks to call out Joyce most likely because she is aware that her own daughter is showing such a marked preference. Joyce further tells Clara that Irie is remarkable because she is bright, which is not the expected thing. Expected for whom? Joyce Chalfen here betrays her seeming liberal roots with the assumption a black or mixed race person can't be intelligent. In her quest to establish her stature in the dominant culture Joyce prates on about "purity" and betrays her innate prejudice that Clara is not her equal nor can claim to be just because her daughter was born in England. Joyce presses her point when she suggests to Clara that true intelligence is factual and biological – and strictly a white thing. Clara's husband and Irie's father is white and so it is a backhanded insult that Clara lacks any right to intelligence and thus it is the white part of Irie that must take credit for her innate intelligence:

> "I mean, after a while, you've got to suspect it's in the genes, haven't you? All these brains. I mean nurture just won't explain it. I mean will it?"
>
> "Er, no," agreed Clara. "I guess not."
>
> "Now, out of interest – I mean, I really am curious – which side do you think Irie gets it from, the Jamaican or the English?" (Smith 293).

Clara, who has never let public opinion influence her actions, understands what Joyce is about and attempts to establish her own claims to being legitimate i.e. having the "right" pedigree. Clara confesses her maternal grandfather was white and therefore Irie must get her smarts from the Jamaican side, but by virtue of the English blood. It's a whitewashing of history since her grandparents were not married – her grandfather used her grandmother and then left her to fend for their illegitimate child. Thus there was very little that was pure about their union. Clara says it because at the time it seems like a small meaningless thing. She even makes a joke out of it. Perhaps she wanted to "prove" to Joyce that, she, Clara had some claim to Irie despite her black skin. Perhaps she wanted to underscore the point that they were not so different. However, as she leaves the Chalfens Clara realizes that she has betrayed herself in playing along with the notion that white is somehow superior and that biology determines class and pedigree:

> As the front door closed behind her, Clara bit her own lip once more, this time in frustration and anger. Why had she said Captain Charlie Durham? That was a downright lie. False as her own white teeth. Clara was smarter than Captain Charlie Durham. Hortense was smarter than Captain Charlie Durham. Probably even Grandma Ambrosia was smarter than Captain Charlie Durham. Captain Charlie Durham wasn't smart. He thought he was, but he wasn't. (Smith 294).

All this talk of purity and pedigree further unravels when one considers Joyce wasn't born a Chalfen but married into the family and so can't lay a claim to having the genes or

right pedigree. Also she is being more than a little disingenuous by passing herself off as English because her husband's family was originally Jewish who after emigrating to England shortened their name in a bid to be more anglicized. It is yet another way in which Zadie Smith lampoons the conceit of class and believing in your own myths and perhaps for this reason Jan Lowe has likened Smith's style of writing to Jane Austen[5]. A person with status is invested in keeping the status quo because a) she has something worth protecting i.e. status, wealth, notions of color or blood purity and b) she doesn't identify with the new immigrants (or in Kiran Bingley's case fellow Indians) whom she views as a potential threat to all of the above. Thus the push to maintain the status quo is a result of a person's identification with class over all other considerations. Homi Bhabha defines the function of class identification in the following manner "If the secularity of class consciousness provides race and gender with its interpellative structure, then no form of collective social identity can be designated without its prior naming as a form of class identity. Class identity is autoreferential, surmounting other instances of social difference. Its sovereignty is also, in a theoretical sense, an act of surveillance" (318). We see this over and over in the literature. The great equalizer is a black person of education and background who comes to England only to find she has to fight cultural stereotypes that measure everything about her including her physical appearance, her religion, her language skills and her parenting skills.

On a final note Jasbir K. Pusar reminds us that "Immigration is not a onetime movement; it is a complex shifting of physical, mental and emotional states, which begins much before and extends far beyond the actual event. As children of immigrants we are denied these realities by Western society, yet constantly reminded of them." She

goes on to remark that every time a non-white person is asked "*where are you from?"* the implied message is "you don't belong here." However I would argue that the latter message is losing strength as black British literature gains popularity and expands beyond the implied "black" audience. The current generation of writers like Smith and Levy do not consider themselves Caribbean-British writers or people who are engaged in multicultural observations because they view themselves simply as British writers who are commenting on the world around them, and now feel comfortable in their status, a turn of events their fiction is starting to echo.

NOTES

[1] Certainly Muslim communities are often isolated within England and post 9-11 the discussion on racial status/acceptance has shifted more from ethnicity to religion, a conversation beyond the scope of this project.

[2] Although Macauley is often held to be an example of how imperialistic values were institutionalized he has some defenders who maintain he is misunderstood. The Minute on Indian Education (1835) was considering what language the people of India should use for education and since there were many dialects, it made sense, the say, that he would propose English as a common language.

[3] Although the same is obviously true of the West Indians who came to England in the 1950s assuming all Britons were rich and educated because their schooling had taught them to view England as protective mother and overseer and failed to reveal that some of the poorer whites were very little removed from them in advantages.

[4] In the U.S. a parallel situation has developed with Oprah Winfrey, a celebrity with both immense wealth and influence who seems to appeal to a cross section of people. She has risen above the limitations of being a "black woman" or an "African American" or a "woman." People seem to genuinely admire her and listen to her (as witnessed by the sales of books she picks out for her book club). The way in which people react to Oprah as if she has somehow transcended race is not the same manner in which President Obama has been received. While running for the office, there was a debate that candidate Obama was not black enough for black American voters. As the first African-American President Obama seems doomed to an administration that will be forever "historic" and

his race is always lurking unspoken in the background. As one of my students expressed, the president will be judged not by his actions as president but his actions as a black man. [5] Says Lowe, "This is because of her fine and certain touch with drawing out how deeply the English class system resides in the heart and soul and how, when it does, you know that the characters are definitively English, woven into the fabric of English Society. However, it is contradicted in Zadie Smith by a brand of cynicism about class that is very different from that of Jane Austen, and this is a clear indication that Smith is coming at Britain from a very different understanding of history and from a very different Britain" (173).

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